

*Department of History  
University of Wisconsin*

**History 600  
Politics and Film**

**Reading Calendar**

*Spring, 2017*

**January 25: Introductory Meeting**

Each week we will examine one, two or [very occasionally] three films produced by Hollywood studios that portray fictional representations of American politics. We will make artistic/critical judgments about the films, of course: the structure of plot, symbolism, dialogue, character development, moralistic tone, etc. However, more important we will try to view them as documents produced in a certain time and place – subject to the constraints of “context.” So, we will always be aware of:

1. The context of production: The studio, the producers, writers, directors & actors at the time of production;
2. The context of the history of the industry: Trends in the technical, commercial & corporate aspects the industry’s growth;
3. The context of American political & social history: The character of American politics at the time of production and the trends in political culture up to that “moment;”
4. Our own context: Our judgments will be conditioned by our own political context. An awareness of our own bias is a necessary condition for good analysis.

**February 1: The History of Hollywood: The Early Days**

**Readings:** Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* [2<sup>nd</sup> edition], Parts I & II [Chapters 1 – 9].

**Assignment:** Write short chapter summaries [one or two paragraphs] for each chapter.

**February 8: Hollywood History: How Political is Hollywood?**

**Readings:** Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, Parts III - V [Chapters 10 – 22]; Philip Davies, “Hollywood in elections and elections in Hollywood,” in J. D. Davies & P. Wells, *American Film and Politics* (2002), pp. 43 – 64; Daniel Franklin, *Politics and Film*, Chapters 2 – 3; Stephan Vaughn, “Will Hayse and Making Movies Respectable” (2005). These last three items are available at the History Learn@UW website.

**Suggested Readings:** Larry Ceplair, “The Film Industry's Battle against Left-Wing Influences, from the Russian Revolution to the Blacklist,” *Film History*, Vol. 20 (2008): 399-411; Jon Lewis, “‘We Do Not Ask You to Condone This’: How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood,” *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 39 (Winter, 2000): 3-30. [Both of these essays are at the History 600 website.]

**Assignment:** Write a short essay [3-5 pages] addressing the question: Is Hollywood now more or less political than it was in the "Golden Age?"

## **February 15: William Randolph Hearst & Devine Intervention in America Politics**

**Movie:** *Gabriel over the White House* (1932) [The complete film is not available @ YouTube. There are some download sites that claim you can get it free. We may need to watch it together. Sunday night?]

**Readings:** Robert L. McConnell, "The Genesis and Ideology of 'Gabriel over the White House'," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring, 1976), pp. 7-26; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932 – 1940* (1963), Chapter 1; David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (2001), Chapter 29. Louis Pizzitola, "Hearst Over Hollywood," pp.288-303. These items are available at the History Learn@UW website. There are others as well, although not required.

**Assignment:** Movie Report. [Report Form is available at Learn@UW.]

### **Commentary:**

*Gabriel over the White House* (1931-2) is a political drama produced and [perhaps] partially written [edited?] by William Randolph Hearst, the multimillionaire tycoon who owned a chain of newspapers, a studio and numerous other enterprises. [He is the source for Orson Wells' protagonist in *Citizen Kane*.] He ran for office a number of times – sometimes successfully, sometimes not. He was a significant force in the Democratic Party of the time but not perhaps as powerful as he envisioned himself. He thought of himself as a bit of a "king maker" – THE man who could determine the outcome of not only conventions but also elections.

Hearst's political beliefs were complicated and conflicting. He always posed himself as a defender of the "ordinary man." Although he was extremely wealthy, his editorials often attacked America's business elite for their selfishness. He claimed that treating the American working class ruthlessly would only drive them to embrace communism. Although he supported the Spanish American War, he opposed American entrance into World War I. He opposed the United States joining the League of Nations but supported signing disarmament and trade treaties. Up until the attack on Pearl Harbor, he completely opposed any American involvement in opposing the dictatorships of Asia and Europe.

After at first backing another candidate of his own choosing [John Nance Garner], Hearst became a very strong supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate for president in 1932. [Roosevelt, I hope you know, won and went-on to be America's only four term president; and to rank among those, who most historians would consider the top five presidents in our history. See the Leuchtenburg chapter.] Later in Roosevelt's second term Hearst came to despise the president. Some of his editorials were among the most vicious attacks on Roosevelt ever published.

The degree to which Hearst was involved in the writing and direction of this movie is a matter of some dispute. Louis Pizzitola, whose chapter on the movie is among your readings, makes Hearst the prime mover on the production of the movie. Gregory La Cava, the director is not given even passing mention. Interestingly, La Cava was notorious for departing substantially from studio scripts and on occasion shot his movies

without a script on the set! [There is a short piece on La Cava among the readings, if you're interested in his career. It is not required.] It should be noted that La Cava got his start in Hearst's ill-fated animation studio and much of his early directing was for Hearst's production company. Perhaps, during the making of *Gabriel* La Cava was mindlessly obedient to Hearst's demands. Who knows? David Nasaw, who unlike Pizzintola, is an academic historian, presents a somewhat different picture. Hearst was certainly interested in the picture but he hardly hovered over its production.

Nonetheless, how much he was involved in the making of this movie is a matter of debate. It clearly has the stamp of his convoluted politics. Although Hearst owned a studio, he did not have a distribution system. He was dependent on Metro-Goldwin-Meyer to distribute his films. Louis B. Meyer, who was a Republican, blocked its release until after the 1932 election. [At the web site is a chapter on Louis B. Meyer by Steven Ross. Highly recommended.] The film also had a pre-screening by President Roosevelt. As a result, a number of changes occurred before its final release. The Board of Censors also had a crack at it! Even with the editing, however, it still has a rather shocking premise: The hard times of the Depression call for a dictator – one anointed by GOD!

## **February 22: Frank Capra and the Politics of Hope**

**Movies:** *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) & *State of the Union* (1948)

**Readings:** Geoffrey Hellman "Thinker in Hollywood," R. Glatzner & J. Reburne (eds.) *Frank Capra: The Man and His Films* (1975) pp. 3-13; Michael Rogin & Kathleen Moran, "Mr. Capra Goes to Washington," *Representations*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (November 2003), pp. 213-248; Glen Phelps, "The 'Populist' Films of Frank Capra," *Journal of American Studies* (1979): 377-392; Donald Willis, *The Films of Frank Capra*, pp. 23 – 37; Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title* [An Autobiography], Chapter 14. These items are available at the History 600 Learn@UW website.

**Assignment:** **Movie Reports on both films. [In your reports compare the two films. Refer directly to the assigned readings.]**

### **Commentary:**

Frank Capra was one of the most successful directors in Hollywood history. He won a total of six Academy Awards. His films also produced Academy Awards for eleven actor and actresses. There is an enormous literature on his career and film production.

His personal politics were quite complicated. Like many Americans, he was an inconsistent mix of conservative and liberal views. He supported progressive labor organizations in Hollywood in the late 1930s and remained friends with many of the writers who were blacklisted in the 1950s. But he voted Republican throughout his life. He counted among his associates some of America's most liberal politicians and some of the most conservative. As the years passed, however, he personally became more conservative and alienated from Hollywood and American culture generally.

He was deeply patriotic. An Italian immigrant, whose story of success mirrored the mythology of America's "rags to riches" narrative, he embraced the core values of American culture. He had great faith in the American people but he was also suspicious of "mob mentality" that lead people away from democratic principles. He was also deeply suspicious of powerful elites – political, economic and those in his own industry. The war documentaries he made in the 1940s are among the best of the pro-America propaganda of the era. He won an Academy Award and military citations for his efforts.

While “politics” more broadly played a role in many of his films, he made four films that can be considered overtly political: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941) and *State of the Union* (1948).

*Mr. Smith* and *State of the Union* were written and directed a decade apart. They reflect some of the deep currents of Capra’s beliefs about politics and corruption. There is, however, a decidedly different “feel” to these two movies. They seem to carry slightly different messages about Washington politics. The 1949 narrative is much more complicated and challenges basic American values in more profound ways. There is a cynical tone to *State of the Union* that’s absent in *Mr. Smith*. It was based on a successful Broadway play. *Mr. Smith* was written for the screen by Sydney Buchman who was among those blacklisted for refusing to cooperate with the HUAC investigations.

*State of the Union* had a number of different writers and went through many revisions as it moved from play script to screen. Nonetheless, it still has the “look and feel” of a theatrical production. One of writers was Myles Connolly who had a very successful career as a writer and producer. He was also a conservative Catholic who had a wide audience as a writer of religious novels. He was also an uncredited contributor to other Capra films: *Mr. Smith*, *Here Comes the Groom* (1952) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

An interesting aside: Over the past two years I’ve been doing research on Capra’s political films. *Mr. Smith* is said to be based on a short story by Lewis Foster, “**The Gentleman from Montana**”. While it won an Academy award that year there is no copy of it at the Academy Archives; nor at the studio archives nor among Capra’s personal archives. I don’t think it ever existed. My guess was that it was a “treatment” based loosely on a play by Maxwell Anderson - *Both Your Houses*. It was written in 1933, which was, in turn, based on a movie, *Washington Merry-go-Round* (1932). Maxwell Anderson wrote the screen play for that movie. I highly recommend you view this movie. It’s similarity to *Mr. Smith* is striking. Even more so, is the play. [The play is available on the web. It won a Pulitzer Prize.]

There is even more mystery. Let me quote from the TCM.com page on *Mr. Smith*: "In 1941, Columbia was sued by Louis Ullman and Norman Houston, both of whom claimed that Mr. Smith was plagiarized from their respective written works. Lewis Foster testified that he wrote the story specifically for Gary Cooper, and Capra testified that he had seen only the synopsis of Foster's story and had intended to use it as a sequel to *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. Columbia won the case." I can't find the court case or a newspaper reference. Note it says that Capra claims only to have seen a synopsis!!! Really? This is after the movie had been scripted, filmed and released. But in his Autobiography, he claims that when he read the story he immediately thought of Jean Arthur and Jimmy Stewart playing the lead roles. Nonsense, of course, Gary Cooper was originally slated to play the role [as Capra apparently stated at the trial]. In any event, they must have had to produce a copy of the story in the course of litigation but it has entirely disappeared from the historical record.

And there is more mystery. The last five minute were cut apparently simply for practical reasons but that seems unlikely. The few minutes at the end seem trivial and there are certainly other sections of the film that could use a bit of cutting. What was lost was a final scene back home, not in the Senate as it is in the final cut. Mr. Smith is welcomed home as a hero; the political machine is defeated. Jefferson Smith he dashes into the crowd to embrace and forgives a sulking Joseph Paine who is encouraged to join Smith in the “victory parade;” and, finally, Clarissa Saunders is introduced to Smith’s mom and welcomed into the family. [At the website you’ll find the complete script. Scroll down to the final two pages.] Why is this important? By cutting this last scene, the fate of Mr. Smith is left unsettled. We are left to wonder: will his victory be reported back home? The political machine appears to remain in power. And as the movie closes with Paine as the disgraced bad guy.

*Mr. Smith* provoked substantial criticism – much to Capra’s consternation. Despite the criticism from Washington elites, it found widespread appeal, particularly in the “American hinterland.” *State of the Union* was released in a decidedly different setting and while it is sharply critical of American political process, it evoked very little hostility. President Truman is said to have enjoyed the movie at a special showing. He even laughed when he was the butt of the joke.

### March 1: The Politics of *Citizen Kane*

**Movie:** *Citizen Kane* (1941)

**Readings:** Robert L. Carringer, *The Making of Citizen Kane* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1998. Entire book.

**Suggested Reading:** What about “Rosebud?” Is the “Rosebud” theme in the movie just a rhetorical device and ultimately a rather silly contrivance? Wells himself later dismissed it and said he wish he had left it out. [If no one is with Kane when he dies, how do his last words become known to the press?] But if you’re interested in the “Rosebud issue,” there are some readings at the web site. There are also some other general readings about Wells and the movie. They are not required, but if you’re a serious “film buff” you should give them a quick read.

**Assignment:** No “movie report” due. Write a short essay [6 - 7 pages] addressing one or two of the following areas:

**Context:** How do we place this movie in the context of Orson Wells’ career, the studio for which he worked Hollywood’s history and the larger political context? Keep in mind the timing of this movie. It’s made about the same time as Capra’s two political greats: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* & *Meet John Doe*. Are there any similarities?

**Art versus Propaganda:** What’s the basic message of this movie? Is it really about William Randolph Hearst? What’s the political message? Why is it called “CITIZEN Kane?”

**Art versus Commerce:** This is often viewed as an “artsy” movie but is it really? No Hollywood movie is “all art.” Every movie that’s released is a mix of the writer/director’s artistic vision, the practical demands of production (studio politics) and it’s “fit” in the market place. Think a bit about how these three sets of forces came to play in the creation and success of *Citizen Kane*.

**Politics and *Citizen Kane*:** But what about Kane as politician? Focusing particularly on the overt political aspects of the movies, what does the movie suggest about American politics in the first half of the twentieth century? Kane challenges an entrenched “machine politician.” How is the corrupt politician portrayed? Is the corrupt politician any more corrupt in a moral sense than Charles Foster Kane, the “reform” candidate? When his affair is revealed, should Kane have dropped out of his race for office? Was his defeat “just” punishment? If so, for what was he being punished? Is J. P. Morgan’s continuing anger about the failed election justified?

**Arriving at an overall judgment:** What’s the bottom line – is it all gimmicks or is there a real message here? Ultimately, is Charles Foster Kane a “Bad” man? When we discover what “Rosebud” is, do we forgive him for his sins? What’s the essential character flaw that leads to isolation at the end of his life? Orson Wells late was critical of the decision to include to “Rosebud” device.

**Finally, is this the finest [Hollywood] movie ever made? Regardless of which group of questions you chose, answer this question.**

## March 8: Boss Politics: Hollywood & The Political Machine

**Movies:** *The Great McGinty* (1940) & *The Last Hurrah* (1958) Recommended but not required: *The Boss* (1956).

**Readings:** T.P. Clifford, The Political Machine, Chapters 1-4; Robert Merton, "The Latent Functions of the Machine" [very famous article by a famous sociologist of the 1940s]; Bruce Stave, et al., "Boss Politics Reconsidered;" J. Bruner "Boss Politics in 1945" and G. Schottenhamel, "Big Bill Thompson of Chicago" look at particular political machines.

**Suggested Readings:** There are other readings at the web site; but the one I **most strongly suggest** you look at is Plunkett of Tammany Hall. Plunkett was a ward boss in the Tammany Hall machine in New York. This book is a set of interviews in which he defends boss politics and the machine. He had a great sense of humor. Well worth a read. It is available at the History 600 Website in Word format or HTML at this web address: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2810>. There are many copies in the UW Library.

**Assignment:** Write a short [4-5 pages] essay in which you compare the Hollywood representations of the urban political machine to the "real thing." Refer directly to both the movies and the articles at the web site. The paper is required even if you do not attend class. Essay is due in class.

### Commentary:

Americans had lived with corrupt politics since the Founding Fathers and, to some extent, had grown cynical and accepting of 'boss politics.' It should not be surprising that movies often used machine politics as a setting for both drama and comedy. Political machines play a singular role in a number of Hollywood movies; among others, *Mr. Smith*, *Citizen Kane*, and *All the King's Men* have direct commentary on the good and bad aspect of corrupt "machine politics." Urban gangster movies and *film noir* often are set against a backdrop of political corruption.

But *McGinty* and *Last Hurrah* make the political machine the primary setting for the film's narrative - as does *The Boss* [which we won't consider this term but is recommended].

(*The Boss* is a fictionalized narrative of the Pendergast machine in Kansas City, Missouri. Harry Truman ran for the Senate under the blessing of "Boss" Pendergast and, of course, won. While there never was any suggestion that he was corrupted by his affiliation with the Kansas City machine, Republicans liked to emphasize his political past well into his presidency.)

*McGinty* and *Last Hurrah* have much in common. One treats the boss politics with humor, the other with a certain level of benign nostalgia. *McGinty* is [apparently] set in New York City and *Last Hurrah* is set in Boston. Both cities were famous for their political machines dominated by politicians of Irish decent. *The Last Hurrah* was based on a bestselling novel by Boston journalist, Edwin O'Connor. The novel was loosely based on the successful Boston mayor, James Michael Curley (1874 - 1958).

Something should be said of the two directors: Preston Sturges and John Ford are both considered among the best of Hollywood's "Golden Era." However, they were, both in life and in their movie production, very different men. Sturges was a bit of a dilatant - a man of the salon and drawing room - martinis and wine. Ford was a "man's man" - his hobbies were riding, shooting and the outdoor life - whiskey and beer.

Preston Sturges was primarily a comedic writer who wrote eight successful screenplays or scripts prior to his debut as a director with *McGinty* in 1940; and contributed - either credited or uncredited- to a dozen more. During the peak of his

career in the early 1940s he wrote and directed a half dozen very successful movies. *The Great McGinty*, *Christmas in July*, *The Lady Eve*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *The Palm Beach Story*, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero* are usually included among the best comedies that Hollywood ever produced. They are all classic "situation comedies" in that some contrivance results in misunderstanding or deception followed by resolution; the comedic arch allowing for a cynical critique of social conventions or accepted mores. Sturges won an Academy Award for "Original Screenplay" for *The Great McGinty*.

It is only fair to say that in longevity, productivity and stature Ford ranks above Sturges. After a short stint as an actor in early silent shorts, he began a directing career that spanned five decades. He was the recipient of many awards including six Academy Awards. The influence of his work remains powerful even today. Many of the current crop of great directors cite Ford as an influence on their work. Most famous for his westerns, Ford's movies often dealt with how a strong male character can find personal integrity while serving the essential imperatives community and family. Although issues of masculinity dominate his narratives, he often had strong female characters who served a center of moral virtue. In sharp contrast to Sturges, Ford might invoke irony or humor but he was never cynical. Indeed, there is sentimentality to Ford's work that often borders on saccharin. He was the master of the "male weepie." In addition, while there is often humor in his movies, it is seldom a dominant theme but rather it serves as a contrasting moment to a deeper drama.

[It is perhaps worth noting that both Spencer Tracy, who stars in *The Last Harrah*, and John Ford were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Irish Catholics. John Ford had worked with Tracy once before early in his career in a comedy, *Up the River* (1930). Tracy, by the way, was born in the Irish section of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, although much of his youth was spent at Catholic boarding schools. He attended Ripon College. See the article at the website about Ford's "Catholic vision" and the moral imperative he brought to his movies.]

### **March 15: Is Political Charisma Created or a Gift?**

**Movies:** *Meet John Doe* (1941) & *Face in the Crowd* (1957)

**Readings:** Read the articles and book chapters at the website

**Assignment:** Movies Reports for each movie. Compare them in your analysis.

**Commentary:**

In both these movies the protagonist is a proletarian man "discovered" by a woman who is employed in the media [in one case a newspaper, in the second case, television]. In each case, the rise in their popularity shapes a protein personality. In part merely creatures of the media, they are ultimately vulnerable to the whims of manipulative elites and a fickle public. The movie charts their rise and fall.

The single similarity of these two movies is the cynicism about the media – the press in 1941 and, in the case of *Face in the Crowd*, television. If you have the time you could add another movie to this group: *Network* (1976). It is not required but it carries this theme forward into the 1970s.

Again, we have two of the truly great directors Frank Capra and Elia Kazan. Capra, of course, we have already considered. Elia Kazan was one of the most important directors of the 1940s and 1950s. He directed 21 actors to Oscar nominations, resulting in nine wins. He won two Oscars for himself and a host of other awards. His movies often had a

strong message about social ills such as racism, anti-Semitism, labor union corruption or uncontrolled corporate power. Although decidedly left-liberal in his views, he appeared before the HUAC hearing on “communist influence” in Hollywood as a “friendly witness.” He did not actually “name names” but he did confirm the socialist leanings of various Hollywood writers who were on the Committee’s subversive list. Many of his liberal colleagues in the business never forgave him.

## **SPRING RECESS**

### **March 18 – 25**

#### **March 29: Imaging Women in Politics**

**Movies:** *Farmer’s Daughter* (1947) & *The Contender* (2000)

**Readings:** The website has some readings on the “reality” of women in politics over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I recommend reading these articles as background. I have also included a short essay of my own with some reflections on the topic of “women in political movies.” Please do not read it until after you have watched the movies and formed your own opinion.

Repeatedly women play an important role in the narrative arch of the “political movie.” Often, however, it is a “behind the scenes” role. In both “Meet John Doe” and “Face in the Crowd” it is a woman who discovers the proletarian man and creates his media persona. For example, there is a strong female presence in *Mr. Smith, State of the Union, Great McGinty, Seduction of Joe Tynan* and *Primary Colors*. In all these movies, women are instrumental in the evolution of the plot but the core action remains with the male protagonist. Two major exceptions present themselves - *Farmer’s Daughter* (1947) and *The Contender* (2000). In these movies, the lead character is a woman and she is actively involved in politics. [Actually, there is another very early exception, *Politics* (1932) in which a young woman runs for mayor as a reform candidate in a corrupt city government. Well worth a watch.]

**Special Assignment:** You will write a paper (7-8 pages) on Hollywood’s representations of “women in politics.” Although you will come to seminar prepared to discuss the topic in depth, the paper will be due on Friday, March 31 (before 4:00 pm). The essay should discuss the representation of women in political movies, not only the two films viewed this week but also in the films to date. Final submissions should be hard copy. No email attached essays will be accepted. [This essay MUST be submitted even if you do not attend class this week.]

**Note:** *Farmer’s Daughter* can be found at YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89k3ovpTUtl>.

The “farmer’s daughter” joke has been a staple of ribald humor for decades. Perhaps that was in the producer’s mind when he chose the title for the 1947 movie. Be forewarned, if you Google “farmer’s daughter” some pretty raunchy stuff shows-up.

**Additional Outside Readings:** If you want some background reading to this assignment, checkout:

Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream*, New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973

Dawn B. Sova, *Women in Hollywood : From vamp to studio head*, New York : Fromm International Publ., 1998.



Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape : the treatment of women in the movies*, 2. ed., Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1987

Pat Kirkham & Janet Thumin (Editors) *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies, and Women*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995)

## April 5: The “Smoke-Filled Room” – Behind the Scenes in the Senate and Conventions

Required Movies: *The Best Man* (1964) & *Advise and Consent* (1962)

Optional Movie: *Manchurian Candidate* (1962).

### Commentary:

This week we look at two movies [perhaps three, if you wish] that capture the flavor of partisan politics in the late fifties and early sixties. Both are set against the backdrop of anti-communist politics and recriminations. *Advise and Consent* (1962), which is based on a best-selling Allen Drury novel, revolves around the political intrigue that accompanies the appointment of a new Secretary of State. Adding intensity to the drama, the sitting President himself is ill and there is a possibility that the appointment will not be confirmed before his death. The nominee is widely respected by the liberals in the Senate but is viewed as “weak on communism” by the conservatives. Although the book’s author, Allen Drury, was a deeply committed anti-communist, the director Otto Preminger was clearly willing to make the movie less strident in its portrayal of “appeasement” – the belief that cooperating or negotiating with the Soviet Union in any way would expose the United States to great harm. Preminger was one of Hollywood’s truly great directors. His career goes back to the 1930s but in the 1950s and 1960s he became renowned pushing the boundaries of censorship confronting such issues drug addiction, rape and homosexuality. His movies received many nominations and awards. He’s considered one of the “Hollywood greats.”

*The Best Man* (1964) is based on a play by Gore Vidal. [The play was revived and had a brief successful run on Broadway in 2012.] Vidal, who died in 2012, came from a political background and had mingled with America’s political elite for more than two decades prior to writing this script. He was a prolific author; writing novels, plays, Hollywood scripts and hundreds of essays. Although his political beliefs were definitely on the Left, he was often very critical of mainstream liberals.

This movie is about the interworking’s of a national convention [party unnamed] where two would-be presidential candidates jockey for control of the delegates needed for victory. Both candidate are flawed men but in fundamentally different ways. Again, like *Advise and Consent* issues such as communism and diplomacy with Russian play a major role in the narrative. Another theme is introduced in this narrative is the issue of integration and race relations. Keep in mind that at that point in time Southern white segregationist still were a powerful force in the Democratic Party. There is as well a sub-narrative about closeted homosexuality. [That it’s entangled in this story is not surprising given that Vidal was openly bisexual from early in his adult life.]

Franklin Schaffner was the director of this film. While he is not as famous as Preminger, Schaffner had a distinguished career directing such films as *Planet of the Apes* (1969), *Patton* (1973), *Papillon* (1973) and *Boys from Brazil* (1978). His movies received 26 nominations for academy awards and won 10. Not bad for a “lesser known director.”

A brief comment on anti-communism is in order. American paranoia about the domestic threat of communism reaches its peak well before these two movies were made. HUAC’s hearings were in the late thirties, forties and early fifties. Senator Joe McCarthy’s hearings were over by 1955 and he had been censored by his fellow senators. He died in 1957. By the time these movies are made the “witch hunt” days were over; accusations about domestic subversion had ebbed.

Nonetheless, at the international level there was an on-going debate about how we should respond to the Soviet Union. Should the United States work with the Soviet leadership in reducing tensions because the threat of nuclear war was so frightening? Or, were the Soviets merely deceiving us into dropping our guard with the real goal being the total destruction of America?

While I'm not requiring *Manchurian Candidate* (1962), it's well worth a watch. It is considered the preeminent Cold War suspense classic. It is about an assassination attempt at a national convention by a Korean War hero/POW who has been programmed to kill on cue. Angela Lansbury, who we saw in *State of the Union* (1948), is absolutely brilliant in this film. She plays one of the great female villains of all time. She won a Golden Globe and was nominated by the Academy for "Best Supporting Actress."

All these movies have the "look and feel" that the television series, "Mad Men," tried to capture.

#### **April 12: Why do Good Men go Bad? Are Politics ALWAYS Corrupting?**

**Movies:** *The Candidate* (1972) & *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (1979). Although not required may also view *Ides of March* (2011). We will get to this latter film last week of the term.

**Readings:** There are two articles at the website written by political scientists about public perceptions of corruption in politics and how these perceptions affect voting behavior. They're a bit academic and technical but well worth a read.

**Assignment:** Movie Reports on each movie but combine on one report form; direct comparisons expected.

#### **Commentary:**

One of the recurrent themes of the "political movie" is the corrupting nature of political involvement. It would appear that even the best of men [and/or women] could not resist the temptations of power. Moreover, there seems to be a conflation of compromise and corruption; that the hundreds of little compromises a politician is forced to make weakens his [or her] soul.

As we have seen, Americans always held ambivalent views about political process. That ambivalence is shown in movies about politics. The 1970s, however, brought a wave of disillusionment that far exceeded anything in the past. In particular, the Watergate Scandal seemed to epitomize a complete lack of moral rectitude. What was perhaps most troubling was that scandal was less about the corruption of money [the usual stuff of American politics] but about an arrogant corruption of power. – a complete contempt for the essential values of the American democracy. The sinister darkness of the moment is shown in *All the President's Men* (1976). [A very good movie. Well worth a rent.]

*The Candidate* & *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, however, are about "little corruptions" – certainly nothing of the magnitude of Watergate. In neither case does the protagonist even closely approximate Richard Nixon and his associates. Indeed, both are liberals with a deep commitment to progressive causes. Their "crimes" – if they are crimes at all – are little ones, but they expose weaknesses that erode their character and commitment. Although hardly heavy-handed dramas, there is a certain sadness about these movies. They convey a sense of disillusionment about the weakness of men in politics no matter how good their intentions.

## **April 19: Machine Politics in the South: “All the King’s Men”**

**Movies:** *All the King's Men* (1949) & *All the King's Men* (2006).

**Reading:** Robert Penn Warren, *All the Kings Men* [1946]. Entire book. REQUIRED! There are other readings on this book at the website. They are recommended. I think they will improve your paper. Some are written by Robert Pen Warren himself!

There are many copies of this novel available at a number of the campus libraries (Call Number: PZ3 W2549 A1 1974). If you want a personal copy check, the UW Bookstore or web based book vendors. Warren made minor changes over the years with each of the early republications. Some scholars have focused on those changes but we will consider the novel as a whole – which was not substantially altered. The entire text is also available on the web at: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/kingsmen/> (There are two versions. The one that was published in the 1940s and a later one that was apparently the original manuscript version – discovered and published long after RPW death.)

**Special Assignment:** You will write a longer essay for this assignment (8 – 10 pages) comparing these two movie renditions of *All the Kings Men*. How are they different? Why are they different? Why was one a box office success [1940s version] and the other a financial disaster? How do you successfully “map” a complicated novel into a good script? Can most of the difference be attributed to “context”? American was simply a different place when you compare the 1940s and the post-2000 era. The essay will be due on Friday, April 21.

## **April 26: Cynicism and Contempt: Hollywood Belittles American Politics**

**Movies:** *Bob Roberts* (1992), *My Fellow Americans* (1996), *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Primary Colors* (1998) and *Bulworth* (1998). View all four if you can, but no less than two. Extra credit for each additional movie.

**Suggested Movie:** *Election* (1999): A lighthearted comedy set in a suburban high school, this film satirizes both the dynamics of teenage culture and the character of American politics.

**Readings:** Some readings at the website examine the political attitudes brought to the production of these movies. While not required, it would be nice if you read these articles and integrated their observations into your “movie reports.”

**Assignment:** Compare the movies in a short essay [4 – 6 pages] that address the issue of satirical representations of American politics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Are politician now so corrupt and/or inept that there is no hope for sound public policy. Is it all comic theater? What do these narratives assume about voter’s attitudes?

### **Commentary:**

While portraying American politics in a cynical light was not new to the Hollywood movie, the 1990s marked a level of satirical representations that were unprecedented in

movie history. If the movies of the nineties are in any way close to reality, political actors were manipulative, deceitful, shallow, corrupt and, occasionally mentally unbalanced. In addition, what is even more unsettling, the writers and directors seem to assume that the America people are either indifferent to all this or, perhaps, just plain stupid! What is interesting is that many of the leading actors in these movies were all actively involved in the liberal politics of the period. Most notably Warren Beatty and Tim Robbins both considered running for office [as Democrats, of course]. Conservative critics claimed that these movies had a strong left-wing bias. Perhaps so but at least three of them mock liberal politics or, at least, liberal politicians. Maybe a more profound bias is that all these films seem to suggest that the system is so badly broken that it's beyond repair. Perhaps it's time for Gabriel to return to the White House?

### **May 3: Hope and Disillusionment: Movies and Contemporary Politics**

#### **Movie: *Ides of March* (2011)**

#### **Comment & Assignment: Short essay [see questions below].**

George Clooney's father ran for office when he was young and he has always wanted to make a movie about a political campaign. This is his offering to the genera. He, along with Grant Heslov and Beau Willimon wrote the script. He directs and acts in the film as well. It is based on a play by Willimon, "Farragut North." [Farragut North is a subway stop near the U.S Capital in Washington, D.C.]

The story is less about the Clooney character [the candidate] than it is a study in the reactions and transformation of Ryan Gosling's character [a deeply committed staff member on Clooney's campaign]. Obviously, it's a story of hope transformed to disillusionment. But in the transformation of the main character we find, perhaps, a more-savvy political actor who is likely to a long way in American politics. [There may be a bit of connection between this plot line and the John Edwards campaign scandal but it is clearly not meant to mimic the Edwards saga.]

Since this is our concluding movie, I think it's a good time to reflect back on the themes of the course in addition to analyzing this particular movie. We have watched a number of "campaign movies" – *Citizen Kane*, *The Last Harrah*, *Farmer's Daughter*, *State of the Union*, *The Best Man*, *The Candidate*, and *Primary Colors* ... among others.

**Questions:** Over time, have Hollywood writers changed the way they spin the "campaign story?" What is the essential structure of the campaign movie? How do Hollywood writers create the "by in" for the campaign movie; i.e., the hook that allows the audience to "be there" and care about the candidates race for office? If you don't like politicians, why care about the characters in the movie? If you compared *Ides* with say *State of the Union* or *The Candidate*, has the essential message of the "campaign movie" changed with time? At the very end, is the Gosling character going to reveal all and clear his conscience or use his newly acquired power to advance his own career?