

HCSV366-01 Drugs in American Film (6238)

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Summer 2008

Office Hours: TBA

May 27-June 12

M-Th: 12-4:10 p.m.

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Course Description:

This course examines popular representations of psychoactive drugs in American film. Film portrayals of drug use are compared with current information regarding the prevalence, acute and chronic effects, and treatment strategies for specified licit and illicit drugs including alcohol and other depressants, stimulants, marijuana, and hallucinogens. Social, economic, and political elements related to drug use and abuse are explored.

Course Objectives:

The student will

1. compare the attitudes, beliefs, history, and patterns of use regarding selected drugs during the past century in the United States with their depictions in American film over a similar period.
2. increase knowledge regarding acute and chronic effects and treatment strategies for selected drug classifications: alcohol and other depressants, stimulants, marijuana, and hallucinogens.
3. compare and contrast the depiction of selected drugs in American film with their actual use among selected population groups.
4. compare and contrast governmental control efforts with portrayals of drug control efforts in popular films.
5. explore the political, cultural, and economic impact of chronic drug use upon the individual and society.
6. discuss ways that popular film both reflects and shapes society's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding licit and illicit drug use.
7. debate the risks and benefits related to the legalization of currently illicit drugs in the U.S.

Student Responsibilities:

1. Attend class regularly
2. One page analysis paper for each film reviewed (9 required)
3. A comprehensive final examination

Evaluation:

Analysis papers	100 points
Final exam	100 points

Final grades will be assigned on the following basis:

93-100% = A	73-76% = C
90-92% = A-	70-72% = C-
87-89% = B+	66-69% = D+
83-86% = B	60-65% = D
80-82% = B-	< 60% = F
77-79% = C+	

Dates to Remember:

Final exam: last day of class

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

All papers should be typed, double-spaced, appropriately referenced and will be graded on the basis of content, organization, style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and neatness. Papers will not be accepted late.

Course Outline:

Class 1: History and nature of popular film; how film shapes and reflects social beliefs, attitudes, and practices

Class 2: Overview of licit and illicit drug use in American history; writing workshop: grammar, spelling, diction, and style

Class 3: Marijuana: history, patterns of use, acute and chronic effects, treatment

Class 4: Narcotics (opium, morphine, heroin): history, patterns of use, acute and chronic effects, treatment

Class 5: Stimulants (cocaine and amphetamines): history, patterns of use, acute and chronic effects, treatment

- Class 6: Hallucinogens (LSD): history, patterns of use, acute and chronic effects, treatment
- Class 7: Sedative hypnotics (barbiturates and benzodiazepines): history, patterns of use, acute and chronic effects, treatment
- Class 8: Alcohol: history, patterns of use, acute and chronic effects, treatment
- Class 9: Review and wrap-up
- Class 11: Final exam

Tentative Film Schedule

- Class 1: **Reefer Madness**, 1936, Louis Gasnier (0:60 mins)
Homegrown, 1998, Stephen Gyllenhall (1:41)
- Class 2: **High School Confidential**, 1958, Jack Arnold (1:30)
Rush, 1991, Lili Zanuck (1:20)
- Class 2: **Requiem for a Dream**, 2000, Darren Aronofsky (1:42)
Hollywood High, 2002, (0:46)
- Class 3: **Trainspotting**, 1995, Danny Boyle (1:45)
- Class 4: **Drug Store Cowboy**, 1989, Gus Van Sant (1:44)
Go, Doug Liman, 1999 (1:43)
- Class 5: **Blow**, 2001, Ted Demme (1:20)
Salton Sea, 2002, D.J. Caruso (1:43)
- Class 6: **Scarface**, 1983, Brian De Palma (1:70)
- Class 7: **Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas**, 1998, Terry Gilliam (1:20)
- Class 8: **Barfly**, 1987, Barbet Schroeder (1:40)
Leaving Las Vegas, 1995, Mike Figgis (1:51)
- Class 9: **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?** Mike Nichols, 1966 (1:31)
- Class 10: **Traffic**, 2000, Steven Soderbergh (1:47)

Please follow the guidelines below for film analysis papers. Grades will be dependent on addressing all of the five points listed there. All papers should be typed, double-spaced, appropriately referenced, and when possible limited to **one page**. They will be graded on the basis of **content, organization, style, grammar, spelling, and neatness**. Please use standard English. Late papers **will not be accepted**. A total of ten film analysis papers are required. One extra credit paper is allowed. Be certain that each of the papers submitted is of the highest quality.

Do not submit professional reviews as your own, though it is appropriate and even suggested that you examine a variety of reviews in helping to arrive at YOUR OWN conclusions about the meaning of the movie. Be sure to answer all of the questions listed below. Originality will be rewarded, as will appropriate humor and insightful commentary. Relevance of the film to contemporary life is a worthy topic, as is the awareness of underlying metaphors, intentional or unintentional. **BE SURE TO CITE YOUR SOURCES AND PROVIDE REFERENCES FOR THEM.**

Typically the first or second lecture of the semester will be devoted to common student writing problems. It is imperative that you attend (and be attentive at) this lecture. Much of your subsequent writing grade will depend on adherence to the rules of writing presented at this lecture. For example, E. B. White suggested that writers beware the “leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words.” **These leeches include “very, little, pretty, and really.”**

FILM ANALYSIS PAPERS

YOUR NAME/ NAME OF FILM/ DIRECTOR/ YEAR RELEASED

- 1. Were drugs the central theme of this movie? If not, what was the central theme? What role did drugs play in this film?**
- 2. How did the director use music, cinematography (e.g. camera angles), and dialog when depicting drug use?**
- 3. Did you feel that the movie made drug use attractive or unattractive? Explain.**
- 4. Putting the film in historical context (relating it to the time it was made), what were some of the social problems/changes and attitudes influencing the film?**
- 5. Did this movie present an accurate portrayal of drug use/abuse? Why? Use information from readings and lecture in your explanation.**

MAKE SURE YOU ADDRESS ALL FIVE POINTS LISTED ABOVE AND NUMBER THEM ON YOUR PAPER 1-5

Evaluating Student Writing

A Paper: excellent in nearly all respects

Thesis: The paper has a clearly stated thesis that controls the direction and development of the entire work. The thesis is worthy of development, but it has been narrowed sufficiently to be manageable. Typically the thesis statement comes at the end of the first paragraph and directs the rest of the paper.

Organization: The paper is logically organized with each paragraph leading clearly to the next and each paragraph building additional support for the thesis.

Development: The main point (topic sentence) of each paragraph supports the thesis and these points are in turn developed within the paragraph through analysis, detail, and example. The writer uses developmental techniques (such as comparison/contrast, cause/effect, extended example, definition, or argument) to clarify and develop the thesis. The paper is developed through argument; the writer may acknowledge opposite views and always adequately supports the paper's ideas.

Mechanics: There are few, if any, mechanical, grammatical, or spelling errors.

Style: The style is clear and concise, with sentence variety (sentences written with a variety of lengths and patterns) and effective subordination. There are few, if any, examples of choppy sentences or wordiness. The author avoids the use of colloquial or informal/slang phrases. The author does not take a conversational tone.

THESE ARE THE STANDARDS FOR AN IDEAL PAPER. PAPERS RECEIVING GRADES OTHER THAN "A" DEVIATE FROM THIS STANDARD IN VARIOUS WAYS AND TO VARIOUS DEGREES

B Paper: solid paper with a clear thesis that is well supported. There may be some minor lapses in organization or argumentation, and there may be a few mechanical or grammatical errors. Generally these are good papers; with some additional editing and re-writing they would probably receive an A.

C Paper: adequate paper. A satisfactory paper organized around a central idea, though the idea may not be as clearly stated as it might or the thesis may be faulty (not sufficiently narrowed for instance). Organization of the paper may be weak; transitions linking paragraphs are not perfect. The paper is likely to contain mechanical and grammatical problems; wordiness and awkwardness may impede understanding. Sentence structure may be choppy, repetitive, and simplistic. Problems with spelling, punctuation, diction, or syntax are present but do not terminally impede understanding.

D Paper: Poor paper. No clear ideas or ideas that are too general to give shape to the paper. No thesis or one too obvious to be developed. These papers have significant organizational problems; faulty or nonexistent transitions and their arguments lack adequate subordination. Problems with spelling, punctuation, diction, and syntax are common and impede understanding.

F Paper: failing paper. No central idea; no thesis; random organization. No development, support, or details are included. Papers may be off the topic, unduly brief, or written in grade school language. Major and repeated errors in diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.