US Culture and Society: American Society on Films

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| *Amerikai társadalom és kultúra mai filmek tükrében, BBNAN13400 Z4* |  |

**Lecturer**: Balogh Beatrix

**Time and place**: All mandatory-item movies are viewed at home. The movies must be watched by the time indicated in the syllabus. Should we work online, a designated closed Facebook group will be set up for the real-time group discussions and handouts. Weekly course materials (discussion handouts) will also be uploaded to NMS or Teams. Allocated room BTK Z 316.

**Availability**: via email: [trixiebalogh@yahoo.com](mailto:trixiebalogh@yahoo.com), weekly forum on Thursday 14.15-15.45

**Purpose** of the course is to gain further insight into issues of American society through movies. Far from presenting a comprehensive survey of the contemporary social, political and cultural reality we will choose a few important themes and 1, discuss how these issues/realities are present and presented in cinema 2, and what particular insight we can gain about American identity and American society through these representations. In this respect, the course intends to revisit key features of American society you learned about in an introductory survey/lecture course, albeit through a specific medium.

Every movie, irrespective of topic or genre, is a window into society and culture: it tells us about social patterns and customs, class and race issues, dreams and anxieties, cultural clichés, gender norms and stereotypes, regional differences, landscapes and cityscapes. You will also be exposed to regional varieties of language, or the special lingo of certain professions or subculture. We will also explore why and how certain movies become cultural icons or iconic culture products with an impact beyond catering to a particular American audience; and what role the movie industry plays in not only reflecting on but also forming culture and society.

**Format and Requirements:** response notes, forum participation, end-term test.

After an introduction to a “main theme” you will watch the assigned movies at home and will reflect on how they depict or represent US culture and social norms. You will also bring your comments and question to the discussions. Short texts to familiarize students with the social or political background of the movies will be provided. Your instructor/group discussion simply assumes that you have read the assigned text.

**Response notes**: partly to demonstrate your familiarity with the movie (to show that you have indeed watched it) you are to write a short (1paragraph in the Unipoll form) informal ‘reaction’ before class. Usual deadline is Sunday evening for the Tuesday group. (What you liked/disliked, found interesting/difficult, in what way you found the movie instructive/informative/distressing/funny; in other words, your personal reaction as audience). Add to it comments on perceived social-cultural perspectives, the insight you gained from watching the movie, and any question you would like to raise in class. You are to watch the movie even if you cannot show up for discussion (see below at “attendance and grading policy”). Responses are only accepted if either written directly into the unipoll plane or copied from your notes before the deadline. In other words, no emailing late reactions or writing full-blown analysis in word.docs.

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| class | | date | | Discussion topic and Movie(s) to Watch  **!Deadline for movie reflection is two days before the discussion starting 02.14 23:00** |
| 1 | 02.11 | | **Introduction**, goal orientation. Cinema and society: cinema as entertainment, social record, artistic project. Introduction to “The American Dream.” Read ’10 movies’ | | |
| 2 | 02.18 | | Cosmopolitan dreams and social expectations; LA scenes and characters, social norms: ***Valentine’s Day*** | | |
| 3 | 02.25 | | Critical approach to the American Dream: ***Revolutionary Road*** | | |
| 4 | 03.04 | | The American Dream and Conservative Perspectives; Southern scenes I. Commenting on history. ***Forrest Gump*** | | |
| 5 | 03.11 | | Contested Native American and Cowboy Identities; Representation of the American West/Mountain West, ***Smoke Signals / a choice of Western movie, Brokeback Mountain*** | | |
| 6 | 03.18 | | Racial and Cultural Identities, Melting Pot, Salad Bowl or Masala? **Mississippi Masala** | | |
| 7 | 03.25 | | Race, class, and equal opportunity, Legacy of Brown ***Hidden Figures*** | | |
| 8 | 04.15 | | Race, class and equal opportunity 2 Youth culture and inner-city school.***, Freedom Writers*** | | |
| 9 | 04.22 | | The myth of modern-day David and Goliath; Legal America and the Environment; Gender and class stereotypes; Landscapes: Mojave Desert and rural California. ***Erin Brockovich*** | | |
| 10 | 04.29 | | Class and ethnic divisions. The Boston scenes; Irish vs English. ***Good Will Hunting*** | | |
| 11. | 05.06 | | Apocalyptic fears of social-breakdown: *Contagion* /OR Congress and gun control: *Miss Sloane* | | |
| 12 | 05.13 | | End-term test: short essay questions based on class discussions delivered in unipoll | | |

Attendance, class work, and evaluation:

1. You should prepare for each class. Watch the movie and read the assigned text before the class discussions. Missing a class forum time does not exempt you from watching the movie assigned for that week or preparing for the next.
2. Attending class means that you are participating in discussions for the duration of class. Being signed in does not count for presence. You may miss 3 classes during the semester. Response notes should be turned in notwithstanding.
3. Evaluation: your final grade will be based on the following components. Class work: meaningful participation in class discussions/comments posted to forum (virtual classroom); authentic response notes; end-term test.

Readings:

* Murphy, Emma. “10 Films That Represent the American Dream” *Culture Trip*. November 16, 2016. <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/california/articles/10-films-that-best-represent-the-american-dream/>
* Johnson, Scott. “The American Dream is Too Loud in 'Revolutionary Road'” *Charlotte Viewpoint*. February 6, 2009 (posted to course website).
* “Conservatism and the American Dream in Forrest Gump” (Student essay, March 2, 2015) <https://einblogvonvielen.wordpress.com/2015/03/02/conservatism-and-the-american-dream-in-forrest-gump/>
* Kedong Liu & Hui Zhang. “Self- and Counter-Representations of Native Americans: Stereotypical Images of and New Images by Native Americans in Popular Media” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XX: 2 (2011). <https://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/09KedongLiuHuiZhang.pdf>
* Boyd, Julia. “An Examination of Native Americans in Film and Rise of Native Filmmakers”. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, Vol. 6, No. 1. Spring 2015. <https://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/research/vol6no1/10BoydEJSpring15.pdf>
* Paul, Crystal. “From ‘Outbreak’ to ‘Contagion’: What post-apocalyptic movies can teach Seattle about coping with the coronavirus pandemic” *Seattle Times*. March 19, 2020. <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/from-contagion-to-pandemic-what-post-apocalyptic-movies-can-teach-seattle-about-coping-with-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Recommended:

* Arena, Jenny. “Hidden Figures and Human Computers” Digital Experiences. *Smithsonian Air and Space Museum*. January 26, 2017. <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/hidden-figures-and-human-computers>
* *Erin Brockovich. My Story.* [*https://www.brockovich.com/my-story/*](https://www.brockovich.com/my-story/)
* “The Role of Film In Society” *Thought Economics. June 2011.* [*https://thoughteconomics.com/the-role-of-film-in-society/*](https://thoughteconomics.com/the-role-of-film-in-society/)