



SELF PROGRAM

2026/2027

French History & Culture through Film

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Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 hours

Hours taught per week: 2,5 hours

Teaching period: Fall Semester 2026

Course description

This course will examine French culture and history through the lens of cinema. As a site of production and reproduction of collective identities, movies offer a rich archive to reflect upon the idiosyncrasies and paradoxes which characterize modern-day France. The class is arranged around important (French and non-French) key films from a period ranging from the mid-20th c. to the early 21st c. and from a wide variety of genres (historical drama, biopic, documentary, comedy, etc.). Those films will provide case studies for the appreciation of cinema as a means to examine the past, not simply understood as a collection of dates and facts, but as a process of storytelling that dramatizes collective myths as well as ideological tensions, social practices and cultural traits. The first few classes will consider stereotypical representations of Frenchmen and women (as arrogant in the *Monty Pythons and the Holy Grail* or flirtatious in *Pépe the Pew*) and cultural fantasies around Paris (*Emily in Paris*,

Midnight in Paris). Classes will then be devoted to the fictionalization of historical figures (such as Joan of Arc, Napoleon, and Marie-Antoinette) as well as to the depiction of historical events (like May 68, the Paris Commune, and the Battle of Algiers) that have marked and made French history and identity. Particular attention will also be paid to people's lives during German occupation in the 1940s, under French colonial rule in the 1950s, or else in the suburbs around Paris in the 1990s. The class aims to introduce students to the basics of film analysis and to develop their understanding of French culture, history, and cinema.

Examples of films that will be viewed and discussed:

- *The Battle of Algiers* (1966, G. Pontecorvo)
- *La Chinoise* (1967, JL Godard)
- *The Dreamers* (2003, B. Bertolucci)
- *La Haine* (1995, M. Kassovitz)
- *Marie-Antoinette* (2006, S. Coppola)
- *Paths of Glory* (1957, S. Kubrick)
- *Inglorious Bastards* (2009, Q. Tarantino)
- *La Commune* (Paris, 1971) (2000, P. Watkins)
- *Napoleon* (2023, R. Scott)
- *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999, L. Besson)

Course objectives

- Students will be given the opportunity to learn more about French history and French cinema.
- Students will be given practice at writing about and discussing French history and cinema.
- Students are expected to attend all classes and participate with questions and comments.
- It is a discussion-based class: class time will be devoted to commentary of conflict-filled periods in French history and cinematic treatments of those conflicts.
- A detailed syllabus will be provided during the introductory session.

Suggested Reading :

- Hayward, Susan, *French National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Hughes-Warrington, Marnie, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* (Routledge, 2006).
- McMillan, James F., *Twentieth-century France* (London: Arnold, 2000).
- Nadeau, Jean-Benoît, and Barlow, Julie, *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong* (2003)
- Rosenstone, Robert A., *History on Film/Film on History (History: Concepts, Theories and Practice)* (Routledge, 2012).
- Williams, Alan, *Republic of Images: History of French Filmmaking* (Harvard UP, 1992).

Assessment

Presentations in class and a written exam.

Attendance

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise, no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.