# English 380: Film, Media, and History: The Big 80s

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<tr>
<th>Professor Drew Beard</th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
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## Course Description:
This course establishes the importance of historical context in studying film and media. Our chosen decade, the 1980s, has had a profound influence on how we live now. Political, technological, and cultural shifts during the decade, most commonly symbolized by the two-term presidency of Ronald Reagan, changed how movies were made, sold, and consumed. The 1980s witnessed Hollywood’s shift away from the “New Hollywood” of the 1960s and 70s to the “blockbuster” model associated with the films of Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and others, despite an increase in the production of independent films. Lingering shame over the Vietnam War, the continued “Cold War” against the Soviet Union, covert military intervention in Central America, anxiety surrounding women’s liberation, class warfare, the aging of the “Baby Boomer” generation, and a resurgence in patriotism (following the cynicism and paranoia of the 1970s) all inform the films we'll be watching over the next ten weeks. In addition, nostalgia runs throughout the decade and its cinematic output, with the transformative aspects of Reagan’s proclaimed “Morning in America” turning up in the throwback action-adventure of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, fantasy/melodrama hybrids such as *Poltergeist*, *Gremlins*, and *Back to the Future*, almost hysterically introspective melodrama in the style of *The Big Chill* or *Pretty in Pink*, or the “male melodrama” of *Die Hard* and *Field of Dreams*, among others.

Having studied films from the 1980s, students completing English 380 will recognize how historical context has helped to shape U.S. cinema in this period, and will be able to perform their own analysis by drawing on class lecture and discussion, readings, and screenings. Students will also develop a historical framework by helping to construct a class wiki, reconstructing the decade by posting and analyzing various artifacts from each year and connecting them to the films under discussion.

## Required Texts:
* Access to Blackboard for Additional Documents and Assignments

## Class Meetings & Procedures: Attendance is required and taken daily. You are expected to attend all class meetings and participate in all discussions. Screening and discussing films in a group setting is vital to critical learning. If you plan to be absent on a given day you must contact me in advance to arrange make-up work/exams. The following attendance policy is straightforward and non-negotiable: THREE absences no questions asked. You are responsible for any missed screenings, notes, or assignments due. A FOURTH absence, for any reason, will result in the automatic deduction of one-third letter grade from your final grade (e.g., from A- to B+). On the FIFTH absence you will automatically receive a failing grade for the course.

## Participation: This is a discussion-based class. As such, it is absolutely vital that you complete the reading assignment prior to attending class. As you read, mark any passages that strike you as interesting or challenging and come to class ready to discuss the texts. ALWAYS bring your assigned readings for that day; failure to do so will negatively impact your participation grade.
Screenings: Watching films in a classroom requires different ways of seeing (and note-taking), as you will need to pay close attention to how the events unfold on screen and why each film takes its own specific form. If you are absent during a screening day you will need to make arrangements to see the film on your own.

Classroom Conduct: Engaging in side conversations, using cell phones, listening to music, disrespectful conduct, and unauthorized computer usage will all result in considerable deductions from your participation points. These will also count as absences and can cause you to fail the class without further notice. In other words, I won’t scold you, I will just mark you absent.

Access For Students With Disabilities: If you have a registered disability, which you believe may affect your performance in this course, please see or contact me the first week of the term so we can make the necessary arrangements for your fullest access to the course and its activities.

University Civility Policy: Any form of discrimination or harassment will not be tolerated in this course. The university defines discriminatory harassment as “conduct that unreasonably discriminates among individuals on the basis of age, disability, national origin, race, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or veteran status and that is sufficiently severe or pervasive that it interferes with work or academic performance because it has created an intimidating, hostile, or degrading environment and would have such an effect on a reasonable person of the alleged victim’s status” (University of Oregon Policy Statement on Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity). For more information on this policy, please visit: http://aaeo.uoregon.edu/

Plagiarism: All work submitted for this course must be your own and written exclusively for this class. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please refer to the summary of the Code of Student Conduct in the Schedule of Classes. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources.

Incompletes: An “incomplete” grade will be granted only in the most extreme of circumstances and with advance communication between the instructor and student.

Assignments:
- Wiki entries: 20%
- Participation: 10%
- Weekly Reading Quizzes: 10%
- Take-Home Midterm: 25%
- Take-Home Final Exam: 35%

Postings on the 80s Wiki: On a weekly basis, you will contribute to a 1980s-themed wiki that I have set up and can be accessed through Blackboard. At the beginning of the quarter, I will assign you a number (either 1, 2, 3, or 4). This will remain your group number throughout the quarter. Each week, numbered groups will be assigned different categories to cover (Film/TV, News/Politics, Pop Culture, and Technology) as we build a year-by-year collection of online materials related to the 1980s. Based on your assigned category in a given week, you will find an image, a clip, an article, a link, etc. that pertains to a given year. To get full credit, you must locate your object/material/artifact and post it to the 80s wiki in your appropriate category. You must then do the following: write one paragraph describing and/or explaining your choice, followed by another paragraph reflecting on its place within 1980s culture and making connections to the films we have watched and discussed, providing at least one direct reference to the assigned readings. These postings will be due by Monday of the week following our coverage of a given year; for example, wiki postings related to the year 1980 must be posted by noon on Monday of Week 2, while wiki postings related to 1981 must be posted by noon on Monday of Week 3. These posts are graded (worth 20% of your course grade), cannot be made up or turned in late, and will be assessed for content as well as clarity (so spell-check, revise, read it aloud once, etc.).
Weekly Reading Quizzes: These quizzes, worth ten points each and held every Tuesday at the beginning of class, cover the assigned readings; on occasion, they may also review concepts addressed in lecture. Generally, quizzes will be of the true/false, matching terms, etc. variety. While reading quizzes are not intended to break you, they do keep you responsible for reading and ensure that you are picking up the necessary information. Quizzes are open book and open notes, but must be completed within ten minutes. Quizzes are worth 10% of your grade and shouldn’t be taken too lightly; however, if you find you are doing poorly on the quizzes, you will know to read more carefully and take more notes as you work through each assigned reading.

Take-Home Midterm Exam: You will be choosing between three essay questions concerning 80s cinema in the U.S. and dialoguing with the issues raised in lecture, class discussion, assigned readings, and the screenings. Choosing TWO out of the three questions, you will answer in short essay form, citing at least TWO examples from either reading or lecture and at least TWO from films we have watched in class. As this will be a take-home midterm, you may use notes and class texts in preparing your answer. However, because of this, I will expect a higher degree of quality and polish than would be found in an assignment completed in class. Both short essays will be approximately two pages in length, double-spaced, and in proper MLA format including headings and in-text citations. Your two completed essays will be due in class on Tuesday, October 30.

Take-Home Final Exam: You will (again) be choosing between three essay questions concerning 80s cinema in the U.S. and dialoguing with the issues raised in lecture, class discussion, assigned readings, and the screenings. Choosing TWO out of the three questions, you will answer in short essay form, citing at least TWO examples from either reading or lecture and at least TWO from films we have watched in class. As this will be a take-home mid-term, you may use notes and class texts in preparing your answer. However, because of this, I will expect a higher degree of quality and polish than would be found in an assignment completed in class. Both short essays will be approximately two pages in length, double-spaced, and in proper MLA format including headings and in-text citations. Your two completed essays will be due to me by email (abeard3@uoregon.edu) by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 7.

Schedule

Week 1: 1980
9/25 Introduction: “We Are Haunted by the 1980s”
9/27 Reading: “Introduction: Movies and the 1980s” (AC, 1-21); “Movies and the New Woman” (AC, 22-42)
9/27 Screening: Nine to Five (Colin Higgins, 1980)

Week 2: 1981
10/2 Reading: “Movies and Looking Back to the Future” (AC, 43-62); “Just Do It” (Sirota, 52-74)
10/4 Screening: Raiders of the Lost Ark (Steven Spielberg, 1981)

Week 3: 1982
10/9 Reading: “Movies and Other Worlds” (AC, 63-81); “Poltergeists, Gender, and Class in the Age of Reagan and Bush” (Blackboard)
10/11 Screening: Poltergeist (Tobe Hooper, 1982)

Week 4: 1983
10/16 Reading: “Movies and Reaganism” (AC, 82-106); “Movin’ on Up?” (Sirota, 180-213)
10/18 Screening: The Big Chill (Lawrence Kasdan, 1983)
Week 5: 1984
10/23 Reading: “Movies and Battles over Reaganite Conservatism” (AC, 107-125); “Operation Red Dawn” (Sirotta, 139-170)
10/25 Screening: Gremlins (Joe Dante, 1984)

Week 6: 1985
10/30 Reading: “Movies and Political Landscapes” (AC, 126-144); “Die, Hippie, Die!” (Sirotta, 7-30)
11/1 Screening: Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis, 1985)

Week 7: 1986
11/6 Reading: “Movies and Fissures in Reagan’s America” (AC, 145-166)
11/8 Screening: Pretty in Pink (John Hughes, 1986)

Week 8: 1987
11/13 Reading: “Movies and the Closing of the Reagan Era” (AC, 167-187); “Fatal and Fetal Visions: The Backlash in the Movies” (Blackboard)
11/15 Screening: Fatal Attraction (Adrian Lyne, 1987)

Week 9: 1988
11/20 Reading: “Movies and Images of Reality” (AC, 188-209); “Outlaws with Morals” (Sirotta, 75-104)
11/20 Screening: Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988)
11/22 No class—Thanksgiving holiday

Week 10: 1989
11/27 Reading: “Movies and the American Dream” (AC, 210-232); “Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome” (Sirotta, 112-138)
11/29 Screening: Field of Dreams (Phil Alden Robinson, 1989)

Notice: This course may screen films that contain graphic violence, explicit sex, and adult themes and/or situations. If such subject matter makes you uncomfortable, for whatever reason, you should consider whether or not this course is an appropriate choice for you.

Given its tentative nature, this schedule is subject to change. You are responsible for all material assigned as reading homework. A failure to demonstrate engagement with the readings (lack of participation, not bringing the readings to class) will have a negative impact upon your participation grade.