History 390 - Historical Problems through Film: Conspiracy and Paranoia in the 1970s

Professor: Dr. Kyle Riismandel
Email: kriis@njit.edu
Time: Monday - 6-9:05PM
Classroom: Cullimore 111
Office: Cullimore 326
Office Hours: Wednesday 3-4PM and by appointment

Course Description:
During this semester, we will explore the origins and manifestations of paranoia and fears of conspiracy in 1970s America. We will consider how select films portrayed American institutions such as government, corporations, and the family, the responsibility of the individual in society and the emergence of foreign and domestic terrorism. We will analyze how these texts created and enhanced a sense that hidden, nefarious forces were at work throughout American life during the 1970s.

Course Goals:
At the end of the semester, students should:
1. Be able to identify and interpret primary and secondary source material
2. Have experience expressing their thoughts clearly and concisely in class discussion and in writing
3. Be able to interpret a film in its historical context
4. Understand the key events and themes of 1970s America and their roles in the broader history of postwar America

Course Texts
All course readings are available via moodle.njit.edu

Assignments:
Class participation: Students are expected to participate actively in all class discussions and activities, to be respectful to the instructor and their fellow classmates, to arrive to class on time, and to stay focused on what is happening in our classroom not on chatting or using digital devices. Further, participation will be assessed not just on quantity but on quality. Quality participation demonstrates the following:
A knowledge of the issues at hand gleaned from lecture
Completion of that week's assignments
A willingness to engage in critical assessment of course texts and lectures

Students are expected to attend class and to be punctual. Excessive absences or late arrivals will result in a greatly diminished class participation grade. Further, there will be only one screening of each film so please do your best to not miss class.

I encourage students to check in with me over the course of the semester regarding their class participation performance. Further, do not wait to contact me if you are
falling behind or having trouble understanding course content. Earlier is always better.

Film Worksheets: For each film, students will complete a film worksheet that will ask them to not only identify basic elements of the films but demonstrate critical thinking about the films as historical text. The worksheet will be due 1 week following each screening.

Film Reaction Paper: Students must complete one reaction paper including a draft and final version. This paper must be about one of the first four films screened this semester. You will submit a draft, receive comments, and then complete a final version of the paper based on those comments. The assignment sheet on Moodle has detailed instructions on completing the paper assignment.

Final Exam: The final exam will be a cumulative exam that will test your ability to synthesize course lectures, readings, and screenings through essay questions that will ask you to think broadly about themes and ideas discussed this semester. Further detail will be provided as we get closer to the end of the semester.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:
Final Exam – 25%
Class Participation - 30%
Film Worksheets – 20%
Film Reaction Paper Draft – 5%
Film Reaction Paper Final Version – 20%

FAILURE TO COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS WILL RESULT IN AN F FOR THE COURSE.

Course Policies
Attendance: Students are expected to attend all course meetings unless receiving prior authorization. Missing class will not only adversely affect your class participation grade, but if you accrue more than 5 absences, you will receive an F in this course. This policy refers to all absences, including missing class because you are ill or have a family emergency. However, if you miss class to attend an NJIT sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or documented illness such absences will be excused. ***For these absences to count as excused, you must receive permission from the instructor in advance or provide a doctor's note in the case of sickness.

Office hours/student appointments: My office hours will be every Wednesday from 3-4 PM. I am also available to meet by appointment if students are unable to make it to my office during this time. And please feel free to come by if you have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades.

Academic dishonesty: Students are expected to obey the NJIT honor code and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent. For the tenets of the code or for clarification of

**Cell phones:** Students must turn off their cell phones before class begins. Under no circumstances may students answer their phones, make calls, send text messages, or use their cell phone in any manner during class hours unless approved by me before class begins. You will receive only one warning. After that warning, you will be asked to leave class and marked absent for that class. Though, you may think texting, using Twitter, etc. is innocuous or invisible, it is not. It interrupts the flow of discussion, distracts other students, and will inevitably embarrass the offender.

**Laptops and miscellaneous technology rules:** Students may use laptops in this course for class-related activities only. If I learn that students are using laptops for any other purpose, I will issue a laptop ban for this class.

Students are also prohibited from listening to ipods or using any other device in this class that has not received prior authorization. Essentially, you are only in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here. If you want to text, surf the internet, or engage in any other activity not related to class, please do not come to class.

**Students with Disabilities or Special Needs:** Students who have disabilities or special needs should contact NJIT's Student Disability Services to help procure accommodations in completing coursework. The center can be found at http://www.njit.edu/counseling/services/disabilities.php.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 – January 28th**
Introductions/Course Expectations/What are conspiracy and paranoia?/Film as History

**Week 2 – February 4th**
President Nixon and the Watergate Scandal
Secondary Source:
Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1964)

**Week 3 – February 11th**
Screening: *All the President’s Men* (1976)
Secondary Source:
Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, “40 Years after Watergate, Nixon Was Far Worse than We Thought,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 2012

**Week 4 – February 18th**
Surveillance, Safety, and Everyday Life in America
Secondary Source:
Democracy Now!, Radio Documentary: *COINTELPRO*
Week 5 – February 25th Screening
Screening: *The Conversation* (1974)

Week 6 – March 4th Feminism and Family: Making Sense of the Women’s Movement
Secondary Source: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Ch. 2

Week 7 – March 11th Screening
Screening: *The Stepford Wives* (1975)

Week 8 – March 25th Nuclear Power and Environmentalism

Week 9 – April 1 Screening
Screening: *The China Syndrome* (1979)

Week 10 – April 8th Vietnam and American Values

Week 11 – April 15th Screening

Week 12 – April 22nd The U.S. and the Middle East at the end of the 1970s

Week 13 – April 29th Screening
Screening: *Black Sunday* (1977)

Week 14 – December 10th
Take home final distributed.
Final Paper Due in Class
Final Exam due May 14th at 5PM