



Film as Representations of American Democracy and Oppression in the Long 20th Century

Guide for Curriculum Unit 15.02.09
by Matthew S. Monahan

During the past three years at Metropolitan Business Academy High School, I have developed an introductory film course that I continue to teach. Introduction to Film is an elective that is open only to juniors and seniors. I also teach senior-level English. It is my aim that students who complete this unit through either of my courses, although my primary purpose and method of delivery will be Introduction to Film, will have a deeper understanding of American democracy and the struggles that different groups have endured in their attempts to attain power and voice in the face of oppression throughout the “long 20th century” – a term I shall attribute to seminar leader Matthew Frye Jacobson to mean the late 1800s to present. Students will critically assess three major movements in which “Americans” have both struggled against and acted as forces of oppression: the early labor movement beginning roughly in the 1920s, the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, and present day post-9/11, post-Hurricane Katrina America.

The anchor texts included in this unit are seminal works of American independent cinema: John Sayles’ *Matewan* and Spike Lee’s biopics *Malcolm X* and *A Huey P. Newton Story*. Also, although it is not available at the time of this writing, it is recommended that teachers consulting this unit seek out the forthcoming feature film *Zeitoun*, based on Dave Eggers’ non-fiction book of the same name, due out later this year.

(Recommended for English and Film Studies, grades 11 and 12)

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