

English 207A: Introduction to Cultural Studies

Final Essay

Length and Due Dates

Length: 4-5 pages, double-spaced, titled, and paginated, with one-inch margins

In-Class Draft: Wednesday, December 10; **class meets in Mary Gates 044**

Optional Draft Conference: Individually scheduled from December 12-15

Revised Draft: Tuesday, December 16, by 5:00 p.m. in hard copy at Padelford A-305 or via E-Submit

Assignment

For the final essay, you may compare any two films from the following list: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Easy Rider*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Do the Right Thing*, and *Fight Club*. Your comparison must address one of the questions below.

1) Several of the films screened since the fifth week have attempted to critique particular ideologies or practices. Compare and contrast the critiques offered by any two of the films listed above. How do the films convey their critiques? What is the significance of the similarities and differences in the films' approaches and conclusions? Why do the films level the critiques they do?

2) Compare and contrast two films' construction of masculinity. What do the films communicate about the roles men should fulfill and shun? Do the films present a monolithic view of masculinity, or do they explore ideological tensions?

3) Compare and contrast the ways in which two of the listed films articulate national identity. What defines characters as "American"? What symbols and icons are associated with "Americanness"? Do the films convey a unified vision of American identity, or are particular visions in conflict?

4) In several of the films we have screened, the small town or the way of life it represents is under threat. Compare and contrast the threats presented to the small town or small-town way of life in two of the listed films. What is the nature and significance of the threat?

Guidelines

1) Although I have provided questions, you will need to develop an angle of comparison/contrast. For example, one could approach the national identity question in terms of the loss of traditional American identity, the struggle to define identity in times of national crisis, or the conflict between two visions of American identity.

2) Effective comparison/contrast essays highlight how similarities and differences reveal something important about each film. As you develop your essay, consider how each film "unlocks" the other. Think about how far you can take your argument when you make particular choices. For example, an essay on two films' ideological critiques will be more effective if you select films that address similar ideological territory. Otherwise, you may not be able to explore the significance of the films' connections. Ask yourself why it is important to examine these films together in terms of ideology.

3) Rather than offering a catalogue of your observations regarding the films' similarities and differences, your essay should pose an argument about the significance of the connection. Your thesis should not simply state that "films X and Y treat ideology Z similarly and differently."

4) While you can organize your comparison/contrast essay in several ways, you should avoid discussing one film in full, then turning to the other. This format relegates the comparison/contrast to the second half of the paper. Instead, you can structure the first part of the body around similarities, moving from one film to the other, and the second part around differences, discussing each film in turn. You can also focus each paragraph on one similarity or difference, discussing examples from both films.

5) Although the comparison/contrast essay examines large-scale ideologies, close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to how the films code ideology through narrative and/or cinematic techniques. Focus on specific shots or scenes and the narrative and cinematic codes at work in those shots or scenes. You may also refer to readings from the packet as they help you to develop your analysis.

6) Remember that you are writing to an audience who has already viewed the films. Therefore, your essay should not offer plot summaries. Instead, any reference to the films—dialogue quotations, scene descriptions, explanations of narrative movement—should support your analysis.

Grading

In evaluating this essay, I will use the same criteria I used to grade the midterm essay. Generally speaking, successful essays will have a substantive, defensible thesis, a logical pattern of development, detailed support for all arguments, and a sophisticated, grammatically correct writing style.