

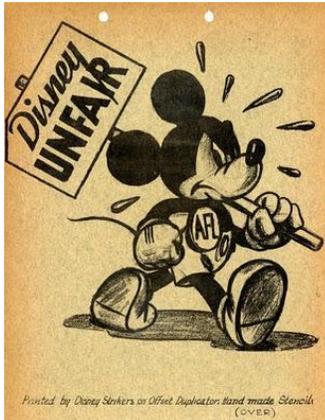
The Strike in Film : Syllabus 37:575:394:02

Fall, 2015, November 4th – December 9th, 12:35-3:35 Labor Ed. Ctr., Rm. 137
LSER, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers, the State University of NJ

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1. STRIKE - a concerted stopping of work or withdrawal of workers' services, as to compel an employer to accede to workers' demands or in protest against terms or conditions imposed by an employer.

The Strike has become a symbol in our culture of worker power or worker threat. Portrayals of labor union life in film and on television feature strikes as a major form of union activity, even though statistically few unions these days actually go out on strike. The Strike has become a vehicle through which major filmmakers dramatize their vision of working class life (Sayles, Kopple, Eisenstein), a plot device used by science fiction television to safely tell stories about class division (Battlestar Galactica, ST: Deep Space Nine, Babylon 5), and even a hook for singing (The Simpsons) and dancing (Newsies, Pajama Game).

This brief course will give us an opportunity to view some of these films and television shows, analyze how they communicate their vision of The Strike and other worker actions, and discuss how our definitions of work, workers and unions are shaped by popular culture.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

Learn a framework with which to critically analyze films, television, and other visual media.

Acquire knowledge about the history of significant labor films and about the economic, social, and racial issues that they explore.

Become aware of how working people and unions are portrayed in popular culture.

Attendance and Grading

Attendance is critical. All absences must be excused and you will be responsible for making up the work and getting class notes. If you miss a film screening, you will be responsible for viewing the film on your own.

Grades will be based on:

1. **Attendance & Attention.** You are expected to arrive in class on time and participate

for the full class period. If you need to leave early for a compelling reason, inform me in advance. All Cell Phones are to be turned off in class. No social media, including film viewings.

2. **Contributions to class discussion.** Quality and quantity count. You will be expected to listen to and respond to other student comments and questions as well as articulating your own views.
3. **Class assignments.** In some classes, you may be given specific questions, to be answered and completed after the film or through small group discussion.
4. **Film Analysis** (writing assignment). The review will be graded on content and writing quality.
5. **Short Exams.** There will be 2 brief exams to test your comprehension of the readings and class lectures and discussions.
6. **Grade Review:** If you feel that your final grade should be changed, please submit this request by email with a detailed explanation as to why you think it should be changed. All requests will be viewed as Grade Reviews. Your work for the course will be reviewed and a decision made on whether your grade is appropriate. **Under grade review, your grade could go up or down or stay the same.**

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Required Readings & Films:

Readings will be available on Sakai or handed out in class. Readings will be taken from film studies and labor studies literature. In some cases, you will be referred to a web site, to read an article online.

Films will be viewed in class. If you miss a class, you will be responsible for viewing the film on your own.

You will be required to view a film or television series for your Film Analysis. **This may involve purchasing or streaming a film (or television episodes); most films cost far less than the cost of a textbook.**

Viewing Films & The Strike Animated

How are workers and labor unions depicted in films?
How to watch a film critically.
Animated examples of workers at strike, now and then.

View In Class:

Black Fury trailer: <http://www.tcm.com/mediaroom/index.jsp?cid=34900>

Basic Shot Types: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laU2MI6X48I>

Alice's Egg Plant (Disney) (YouTube or other online sources:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLwPQIEdjzU>)

Last Exit to Springfield, The Simpsons

Assignments for Week 2:

(1) Readings:

(a) Phillips, William H. *Film: An Introduction, 4th ed.* Bedford St. Martins, and 2009.

- chapter 1: Mise en Scene, pp. 11-37 & 37-60. (Sakai, uploaded in 2 parts)

- chapter 4, Sound, "Music", pp. 170 – 183. (Sakai)

(b) Zaniello, *Select Labor Film Categories* (Sakai)

(c) Zaniello, *Salt of the Earth* (Sakai)

(d) Optional: Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth: Commentary*, pp. 93-109, 117-135

(2) Select film title for Film Analysis; email selection to instructor at donna.schulman@gmail.com. Use subject heading Film Analysis. **All titles must be approved.** If you write a paper without an approved title, it will be deducted from your grade. (Film Analysis assignment and list of suggested titles are at the end of this syllabu.)

Class Two – Nov. 11, 2015

The Strike as Fiction: Salt of the Earth

View in Class: **Salt of the Earth**, directed by Herbert Biberman , 1954, 94 min. (This film can be downloaded from the Internet Archive, http://www.archive.org/details/salt_of_the_earth, and other web sites.)

History of Salt of the Earth, only film to be blacklisted in the United States.

Assignments for Week 3:

(1) Readings

(a) Zaniello, "Salt of the Earth", 175 – 176 (Sakai).

(b) Pellet, Gail. The Making of Harlan County, U.S.A.: An Interview with Barbara Kopple. *Radical America*, March-April 1977, pp. 33-42. <http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1125403552886481.pdf>

(c) Phillips, Ch. 9: Alternatives to Live-Action Fictional Films, pp. 299 – 317 (Sakai).

(2) View film for Film Analysis.

Class Three – Nov. 18, 2015

The Strike as Documentary Harlan County, USA

View in class: **Harlan County U.S.A.**, directed by Barbara Kopple, 1976, 103min.

What is a documentary?

Compare fictional and documentary portrayals of The Strike.

Assignments for Class Four:

(1) Readings

(a) Zanniello, "Matewan," pp. 245-246. (Sakai)

(2) Write Film Analysis, due Dec. 2nd via Sakai.

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 25TH, HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Class Four – December 2, 2015

The Strike by Sayles

View in class: **Matewan**, directed by John Sayles, 1987, 135 minutes.

Assignments for Class Five

1- Review notes and readings for exam.

2-Film Analysis is due by 11pm. Submit via Sakai (assignments section). Document should be in Word format, NOT PDF.

Class Five – December 9, 2015

Putting It All Together

Short Exam.

Small group discussions and report out on Matewan and films viewed in class.

Film Analysis

View a film on workers and unions not viewed in class (a list of titles will be provided). Write a critical analysis of the film, focusing on how it portrays workers and worker organizations. The paper should be 2-4 pages long, double-spaced.

This is NOT a research paper, I am interested in what you have to say. It is acceptable to read articles about the background and history of the film and filmmaker(s). Please do not read reviews. If you do use any articles, web sites, etc., they should be documented according to MLA or APA style sheets.

The paper should include:

1. (a) Film basics: year, studio, director, major actors, anything else important.
(b) BRIEF summary of plot (no more than 1 paragraph).

2. Answers to two questions:

(a) How does the film portray workers? How does the film portray people in management (if they are in the film)? What kinds of stereotypes are depicted? Or, not depicted?

(b) Choose one aspect of the film process (setting, props, music, camera angles, editing dialog) and tell me: How does the director utilize this specific film process to communicate the theme of the film? It may be helpful in answering this question to compare it to a film seen in class.

You may include as part of your analysis: background information on the subject of the film or the director's previous work. This is optional. If you do any research of this type, it must be documented.

3. Conclusion: Summarize your paper in 1-2 sentences and tell me if you recommend this film, why, and for which audiences.

Suggested Films for Film Analysis

These titles should be available through Netflix, Amazon.com, or other film sources. Some are available for in-library viewing at the Carey Library. If you have a film in mind not listed here, you must get the instructor's approval.

Films on workers and the labor movement are shown at film festivals, including the Workers Unite! Film Festival (NYC), Rochester Labor Film Festival, and the Global Labor Film Festival. Perusing their sites might help you select a title; links to these festivals and a labor film database can be found in the Resources section on Sakai.

American Dream 1990. Directed by Barbara Kopple, this Academy Award winning documentary chronicles the six-month strike at Hormel in Austin, Minnesota which pitted the local union against its national organization as well as its employer.) [Available for streaming, free, from Snagfilms, http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/american_dream]

American Standoff. 2002. Documentary, directed by Kristi Jacobson about the Teamster Overnight Transportation strike.

At The River I Stand. 1993. Well-known documentary about the Memphis sanitation workers strike of 1968, a fight for a living wage and human dignity. It is also the story of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who came to Memphis to support the workers and was assassinated there.

Billy Elliot. 2000, directed by Stephen Daldry, this story of a young working-class boy who wants to dance is set against the bitter miners' dispute of 1984-85 in the north-east of England.

Black Fury. 1935, directed by Michael Curtiz, An immigrant coal miner finds himself in the middle of a bitter labor dispute between the workers and the mine owners.

Bread and Roses. 2000. directed by Ken Loach, the fictional story of two Mexican sisters who become involved in a union organizing drive of janitors in L.A., based on the real-life Justice for Janitors campaign.

FIST. 1978. Sylvester Stallone as an organizer for the Federation of Inter-State Truckers in this depiction of a fictional Teamsters union.

Glengarry Glen Ross. 1992. Written by David Mamet, starring Al Pacino, Alec Baldwin. A surprisingly gripping drama about what goes on in a Chicago real estate office. No unions, just frustrated, emotional white-collar workers.

Harlan County War. 2000. Fictional treatment of Harlan County miners.

Hoffa. 1992. Starring Jack Nicholson, biopic of Teamster president James Hoffa.

The Killing Floor. 1985. Two African-American men migrate from the rural south to Chicago during World War I and land jobs in a packing house, where they must deal with racism in the workplace and the union.

The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter. 1980. Excellent documentary about five women who worked in factories and the shipyard while the men were overseas during World War II.

Live Nude Girls Unite! 2000, Documentary, from a very personal point of view, about organizing the first Exotic Dancers Union.

Made in Dagenham. 2010, A dramatization of the 1968 strike at the Ford Dagenham car plant, where female workers walked out in protest against sexual discrimination.

The Molly Maguires . 1970, directed by Martin Ritt, starring Sean Connery, based on the real-life Molly Maguires, a secret group of Irish miners in 1876 Pennsylvania.

Newsies. 1992. This Disney musical, also turned into a Broadway show, is based on an actual newsboy strike in 1899 in New York City.

Nine to Five. 1980. Stars Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Dolly Parton. Comedy about women office workers that makes broad points about how to improve the corporate workplace. (non-union)

Norma Rae. 1979. Directed by Martin Ritt, starring Sally Field, Southern mill worker Norma Rae meets union organizer Reuben and becomes a key organizer in the mill, a move that radicalizes her life and relationships. Based on the real life story of Crystal Lee Sutton and the J.P. Stevens organizing drive.

North Country. 2005. Directed by Niki Caro, starring Charlize Theron, dramatic story of sexual harassment on the job in the mines, based on the landmark court case, Jenson vs. Eveleth Mines.

Office Space. 1999. Directed by Mike Judge. Watch the first time for the humor, the second time for its satiric depiction of white collar workers and the corporate office culture. (non-union)

On the Waterfront. 1954. Directed by Elia Kazan, starring Marlon Brando. Classic film about an ex-prize fighter, now a longshoreman, and corruption on the Hoboken waterfront.

The Organizer. 1963, Italian language film starring Marcello Mastroianni about organizing workers in a textile mill at the end of the 19th century.

Pride. 2014. U.K. gay activists work to help miners during their lengthy strike of the National Union of Mineworkers in the summer of 1984. (Do not confuse with other films entitled Pride.)

Strike. 2006, Docudrama about a nearly illiterate woman who becomes one of the founders of Poland's Solidarity union. Directed by Volker Schlöndorff, Polish language, subtitles.

The Take. 2004. Explores how Argentina's 2001 economic collapse impacted the lives of ordinary workers. Follows 30 unemployed auto-parts workers, who stage a protest against their bosses and economic globalization by occupying their closed factory and refusing to leave.

10,000 Men Named George. 2002. Directed by Robert Townsend, a fictional portrayal of A. Philip Randolph's efforts to organize the sleeping car porter.

With Babies and Banners: The Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade. 1979, Directed by Lorraine Gray, documentary on the role of the Women's Emergency Brigade in the famous 1936 Flint sit-down strike.

TELEVISION EPISODES

All in the Family, Season 5, Episodes 1-4, The Bunkers and Inflation, parts 1-4. These four

episodes could also be titled “Archie Goes on Strike.” They show the effects on the family when Archie’s union goes on strike amidst an inflationary economy.

The Office (U.S.), Season 2, Episode 15: Boys and Girls. Jan runs a “women in the workplace” seminar at Dunder Mifflin, so Michael decides to run a men’s meeting in the warehouse.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, Episode 88: Bar Association. Rom attempts to organize the workers at Quark’s bar and calls a strike.

