

Spring 2025
ITAL 1900; CIMS 1900
“Italian History on Screen”



Course Description:

This course traces the evolving concept of Italy, beginning with its emergence in classical antiquity before exploring the transformations of this idea across centuries. We will examine how the concept of Italy evolved, beginning with Rome’s conquest and subsequent colonization of the Italian peninsula. We will explore its transformation from the heights of the Roman Empire through the Renaissance and the rise of humanism. Moving into modern history, we will analyze the development of Italian national identity, the unification of Italy in the 19th century, and the complex relationship between the idea of Italy and the fascist regime. The course will also address the collapse of this regime during World War II and the subsequent struggles to reconcile Italy’s historical identity with the new realities of the postwar period.

Through a combination of films and historical texts, we will investigate how Italy’s past has been represented and reimagined on screen, exploring themes such as the legacy of the Roman Empire, the cultural and artistic rebirth of the Renaissance, the nationalist political ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the tensions between Italy’s historical myths and its contemporary multicultural identity. The course offers students a critical framework for analyzing cinematic representations of Italy’s rich historical trajectory, while also addressing broader questions about the role of cinema in shaping historical knowledge.

We will use Ross King’s *The Shortest History of Italy* (2024) as a textbook, providing suggestions and historical facts to support our understanding of the films with regard to the period they represent and the years in which they were produced. Further readings will be provided on Canvas to ground our discussions on the relationship between film and history. Students will be required to view one film per week. Films, either dubbed or with English subtitles, will be available for streaming on Canvas when possible and permitted by copyright. In cases where copyright restrictions do not allow streaming on Canvas, students

will be asked to either view the films at the library, where they will be on course reserve, or to purchase/rent them through available streaming platforms.

This course will be taught in English, and all readings will be available in English. There are no prerequisites.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Grade %</u>
Participation & Attendance	throughout semester	20%
Film Responses	throughout semester	20%
Group Presentation	Once: see calendar	10%
Midterm Exam	See Calendar	25%
Final Paper	See Calendar	25%

Outline of Assignments & Assessments:

- *Attendance and active participation in class discussion:* students are expected to participate to attend all the sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays having read all the readings for the day, and to participate actively and with a spirit of collective collaboration to the discussions.
- *Topics and Readings Sample:*

Week X Fascism

8 Oct Ross King, *The Shortest History of Italy* (Chapter 11)
Ferro, "The Fiction Film and Historical Analysis"

10 Oct *The Conformist* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970)

Week X WWII and Neorealism

15 Oct Ruth Ben Ghiat, "Italian History and the Transition from Dictatorship To Democracy"

17 Oct *Rome, Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945)

Course Requirements:

1. **Participation (20% of grade).** You are expected to:

- a. Read all assigned texts
- b. Watch all the films for the day
- c. Actively engage in class discussions
- d. Submit the weekly assignments in a timely fashion.

Your participation will be evaluated based on both the quality and frequency of your contributions to discussions. If it becomes clear during class discussions that you have not completed the readings or viewed the films, your participation grade will be negatively impacted. Additionally, you are required to regularly check the Canvas site, review the course materials for the week, and communicate with the instructor if anything is unclear or if you encounter any issues. If, for any valid reason, (e.g. medical, religious, mandatory participation in sport activities) you are unable to prepare the materials before class, please inform me prior to the session to avoid penalization.

- 2) **Film Responses (20% of grade).** You are required to upload a film response on Canvas for each assigned film on the syllabus. The film response sheet—valid for all responses—can be found on Canvas under Modules > Week 1. These responses should be concise yet demonstrate critical engagement with the film’s themes, historical context, and cinematic techniques. Responses will be evaluated based on the depth of analysis and understanding of the film.
- 3) **Group Presentation (10% of final grade).** In groups of 3-4, you will choose a film from the course and a related historical event. Your group will research and analyze the different ways in which the film engages with this historical event. Each group will present their analysis to the class in a 10-minute presentation, followed by a Q&A session. Visual aids (e.g., film clips, PowerPoint) are required to support your presentation. We will create a schedule for the presentations during the first few weeks of the course, so that each group has adequate time to prepare. Though each student will be graded individually based on their contribution, successful collaboration is essential. The presentation will be graded based on content, depth of analysis, clarity, use of visual aids, and collaboration among group members.
- 4) **Midterm: Reflection Paper (25% of final grade).** For the midterm, you will write a reflection paper (1500 words) that critically analyzes the relationship between one film from the course and a specific historical event. The goal of this paper is to explore how the film engages with the historical past in rhetorical, aesthetic, and ideological ways. I will provide prompts and specific instructions regarding format and citations for the paper in advance of the due date.
- 5) **Final Paper: Film-to-History Comparison Essay (25% of final grade)**
For the final project, you will write a comparison essay (1500 words) that explores how two films from the course approach history in different ways. The focus will be on identifying and analyzing at least two different cinematic strategies that the films use to represent history (e.g., aesthetic, political,

ideological, or narrative). Your essay should explore how these strategies shape the films' portrayals of historical events and what implications they have for the viewer's understanding of those events. Specific guidelines and instructions for the essay will be provided later in the semester.

Required Texts

- All the films and the required readings will be uploaded on Canvas before the beginning of the semester.

If you have any specific questions about this course email to the instructor:

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