

Che at the Movies (HIST 365)

“In this part of the world the possibility is almost totally gone for there to be a peaceful transition to socialism.”

- Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1963)

Fall 2010, Truman State University
Barnett 2224, W 6:30p - 9:20p
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Description

Since his death in Bolivia in 1967, the Argentine guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara has become a bigger than life icon. In recent years several of his diaries have been republished, and three feature films and numerous documentaries have been made about his life. In this class, we will watch these films and read his diaries with the double purpose of understanding twentieth-century revolutionary movements as well as the relative strengths and weaknesses of different media in portraying historical events. In particular, we will read both Che's own diaries and secondary works about Che's life, and we will watch feature films based on his diaries as well as documentaries that assume a broader perspective. After analyzing these four different perspectives, we will attempt to film his diary from his Africa adventures that has not been made into a movie. Based on what we have learned in this class, what is the best way to capture this part of his life on film?

Requirements

Our goal in this class is to challenge existing assumptions, engage alternative viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking. Through the study of history, we seek to empower ourselves to be better citizens, and to provide ourselves with the skills necessary to play a positive and educated role in society. We need to be active constituents rather than mere recipients of our education. To accomplish those tasks, we should strive to create an open and supportive learning environment. Regular attendance and active participation are also necessary. Please drop me a note if you are unable to attend, or if you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the class.

Readings

The following are the required books for this class. We will run this course as a seminar (rather than a lecture course) in which class time will be focused on discussion, so it is critically important that you keep up with the readings.

Guevara, Ernesto. *The African Dream: The diaries of the revolutionary war in the Congo*. New York: Grove Press, 2000. ISBN: 0802138349 **OR** *Che in Africa: Che Guevara's Congo diary*. Melbourne, New York: Ocean Press, 1999. ISBN: 1876175087
_____. *The Bolivian Diary*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2006. ISBN: 1920888241
_____. *Guerrilla Warfare*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2006. 1920888284

_____. *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes On A Latin American Journey*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004. ISBN: 1920888101

_____. *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2006. ISBN: 1920888330

Assignments and grades

Course grades will be based on the following assignments. You can check your grade progress on the class Blackboard web page (there is a total of 1000 possible points in the class). Assignments are due at the beginning of class, and I do not accept “drop and run” papers. Grades on late assignments will be penalized 10 percent for each day that they are late. Successful completion of all assignments is required to receive credit for this class.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Film presentations	100
Response papers (5 x 100 pts ea)	500
Book report and presentation (Dec 1)	200
Final project (Dec 15)	200

Film presentations: We will divided the class into small groups that will present and lead the discussion of each feature film and documentary we watch in class. The introduction should help set up the historical context for what we will watch, and the discussion should focus on the relative merits of the film including its ability to present and interpret historical events. Each group will want to preview the film in advance, and write up a list of discussion questions or themes for the class. The group is also responsible for bringing the film to class the day we will watch it (100 pts).

Response papers: For every book we read and the accompanying film we watch, critique how they present this part of the story of Che's life with a particular focus on the issue of the relative strengths of different media to communicate and analyze historical events. The essays should be about two to three pages long, typed, double spaced, follow good essay form (have an intro, thesis, conclusion, etc.) and include citations, a bibliography, and page numbers (100 pts each).

Book report and presentation: Select one book by or about Che Guevara that we have not read in class. Have me approve your selection, and then write an essay critiquing its argument. The essays should be three to five pages long, typed, double spaced, follow good essay form (have an intro, thesis, conclusion, etc.) and include citations, a bibliography, and page numbers. On November 17, we will discuss your findings in class (200 pts).

Final project. As a class, make a film about Che's Africa adventure. This will include conducting research on the topic, writing a script, designing costumes, filming the event, and finally editing the film. We will present this film to campus as our final exam on Wednesday evening, December 15 (100 pts for your individual contributions, 100 pts for the project as a whole).

Class Schedule

Wk1 (Sept 1) Introduction

Discuss: Donald F. Stevens, "Never Read History Again? The Possibilities and Perils of Cinema as Historical Depiction," in *Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies*, ed. Donald F. Stevens (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1997), 1-11 (on blackboard).

Screen: *Birth of a Nation*, 1:34-1:47 (Video PN1995.75 .B57 1984; DVD PN1995.75 .B57 1998)

Pierre Kalfon, *El Che; Investigating a legend* (1997, 90 min, F2849.22.G85 C54)

Wk2 (Sept 8) Revolutionary theories

Discuss: Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*

Screen: Eduardo Montes-Bradley, *Che, rise and fall* (2007, 52 min., F2849.22.G85 C444 2007)

Wk3 (Sept 15) Motorcycle Diaries

Assignment due: Response essay 1

Screen: Walter Salles, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004, 128 min, F2224 .G783 2005)

Wk4 (Sept 22) Motorcycle Diaries

Discuss: Guevara, *Motorcycle Diaries*

Wk5 (Sept 29) Cuba

Assignment due: Response essay 2

Screen: Steven Soderbergh, *Che Part One* (2009)

Wk6 (Oct 6) Film production

Wk7 (Oct 13) Cuba

Discuss: Guevara, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*

Wk8 (Oct 20) Bolivia

Assignment due: Response essay 3

Screen: Steven Soderbergh, *Che Part Two* (2009)

Wk9 (Oct 27) Bolivia

Discuss: Guevara, *Bolivian Diary*

Wk10 (Nov 3) Documentary

Assignment due: Response essay 4

Screen: Richard Dindo, *Ernesto "Che" Guevara: The Bolivian diary* (1997, 94 min., F2849.22.G85 E76 1997)

Wk11 (Nov 10) Africa

Discuss: Guevara, *African Dream*

Wk12 (Nov 17) Documentary

Assignment due: Response essay 5

Screen: Jihan El-Tahri, *Cuba, Une Odyssée Africaine* (2008, 190 min.)

Wk13 (Dec 1) Book report presentations

Wk14 (Dec 8) Film production

Wk15 (Dec 15) Film premiere