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 AICE American History A
 Period VIII
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Television/Movie Assignment: 1940-1950s

Title of Film	Director/ <u>Produc</u> <u>r(s)</u>	Major Actors	Year Introduced	Genre	Synopsis
<i>12 Angry Men</i>	Sidney Lumet/ <u>H</u> <u>enry</u> <u>Fonda/Re</u> <u>ginald</u> <u>Rose</u>	Henry Fonda, Lee J. Cobb, E.G. Marshall, John Fiedler Etc.	1957	Drama	Twelve jurors are to decide the fate of an eighteen year old boy accused of murdering his own father; during the deliberation, each man's bias and story is revealed, and what started out as an open-and-shut case quickly becomes more.
<i>Paths of Glory</i>	Stanley Kubrick/ <u>J</u> <u>ames B.</u> <u>Harris</u>	Kirk Douglas, George Macready	1957	Drama/War/Anti-War	Set in 1916 during the Great War, a unit of French soldiers is ordered by their general, who seeks promotion, to take part in the suicidal capture of the German position known as the "Ant-hill." Upon the failure to capture this position, three soldiers are selected to be executed; their colonel attempts to defend them.
<i>Gentleman's Agreement</i>	Elia Kazan/ <u>D</u> <u>arryl F.</u> <u>Zanuck</u>	Gregory Peck, Celeste Holm, John Garfield, Anne Revere	1947	Drama	A reporter is given the job of reporting on the extent of anti-Semitism in the United States. To do this, he decides to pretend to be Jewish, and thus experiences discrimination first hand.

Gentleman's Agreement (1947)

Gentleman's Agreement follows the education of a reporter about the existence of anti-Semitism in the United States, as well as the general dislike (most notably by 'liberals') for those people who are not Christian or of obvious Western European descent. The overall message of the piece is that discrimination is not only un-American, as it goes against those values of freedom and equality which the United States was founded upon, but a mistake, as in the end, no matter a person's religion or ethnicity, all people are human.

While the movie sought to make people aware of the truths of anti-Semitism, many influential Jewish businessmen within Hollywood attempted to convince its director and producer from creating the film, fearing it would provoke unneeded attention and attack (e.g. Film Censor Joseph Breen was known to make anti-Semitic remarks). The film itself was very popular with critics, as well as many movie-goers, although this did not prevent the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), a committee of the House of Representatives created in 1938 to prevent Nazi and, later, Communist subversion, from questioning a number of the actors, as well as the producer and director; the very political nature of the film caused great worry in some government circles, especially the frequent use of words like "equality".

Gentleman's Agreement was unique for the time, as it openly assaulted the prejudice towards Jews in the United States; it acknowledged that goals of equality and freedom were not fact for all Americans. Although many were horrified by the camps of the Holocaust, large numbers of Americans still had strong prejudice against Jews. The end of the Second World War saw large numbers of European Jews immigrate and join the already substantial Jewish population in the United States. For many, Jews, even if born in the United States and successful (as evidenced by the many Jewish bankers and financiers, businessmen, etc.), were "foreign", perceptions which the movie sought to address. The movie presented the Jews as people and citizens like any other, demystifying them and encouraging tolerance for different peoples. The film is significant, not only because it questioned society and its failings, but also because it was released during a time in which the formation of Israel was hotly debated. Its portrayal of Jews as real human beings deserving "freedom and equality" could be construed as indirectly supporting the Jewish people's desire for a state (i.e. Israel).

Even though the movie was undoubtedly controversial and helped to promote tolerance, it did not go so far as to talk of the other serious civil and societal failings that existed, namely the persecution/mistreatment of non-Caucasian peoples (i.e. Afro-Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, etc.). This may have been because the censorship and loyalty committees, may not have been ready for such revolutionary topics. Better that some message of tolerance be shown, than none at all.

12 Angry Men (1957)

While there may exist many different interpretations as to the meaning and moral of the piece, the most compelling is that of the individual rights versus the democratic many. Within the film, a single juror's doubts are able to convince, after much discussion and assumption, the eleven other jurors to vote 'not guilty' after previously agreeing that the convicted, an eighteen year old boy, was guilty. The film shows how powerful a single individual can be in the face of the group or community, and how it is sometimes necessary for the individual to stand against the will of the many so as to prevent, in the case of the film, a miscarriage of justice.

The film was received very well by critics who praised its filming and the acting ability of its cast. Despite high praise, the movie did not do very well in theaters; ironically, only after it was broadcast on television did it become much more popular with the general public.

The movie sought to represent a microcosm of the United States. Each juror was symbolic of a different aspect of society, as well as their stereotypical views; e.g. the uneducated, lower class business owner was rude and feared those who were different, i.e. non-white Anglo-Saxon; the blue collar worker respected the views of the older juror and threatened those who were rude to him; the upper middle class office worker was cool, methodical, and viewed the behavior of the lower orders with a degree of disgust; the advertisement man and baseball enthusiast those, of the lower and upper social orders, who were easily moved and cared little for what was occurring.

The piece, whether intended or unintended, spoke much of the times, specifically people's acceptance of the propaganda and word of authority; whereas other movies of the time did little to display the diversity and differences that existed in American society (e.g. living environment, profession, education, values, etc.), *12 Angry Men* did not shy away from it. This diversity and range of thought was in many ways contrary to what was typically portrayed during the period; the United States presented itself as a country of united peoples all with the same values (i.e. liberty, equality, freedom, justice), all of whom hated and desired the end of Communism and oppression; this is disproven in the film by the jurors who openly admit that they do not care whether the charged is guilty or not, as well as by the varied backgrounds of the characters. This era of American society was one heavily influenced by emotion; the will of the many outweighed that of the individual, and prevented anyone from speaking up against the chaos and fear of the times. In the film, an individual is shown as being able to bring about great change; this could be seen as encouraging people to question those around them, rather than blindly follow the herd.

Paths of Glory (1957)

The focus of the movie is the presentation of war as ugly, brutal, and unjust, as shown through the “paths of glory” of three soldiers who are shot under the false claim of cowardice. This film is unique in its portrayal of warfare and nationalism/patriotism as more despicable than glorious, and the questioning of unjust authority, as evidenced through Colonel Dax, the protagonist.

The reception to the movie in the United States was modest, although many critics congratulated the young and upcoming Kubrick on his directing ability. Unsurprisingly, many in Europe censored the film; the French government was insulted by its portrayal of the French military, and neighboring governments did not show it in order to preserve good diplomatic relations with France. Spain, under Francisco Franco, outlawed the movie, noting its anti-war message as disruptive.

Paths of Glory was borne from the American focus on war. In many ways it is not just representative of the Great War, and the continued interest in it within the United States, but of war in general; little more than a decade before, the United States had been involved in the largest conflict in human history, which had been followed a ‘cold war’ that threatened to turn ‘hot’ at any moment. War was very much within the minds of Americans. The movie is symbolic of the American interest in war, although it takes the non-traditional route of displaying war as disgusting and wrong, something that is to be avoided rather than glorified, as it leads only to death. The movie challenged the public’s perception of war and its herald nationalism (something which Stanley Kubrick would do both in *Dr. Strangelove* and *Full Metal Jacket*); not just intellectuals and poets would see war as dirty, but now the whole of society could see this side as well.