

THE ISP FORUM: DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

At the Movies: A Continuing Dialogue on the Challenges of Teaching with Film

As part of ISP's ongoing effort to provide a scholarly venue for the exchange of ideas on a variety of topics, this issue's ISP Forum presents one set of reactions to the February 2001 article by Lynn Kuzma and Patrick Haney titled "And Action . . . ! Using Film to Learn About Foreign Policy" (February 2001:33–50). Vincent Pollard's comments represent what we hope will be the first in a series of comments on teaching international studies with film. Profs. Kuzma and Haney in their rejoinder urge for an ongoing discussion of the topic, as they see the use of film growing in the field. More broadly, the Editors of ISP invite readers to submit their own comments and reactions on this and other pieces that appear within the pages of ISP. Please note that all submissions undergo a peer review process.

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Cognitive Leverage of Film in International Studies Classrooms

This commentary expands on Kuzma and Haney's discussion of five advantages associated with the use of film and video in international studies classes. Those advantages also enhance teaching simultaneously to students with different levels of prior information and experience. However, additional observations and comparisons with those of other international studies instructors are needed to confirm or modify that claim.

Kuzma and Haney helpfully articulate five classroom advantages derived from using film and video. In their cogent treatment, film and video (1) stimulate the senses, (2) concretize abstractions, (3) trigger affective learning, (4) generate historical connections, and (5) generally advance "the learning paradigm" (2001:33–50). And from a complementary perspective, Leib (2000:1) claims, "The main value fiction and film bring to the teaching of politics is engagement." Can we take this analysis a step further and ask what it means if one observes that students are not all engaging the same thing? I believe so. Plausibly, well-chosen and well-introduced films and videos enable a transcendent cognitive and affective advantage in the international studies classroom: appropriate and skillfully introduced films and videos *simultaneously elicit learning at different levels of student understanding*. Selected small-group student reactions to films used in four courses taught on one community college campus (seven sections) and a Research I university campus (five sections) during five semesters in 1999–2001 suggest the plausibility of this claim (see Table 1).

Teaching-learning objectives in these courses emphasize linkages between domestic and international politics and the power of social movements in effecting governmental and extragovernmental political change.¹ Many students' lack of

¹ <http://lama.kcc.hawaii.edu/external/asdp/polisci/easian/japan/pollard2.html> is the URL for the Political Science 345H ("Japanese Politics") syllabus. And <http://lama.kcc.hawaii.edu/asdp/polisci/easian/china/pollard1.html> is the URL for the Asian Studies 320C ("China") syllabus. The full set of teaching-learning objectives for these courses is on page 1 of the respective syllabi.

TABLE 1. International Studies Videos, Courses, and Course Modules: Twelve Sections in Four Courses, 1999–2001

<i>Social Movements: Films/Videos</i>	<i>Courses: Descriptive Titles</i>	<i>Sections Viewing Videos</i>
People Power, 1989	Introduction to Political Science	7
Withdraw U.S. Bases! Appeal from Okinawa	Introduction to Political Science	4
	Japanese Politics	1
Ripples of Change	Japanese Politics	1
China: Agonies of Nationalism, 1800–1927	Asian Nationalism and Communism	3
	Asian Nations Studies: China	1

The “Introduction” course included an “International and Transnational Politics” module. 225 students in 11 sections of 4 courses are included. Total sections listed above are greater than 12 since students in 5 sections viewed more than one of the videos. See reference list for bibliographic data on videos.

activist experience presents a challenge to their appreciating social realities underlying the concept of social movement. I respond by selecting films/videotapes that communicate cognitively and affectively why and how participants in social movements act at the same time at the same place and with the same or similar political goals. Since students learn in different ways, small-group discussions are one venue where markers in the process can be observed. One can plan productively stimulating discussions (Brookfield, 1991:102–114). And an important aspect of planning them is to think through how classroom and other learning materials are likely to be processed by student learners.

With a modal class size of eighteen,² extensive small-group interaction with students and close observation of their behavior and progress was possible. This is part of a mixed pedagogy intended to encourage student questioning, to introduce vicarious experiences, and thereby to enhance inductive learning. Analyzing student activity in their questions-and-answers during class, responses to written and e-mailed “early response questions,” quality circles, papers, and end-of-semester self-evaluations, I infer that film and video allow and stimulate students to access course content on multiple levels, according to students’ prior education, experience, and interests. A selective discussion of oral and e-mailed student responses to film and video representations of social movements follows.

Lengthy segments of the fifty-six-minute “People Power, 1989” on the collapse of state capitalism or communism in Eastern Europe in the 1980s for students in the “Introduction to Political Science” course facilitated an illustration of concepts like “social movement” and the interplay between domestic and international politics. While one might emphasize the heroism and effectiveness of ordinary Polish people struggling against a repressive government, the viewing experience highlighted developments in several countries during 1980–89 and allowed an immigrant Romanian student to explain an unusual scene. This was the nationally televised Christmas Day 1989 trial and execution of conjugal rulers President Nicolae Ceausescu and Deputy Premier Elena Ceausescu. To classmates disturbed by unexpectedly violent images, the student asserted that nothing less drastic would have loosened the decades-long grasp of terror instilled in Romanians by the dictatorial Ceausescu couple.

In two courses (five sections), a 24-minute Okinawa-focused video by the Japan–Asia–Africa–Latin America Solidarity Committee opened the eyes of students in

² Two of these sections met together; otherwise, the mean, median, and modal number of students at each class meeting would be lower.

“Introduction to Political Science” and “Japanese Politics” classes to environmentalist, feminist, pacifist, and nationalist themes (reviewed in Pollard, 2001). In the “Introduction to Political Science” course, a student with a prior career as a U.S. military translator challenged a claim made in the voice-over, thus enhancing discussion of the video. And despite sympathy for demands made in this advocacy video, a student from Japan indicated how the radical demands to expel the bases would seem to many people on Japan’s main islands, some of whom also discriminate against Okinawans.³

Objectives in the Political Science 345H (“Japanese Politics”) course include the following:

- evince familiarity with Japanese governmental and nongovernmental politics;
- be aware of minor political currents which may be early indicators of bigger changes;
- appreciate how history, geography, religion, and language have shaped Japanese political choices.

Nanako Kurihara’s “Ripples of Change” video let students deeply interested in feminist issues educate their mildly curious classmates.⁴ Prior to a postviewing *Japanese Politics-L* e-mail discussion, the following question was posed to students: “When filmmaker/videographer Kurihara considers the effects of the women’s movement on Japanese society in the 1990s, she seems hopeful. In contrast with the women’s movement in the United States, to what cultural difference(s) does Kurihara attribute the different way in which changes in gender relations will probably take place in Japan?” In response, Laura Morrison, an undergraduate student whose family heritage is partly Japanese and who gave permission for the following to be quoted, wrote as follows:

I think what Kurihara is saying is that the women’s movement in Japan is different from [that in] the U.S. because the U.S. women look at themselves more as individuals rather than Americans. Their identity is not based on the surrounding environment. Women in Japan have a harder time because the people in Japan have a group mentality and they are not very open to people who are different from the “group” setting. Japanese women have an extra struggle because they have to be able to learn to be Japanese and [then] being an “individual.” If you compare U.S. women[, they] are individuals first and then Americans. But in Japan you are Japanese first and then an individual, and this order of self-identification is [in] conflict with each other, making the women’s movement even harder. When a Japanese woman is able to look at herself first as a person and accept who she is and also be able to accept herself as Japanese, then the women’s movement will be able to continue.

For students in the “Asian Nationalism and Communism” and “China” courses, documentary film clips and black-and-white still photographs used in “China: Agonies of Nationalism, 1800–1927” conveyed underlying reasons for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese reactions against European colonial powers, Japan, and the United States.

One objective of the Asian Studies 320C (“China”) course was to “demonstrate a familiarity with major trends, events, people, values, and source materials

³ That video and some of those students also participated in an “Envisioning a Demilitarized Okinawa” program cablecast 22 times on community access Channel 54 (Honolulu) during July–November 2001.

⁴ On 13 June 2001, four University of Hawai’i students participated in a 90-minute post-semester IP-to-IP teleconference with women’s studies students from Keio University (Tokyo) who had also viewed and discussed the “Ripples of Change” video.

associated with each of the three major transformations of China in the twentieth century.”

In “China: Agonies of Nationalism, 1800–1927,” occasional barely restrained condescension in the narrator’s intonation and choice of dismissive vocabulary helped to generate understanding of how U.S. government officials, policy-influencing academics, mass communications media, and interested publics repeatedly failed to understand the dynamics of the Chinese nationalist movement in which the *Kuomintang* (*Guomindang* [“Nationalist Party”]), Communist Party, and lesser forces contended for the loyalty of urban and rural masses and elites.

To reiterate, Kuzma and Haney have given us a stimulating foundation for a deeper appreciation of the uses of film and video in the international studies classroom. In testable form, we can synthesize and extend the five cognitive advantages outlined in their article. Well-chosen films and videos help to remediate the less-prepared student to grasp major points without overwhelming him or her with unfamiliar details. Meanwhile, the better-prepared student is reminded on a deeper level of what she already knows while being presented with an opportunity to reflect on, associate, and synthesize her cognitive advantage more deeply.

As teachers, we should be attentive to possible and actual accessing of videos on different levels by students of different ability levels, preparation, and interests. Even if these are unintended outcomes, attentiveness to their occurrence may give us clues about how to increase their frequency. This learning process occurs on an individual level where students view a video and cognitively process its content silently. And it may occur more intensively in small-group discussion where three to five students teach one another while searching for answers to assigned questions of varying difficulty. However, this does not always happen immediately. So, participation in these groups, moving from one to another, sometimes simply listening and observing, sometimes asking if students have enough information to answer the questions, and sometimes playing a more active role in helping them get started with answers to specific questions provide a way to judge. Student requests for additional information provide a check on assumptions about how much they already understand. As the examples above suggest, a student with a firmer empirical or conceptual handle on developments and issues under consideration can explain the significance of a detail for a partner who misses the context altogether. Thus, better-prepared students continue to develop while others keep up and make progress.

Since my plausible inference that well-chosen videos help us teach effectively and stimulate students of different levels of interest, preparation, and cognitive skills by encouraging them to teach one another is based on Small-N observations, this topic invites further discussion and refinement.

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Comments by Kuzma and Haney: Using Film in the Classroom

We are pleased to see recent attention devoted to using films to facilitate active learning experiences in our classrooms. Since our International Studies Association presentations (Haney, 2000; Kuzma, 2000) and *ISP* article (Kuzma and Haney, 2001) we have heard from many colleagues who use films—and many more who want to—in order to connect students to history and abstract concepts in lively and concrete ways. In the last issue of *ISP*, Weber (2001; see also Lindley, 2001) discussed how she used films to teach international relations theory. In this issue, Pollard’s commentary makes the argument that using films can facilitate learning when students have different levels of knowledge and experience with the issues we present.

We would also emphasize a key corollary to Pollard's argument that films can "simultaneously elicit learning at different levels of student understanding," that these films must be skillfully selected and introduced. Identifying what our learning goals are for a film is a central first step to using films well in class; carefully introducing the film to the class and debriefing students after the film is over are also key to the success of the venture. Below, we continue the "forum on film" by offering additional points that will hopefully provide interested readers with more ideas about how to use films in the classroom and resources they can turn to for help. First, we expand our earlier discussion of how films bring history to life; second, we focus on an area not mentioned in our previous article, using film to discuss ethical issues in international relations.

We have argued that films can be powerful tools for promoting learning because of their ability to stimulate the senses, to engage emotions, and to make abstract concepts and history come to life (2001:34–35). However, one of the disadvantages for instructors who show historically based films is knowing in what ways the film used—or misused—the actual historical record. Films based on history often do not stick to historical scripts. This leaves viewers either wondering how things *really* happened or, worse yet, believing that the history portrayed in the movie is the only accurate account.

One very useful resource that interested instructors might consult here, besides Gregg's (1998) valuable edition, is the edited book entitled *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (Carnes, 1996).¹ This volume contains over sixty essays, by eminent historians, many of which relate to international affairs and foreign policy—one by Stephen Jay Gould is even on *Jurassic Park* (1993)! Each essay chronicles the history behind popular movies, placing them in an historic context. The book offers further resources such as related books and films. Paul Boyer's essay on *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), for example, not only describes the Cold War historical setting for this dark comedy, but also demonstrates how the film's characters were based on real historical figures. This invites students and teachers to compare and contrast the movie with the events and actors of the Cold War.

Another essay by Carnes (1996) details how the film *Fat Man and Little Boy* (1989) tried to "improve" history. The author suggests the movie's embellishments served to underscore a political point that the film tries to make about the arms race. This raises the issue of the politics behind film-making that instructors may want to explore by discussing the political agendas of director, producers, and the film industry as a whole.

Educators who want to begin developing a student's sensitivity to and critical analysis of the philosophical and ethical values inherent in public policy choices in the international arena can use movies to further this educational goal.² Movies provide a compressed version of a scenario, fictional or actual, that dramatizes contentious issues, decision-making procedures, and the value conflicts inherent in them. Students are able to identify with film characters as they struggle with decisions that do not have a simple "right" or "wrong" answer. They see the complexity of decision making when characters grapple over conflicting interests. They agonize with protagonists who are faced with morally ambiguous situations. As the film's story unfolds, students are vicarious spectators who see who benefits and who pays the costs of public policy decisions.

For instance, the moral ambiguities of war are dramatically portrayed in the films *Platoon* (1986) and *The Thin Red Line* (2000). *Clear and Present Danger* (1994) questions the efficacy of fighting terror with terror, showing that at times there are no "good" options. The movie *Fail Safe* (1964) dramatizes the choice between appropriate and inappropriate military responses and highlights Just War Theo-

¹ I (Haney) would like to thank one of my students in my summer film class for introducing me to this book.

² For ethical cases in politics see the edited volume by Gutmann and Thompson (1984).

ry's condemnation of purposefully targeting civilians (Walzer, 1977). *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961) questions whether a victor's justice is really just and depicts the birth of an international consensus against genocide, labeling it a "crime against humanity" (Brown, 2000; Sloman, 2000). The concept of distributive justice is brought to life in *A Year of Living Dangerously* (1983) through the questions and actions of an Indonesian journalist and his relationship with a foreign correspondent during the reign of Sukarno.

Instructors leading movie discussions where ethical issues are the focus may ask students to place themselves behind a Rawlsian "veil of ignorance" where they do not know their place in society, social status, fortune, abilities, intelligence, strengths, or weaknesses (Rawls, 1971). Instructors can then ask, "Would you be willing to accept any consequence of this action falling on yourself?" or "What would be the outcome if everyone acted this way?" Leading a discussion of alternative options and actions will advance student's critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.

The above discussion is our attempt at sharing additional thoughts concerning using movies in the International Studies classroom. We hope others will further the discussion in the pages of this journal.

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