

## FORCE, CONFLICT AND CHANGE--FROM TURNING POINTS TO MYTHS: HOW HISTORY GETS PRESENTED

MALS 610-010

Summer 2019 (June 10-August 15, 2019)

Wednesdays, 6-9 p.m.

Room 105, 77 E. Main Street, Newark DE

Historians, confronting the confusion and strangeness of the past, try to make it more comprehensible by organizing their narratives around a significant event or personality. Hence the fascination with "decisive battles," "turning points" and "key figures." The shapers of popular culture--poets, painters, novelists and, in our time, film makers and television producers--take this narrative convenience and spin myths around it. The end result is that what happened and why becomes obscured and what is believed to have happened is often a literary or cinematic construct.

In this seminar, we will look at three case studies of this phenomenon. Then you will produce a case study of your own, reporting it orally in class and finally embodying it in a paper of (approximately) 15 pages. Final grade will be based on your class participation as we work through the case studies, your oral report and your final paper.

CASE I: How did Churchill become prime minister?

On 10 May 1940 Winston Churchill, deeply distrusted by most of the British ruling establishment (including King George VI), became prime minister. He recounted his version of that triumph in the first volume ("The Gathering Storm") of his enormously influential war memoirs. Millions of words by other participants in the drama and historians followed without the story being completely clarified. Finally Nicholas Shakespeare, whose great-uncle had been on Churchill's staff in 1940, put all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together in "Six Minutes in May." Almost simultaneously, however, the Churchill version had been embodied in a powerful film, "Darkest Hours." Guess which account reached more people.

CASE II: Manifest Destiny?

Nothing has so shaped America's vision of itself as the "westward movement" ( or, in the Hollywood version, "How The West Was Won"). An incident from this westward surge of Euro-Americans overrunning Native Americans caught the attention of a writer, Alan LeMay, whose fictional version, entitled "Kiowa Moon," ran in the Saturday Evening Post. That story, in turn, was transformed by the legendary director John Ford into "The Searchers," the greatest of all westerns in the opinion of many film historians. The historical reality was of course very different. S.C. Gwynne's "Empire of the Summer Moon" and Pekka Hamalainen's "Comanche Empire" explain that reality. Glenn Frankel, a journalist turned film historian, explains, in "The Searchers," how a small episode on the Texas frontier was transformed into an iconic statement of one of America's most important myths.

### CASE III: What was the British Raj?

No image is more firmly fixed in the popular imagination than that of the British in India during the twilight of the Raj. Yet this image is almost entirely the construct of novelists and film makers and rather at variance with reality. The writers E.M. Foster, George Orwell, and Paul Scott created that image. The great director Sir David Lean then put Forster's "Passage to India" on the big screen. Finally, Scott's four "Raj Quartet" novels became a wildly successful television series, "The Jewel In The Crown," produced in the mid 1980s by Britain's ITV network, and subsequently bedecked with awards. Against this, the complex social reality of the Raj, described by Philip Woodruff in "The Men Who Ruled India" or in David Gilmour's brilliant "British Social Life in India" didn't stand much of a chance.

NB: The titles mentioned above are obviously not the totality of the bibliography for the case studies. Further titles will be discussed in class.