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| **Week 5 Instructor Guidance** |
| One of the topics we’ve been talking about throughout this course is how we can track both the personal and societal impact of film. In fact, your Week One Introduction post asked you to consider this issue and, as we progressed through the class and learned new terminology--new ways of looking at film, we were able to reconsider and develop our perspectives on this.  Both of your discussion posts this week touch on this issue, and it comes up in relation to your final written assignment as well.  While everything we’ve learned has helped us develop a critical capacity for talking about film, deepening our appreciation of the medium itself, ultimately our understanding of the (sometimes very personal) way film intersects with society is the key to unlocking another layer to the material from this course.  Students sometimes wonder about this course, asking how the material directly impacts their study of a chosen major. Students may even go a step beyond that and ask about how the material they've been studying has bearing on their anticipated career field at all!  That's why it's important to take a step back, away from the camera, away from the specifications of shots or the varying aspects of cinematography. It's time to pull our eyes away from the screen and look around at the world that surrounds us. We should be able to identify and consider the many ways film can impact society . . . as well as how society may impact film! In this way, we can start to consider how we can apply what we've learned in this class!  A recent study conducted by the University of Rochester (NY) finds that watching and discussing movies about relationships is as effective in lowering divorce rates as other, more intensive, early marriage counseling programs! Watch this video presentation.  [Follow this link](https://www.rochester.edu/news/divorce-rate-cut-in-half-for-couples-who-discussed-relationship-movies/) for more information about the study, and to download information about the films the couples watched, as well as the different questions the researchers asked the couples to reflect on after they watched specific movies.  As you reflect on your own journey in this class--how you watch movies and the kinds of impacts that films can have on people--try to think deeply about the many ways we engage with film and what it can really mean to us in our majors, in our careers, and in our lives!  Many of the movies we respond to are made for mostly for entertainment. No matter their artistic value, or how intelligent the plot may be, the main goal is to find an audience and get them to pay money to watch what unfolds onscreen. Individual members of the creative team--the director, the writer, specific actors--might have other more lofty aims, but at the root there is a basic economic principle at work.  Therefore, it would be easy to write these films off and focus more exclusively on documentaries or smaller budget movies made by guerilla filmmakers who aren't tied to the money making Hollywood scheme of things. We could focus on films that try to raise awareness of different issues or films that force us to question values we take for granted. And that's certainly one way to approach the issue. Some films very obviously tackle a specific social issue. These films try to expand how we think about a topic or literally sway our opinion through developing their own agenda.  However, this class is predicated on a study of cinematic terms and techniques using those films which are most readily available to all of us--which, in many cases, will be mainstream American cinema. This means that we're mostly using big budget Hollywood spectaculars as a type of “text” for this course. The question becomes, “In an industry that is motivated by the bottom line, is it still possible to find societal impact?”  The answer is yes. Hopefully, it's easy to see the ways in which society can impact film, so I won’t spend a lot of time on that permutation. Was a nihilistic, paranoid fantasy like *The Matrix* even possible before the World Wide Web made it easy to imagine that we were all living a lie structured inside a machine? Hollywood has long drawn its plots from every day occurrences, fears, and dreams. The next great movies are being made out of the stories all around us. That's one way society can have an impact on film.  What about the opposite side of the coin--film having an impact on society? That's a little harder to measure, but I think it's an equally important thing to consider. Have you ever seen something happen on the screen and then found yourself thinking about it later, in regards to your own life? If so, then you--as a member of society--have been impacted by film.  I think the temptation here is to focus exclusively on front-page issues, the kinds of topics that deeply divide people--and truly it is important to do that. Film isn't just a mode of entertainment; it's a powerful vehicle for trying to effect change in society. Just as a movie might try to comment on issues from real life (society impacting film), it's possible for a movie to try to make such a statement about these issues that they have an actual impact on the social discourse we're having. Movies such as [*The Color Purple*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzGrDgu08r8)*,* [*Driving Miss Daisy*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ3wXC5jqKE)*,* [*Do The Right Thing*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ny631yQ-DM) or, more recently, [*The Help*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbuKgzgeUIU), try to bring issues of race to the forefront of the discussion with a hopeful effort that dialogue can bring about some kind of change in society overall.  Check out this [*review of Spike Lee's Do The Right Thing*](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/30/movies/review-film-spike-lee-tackles-racism-in-do-the-right-thing.html) (note that it's from 1989, when the film first opened!). It's clear that the message Lee was trying to get across was received loud and clear. As you read, consider the ways in which the reviewer is writing about this film too. Vincent Canby rehashes the plot but uses that to springboard into discussions of character and setting, as well as technique, all in the service of describing how Lee is able to layer “the tensions so gradually and so persuasively that the explosion, when it finally comes, seems inevitable. He doesn't deal in generalities. The movie is packed with idiosyncratic detail of character and event, sometimes very funny and sometimes breathtakingly crude.” Canby also notes that “the ending is shattering and maybe too ambiguous for its own good” which may have been Lee’s point exactly--not so much to offer solutions or answers but to demonstrate the problem and get people talking.  \*\*\*  I'd urge you to keep something else in mind as well. For all of the impact a film might attempt to have on divisive social issues, there are other social impacts to consider as well. Every time you see a kid wearing a *Thor* t-shirt, or playing a *Star Wars* videogame, every time you see a *Brave* lunchbox, you're seeing a much different type of effect that film can have on society--an effect that goes deep to the core of popular culture.  Sometimes a movie becomes so popular, or speaks to the culture with such a clear and distinct voice, that society listens in a much different way. It becomes part of our popular culture and we respond through merchandising and (hopefully) a more lasting cultural impact.  Take a look at this video. It’s a rapid-fire trailer for a film about *Star Wars* toys which gives you a good glimpse at the range of iterations of this particular "impact on society" while showing how pervasive our associations with that film series have become:  All of this is just meant to help get you thinking. Every film has some kind of relationship to society, some kind of impact going one way or another. Some examples might seem more important than others--dealing with racism or working to curtail how much fast food we eat. Other examples might seem more frivolous--charting the marketing power of comic book characters or t-shirts. But the point remains that, if you look hard enough--if you think hard enough!--you'll find plenty of examples to draw from! |