Course Description and Expectations:
“America, as a social and political organization, is committed to a cheerful view of life…Modern
equalitarian societies, […] whether democratic or authoritarian in their political forms, always
base themselves on the claims that they are making life happier…If an American or Russian is
unhappy, it implies a certain reprobation of his society.”
Robert Warshow, “The Gangster As Tragic Hero,” 1948

Post-war American life is often imagined as a time of immense prosperity and national well-
being. This version of 1950s America is set in a commercial and domestic wonderland inhabited
by congenial young families living in suburban houses equipped with hi-tech kitchens and
cheery housewives glad to be in them, big shiny cars driven by men with white collar office jobs,
and innocent kids riding scintillating red bicycles in their safe cul-de-sacs. What elements of this
mythic image of the 1950s are consistent with American films of this era? How was the
tumultuous American political scene addressed (or ignored) in motion pictures? How did the
changing nature of the Hollywood film industry impact the films made during the decade?

We will search for answers to these and other questions through an investigation of the decade’s
diverse cinematic offerings, including select westerns, crime films, sci-fi, melodramas, social
issue pictures, musicals, and comedies. We will pay special attention to the ways that the
decade’s films addressed issues of gender, race, the family, and especially American nationalism
and politics. Attendance and regular class participation are required. Students will complete a
short paper, a final research paper and presentation, and a final oral examination.

Academic Integrity:
Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade in the
course. Please see http://www.ncsu.edu/student_affairs/osc/Alpage/acaintegrity.html for an
explanation of academic integrity and of the consequences for violating it.

Grades: Your final grade will be determined as follows:
Short Paper (5 pgs.) 20%
Final Paper Workshop Presentation: 10%
Final Research Paper (15-20 pgs.): 50%
Final Exam: 20%

All assignments will be graded with letter grades using a plus/minus scale, or on a point system
with an equivalent scale.
**Extracurricular Experiences:** The more 1950s films you can see over the course of the semester the more confident you will feel about the decade as a whole, which will help you with our daily discussions and with your papers. The North Carolina Museum of Art will be screening several 1950s films this semester and I highly recommend that you try to attend these screenings: February 9, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957); February 16, *Champagne for Caesar* (1950); February 23, *A Face in the Crowd* (1957). $3.50 students, 8:00 p.m.

**Books:**

**Articles:**
The following readings will be available on “e-reserve”: [http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/reserves/](http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/reserves/) under Eng591A. Print out all articles and bring them to class on the days we will be discussing them.


Mann, Katrina. “‘You’re Next’ Postwar Hegemony Besieged in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.” *Cinema Journal*. 44:1 (Fall 2004): 49-68.


American Film in the 1950s
Syllabus for Spring 2007

Assessing The American Way
Mon Jan 22  *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), Dir. Robert Wise (Fox)
Read:  *The Fifties*, Intro & Chapter 1 (1-32)
  *Naming Names*, “Foreword”–“The Informer as Patriot” (vii-70)
  “What the Atom Age Has Done to Us,” *NYT* Aug. 6, 1950 (e)
  “Study of the Amount of Strontium 90 in Human Bones Points Up Atomic Problem,” *NYT* February 16, 1958 (e)

Mon Jan 29  *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), Dir. Richard Brooks (MGM)
Clip:  *The Wild One* (1953), Dir. Laszlo Benedek
*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Dir. Nicholas Ray
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 3 (65-86)
  *Naming Names*, “Naming Names”–“HUAC in Hollywood” (71-96)
Beth McCoy, “Manager, Buddy, Delinquent: B.J.’s Triangle” (e)

Post-War/Cold War Morality Tales: Two Hollywood Independents
Mon Feb 5  *The Bigamist* (1953), Dir. Ida Lupino (The Filmmakers)
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 2 (33-64)
  *Naming Names*, “The Collaborators”–“Guilty Bystanders” (97-143)
Philip Wylie, “Common Women” from *Generation of Vipers* (e)

Mon Feb 12  *Pickup on South Street* (1953), Dir. Sam Fuller (Fox)
Clip:  *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), Dir. Robert Aldrich
*High Noon* (1952), Dir. Fred Zinnemann
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 4 (87-106)
  *Naming Names*, “Guilty Bystanders” (144-196)

Confrontational Politics
Mon Feb 19  *On The Waterfront* (1954), Dir. Elia Kazan (Columbia)
Read:  Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 9 (197-216)
  *Naming Names*, “Stars, Stripes, Stigmas” (197-278)
Pauline Kael, “The Glamour of Delinquency” (e)

Mon Feb 26  *Salt of the Earth* (1954), Dir. Herbert Biberman (Independent Production Co.)
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 11 (257-279)
  *Naming Names*, “The Reasons Considered”–“Victims” (279-339)
  Biberman, Jarrico, Revultas, Chacon, “*Salt of the Earth*” excerpts (e)
Pauline Kael, “Propaganda—*Salt of the Earth*” (e)

Short Papers Due
Sexual Behavior
Mon Mar 5  *SPRING BREAK—NO CLASSES*

Mon Mar 12  *The Girl Can’t Help It* (1956), Dir. Frank Tashlin (Fox)
Clip:  *Swooner Crooner* (1944, WB Cartoon), Dir. Frank Tashlin
       *Born Yesterday* (1950), Dir. George Cukor
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapters 5 & 6 (107-146)
       Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique” (e)

Mon Mar 19  *Some Like It Hot* (1959), Dir. Billy Wilder (United Artists)
Clip:  *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), Dir. Howard Hawks
       *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), Dir. Howard Hawks
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 10 (217-256)
       Alfred Kinsey, “Transvestism.”  *Sexual Behavior in the Female* (e)
       Joanne Meyerowitz, “Sex Research at the Borders of Gender” (e)

Community Values
Mon Mar 26  *The Searchers* (1956), Dir. John Ford (Warner Bros.)
Clip:  *The Ten Commandments* (1956), Dir. Cecil B. DeMille
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 7 (147-168)
       *Naming Names*, “Intended Victim”-“Informer as Victim” (340-384)
       Gaylyn Studlar, “What Would Martha Want?” (e)

Paper Proposals Due

Mon Apr 2  *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), Dir. Don Siegel (Walter Wanger/Allied)
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 8 (169-196)
       *Naming Names*, “Lessons” (385-428)
       Katrina Mann, “‘You’re Next’…*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*” (e)

Generations, Gender, Genre
Mon Apr 9  *Imitation of Life* (1959), Dir. Douglas Sirk (Universal)
Clip:  *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), Dir. Douglas Sirk
Read:  *Naming Names*, “Afterword” (429-440)
       Marina Heung, “‘What’s the Matter With Sarah Jane?’” (e)

Final Paper Presentations/Annotated Bibliographies Due

Mon Apr 16  *Giant* (1956), Dir. George Stevens (Warner Bros.)

Into the Sixties
Mon Apr 23  *Shadows* (1959), Dir. John Cassavetes (Lion International)
Clip:  *Psycho* (1960), Dir. Alfred Hitchcock
Read:  *The Fifties*, Chapter 12 (279-302)

Final Papers Due

Mon Apr 30  *Final Examination*, 6:00-9:00