**1A Pathways** Fall 2015 **Critical Analysis Project**

**Overview**: As part of our study of film as both a form of rhetoric and a form of art, you will write a critical analysis of a film, which will be similar to the sort of writing done by the more elite film reviewers and by regular film scholars.

For this assignment, you will write a critical analysis of a film that addresses enduring human concerns, choosing from a list I will give you. You will consider the work in its specific historical and cultural context, discussing how it reflects and comments on the concerns and values of the society that produced it.

**Details:**

* **Audience:** Write for an educated audience who would be interested in the film and is familiar with it. (Don’t retell the story for them except as necessary to make your points.)
* **Length/format:** Approximately 1400 words, typed, MLA format

**Content:**

* **Introduce the film** by *briefly* saying what it is about; identify the filmmaker/writer, when it was made, when/where the story takes place.
* **Set the film in its specific cultural and historical context**: Tell us what timely issues the film addresses. For example, *The Lost Boys of Sudan* is based on a particular population that went through a terrible civil war, a grueling journey as refugees, and a decade living in refugee camps before coming to America, where they faced new challenges trying to assimilate and finish their education. This relates both to the current refugee crisis and to America’s long history of dealing with—and learning from--new immigrants who come from societies very different from our own.
* **Identify the film’s enduring human concerns, as well**. For example, in addition to the specifically contemporary themes, *The Lost Boys of Sudan* also explores timeless problems like the struggle of marginalized communities to establish their human worth, both in their own minds and in the hierarchy of the dominant society, and the struggles of orphans to forge a sense of identity and find their path toward autonomy. It is also about the bonds of family and friends tested by hardship and distance.
* **Interpret a theme of the film:** Choose a central theme of the work and articulate what the film shows about that theme. This is likely to be complex, so don’t oversimplify it. (We’ll work on this in class.) Even though you will likely identify more than one concern of the film in your introduction (sections described above), you should focus on just one to fully explore and interpret in this section.
* **Analysis and Evaluation:** Discuss how well the film or story works and why. Be specific about the criteria you are using, and offer specific details from the film or story to support your evaluation. Some criteria to consider are these: Are the ideas interesting, explored well, expressed well? How engaging are the characters? How good is the acting? Is the story complex enough to be interesting but not so much as to be confusing? How is the cinematography? Special effects (if any)? Choose 3 or 4 criteria, at the most. In all cases your discussion should explain how each element you examine contributes to (or detracts from) the overall effectiveness of the work.
* **Response:** You can also include your personal response to the film, most likely in the beginning or the end, but don’t take up too much space doing that.

**Procedure**:

1. **Select a title** below based on your own interests and background. Note: Don’t choose one you have already written about in another class. Expand your horizons.
2. **Write a topic proposal** telling me briefly which one you chose and why.
3. **Watch/read the work**, and **read what others have said about it**, especially professional critics (at least 2). You should cite at least one in your paper and respond to it. It is also good to read what the filmmaker/writer/director has to say about it, if you can.
4. **Write a full rough draft** in proper MLA format, clearly citing your sources, print out two copies, and bring them to the peer review on the assigned day. (You can earn 15 points *only* for 2 printed copies of the full draft.)
5. After the peer review, consider the advice you got and **revise the paper**.
6. **Print** out the paper, after **submitting your final draft to Turnitin.com**. Staple the final draft to the peer review sheet and the rough draft you got comments on.
7. **Submit the stapled bundle** at the beginning of class on the day it is due.

**Suggested Film List**: The titles are posted on the course website in the assignments category. Feel free to pitch other titles to me if you have more candidates, but be ready to defend your suggestions of the grounds of depth and appropriateness.

Note: You are all responsible for getting access to your film. Most are available on Netflix, and the local libraries will have most of them. I strongly recommend that you watch them together with your whole group.