

Listen to part of a lecture about cinema and politics.

Optional exercise

Listen and decide if these statements are True or False.

1. The lecturer defines political films as films made about politicians.
2. Hotel Rwanda made people aware of what was happening in Rwanda.
3. Very few political films were made in the 1970s.
4. In the 1940s and 1950s American film studios completely avoided showing social problems.
5. The lecturer mentions two films by Richard Attenborough.
6. The film Malcolm X came out in the 2000s.

(Answers below)

You may have heard recently about what is being called the return of political cinema, following recent releases such as *Munich* and *The Constant Gardener*. So today I'm going to look at what political cinema is, and a little overview of the history of political film-making in Hollywood.

First of all, what do I mean by political cinema, or political films? To me, the terms refer to films that make people aware of political or social situations. To give a recent example, the film *Hotel Rwanda* caused many people take notice of the political situation in Rwanda for perhaps the first time. The dramatic imagery of film can often be far more powerful than news reports.

For many, the heyday of political film-making was the 1970s. Watergate, the Vietnam War, and mainstream actors with social consciences such as Jane Fonda, Robert Redford and Warren Beatty, made for a number of political films. Think of *All the President's Men*, which detailed the scale of corruption in Watergate, or *Apocalypse Now*, which graphically portrayed the horror of the Vietnam War.

Political film-making didn't start in the seventies, though. Back in the 1940s and 50s Hollywood produced films detailing social problems such as unemployment and alcoholism. In 1967 *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, a comedy about a white couple whose daughter brings home a black fiancé, covered what was then pretty much a taboo subject, that of interracial relationships.

As I said, the seventies saw a sudden increase in political films, which carried on to some extent into the eighties, with the release of films such as *Gandhi*, which won eight Oscars, and *Cry Freedom*, another Attenborough film, this time about Steve Biko, a South African activist who died in police custody.

The nineties is not generally seen as a good decade for political cinema. *Schindler's List*, Spielberg's powerful film about the holocaust, stands out, as does *Malcolm X*, a biography of the black American activist. Which brings us to the present decade, and the so-called revival... (fade out)

Answers: 1 F, 2 T, 3 F, 4 F, 5 T, 6 F