First-year seminar: “A world to win”
Fall 2012
Professor Tom Lewis
Three sample writing assignments


Please write 350-400 words on ONE of the following topics:

1. What individual rights should undocumented immigrants enjoy? What group rights? In your opinion: if it is legal for corporations to cross borders freely in search of profits and low-wage markets, is it fair or unfair to prohibit working people from crossing borders freely in search of greater liberties and better wages?

2. Can you imagine a world plagued by environmental degradation and nationalistic hatreds as much as the one portrayed in Children of men? If so, what might be done to avoid that fate? If not, why not?

3. One of discussion teams raised "trust" as an important issue in the movie. Do you agree or disagree with them, and why or why not? Please support your view by commenting upon specific examples of scenes, events, or characters in the film.

4. Do you consider that people possess a "right to revolt" against a government they consider unjust? If so: how are they entitled to revolt, and under what conditions? If not, why not? Please describe a couple of contemporary situations which illustrate your justification of, or lack of support for, revolutionary movements.

5. Interpret the character of Jaspar's wife. What meanings and realities does she symbolize?

6. When Kee and Theo find sanctuary in the Russian apartment to which Marichka (the old Russian gypsy woman) has led them, the director establishes the setting through a filmic shot that lingers over old photographs and objects on a dresser or bureau. The camera then highlights a medallion with Lenin's face on it. What message do these photographs and objects, and in particular this image, convey to you? (Suggestion: You might want to read a brief summary, or otherwise recall the argument, of Lenin's essay on "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in which he defends weaker nations against the imperial powers and ambitions of stronger nations. I can provide such materials if you wish to consult them.)

7. If you don't like any of the topics above, choose one of your own.

II. Babel (week 8), Alejandro González Iñárritu, dir. (2006)

Please write a 350-400 word analysis or personal response to ONE of the following topics:

1. Interpret the absence, failings, or limitations of mothers in the film.

2. How are connections established among the different geographical locations? What statement is being made through these connections?

3. What constitutes a "family," as portrayed in the film?
4. How important is empathy in explaining the interactions among the characters in the film? How important to the director's successful achievement of his purpose is the viewer's capacity to experience empathy while watching this film?

5. Who is to blame for the sad things that happen in the film?

6. Write on a topic of your own choosing concerning Babel.


Please write 350-400 words in response to ONE of the following topics:

1. Agree or disagree with Eric Weber's review of The Hunger Games.

2. Agree or disagree with R.L. Shaffer's review of The Hunger Games.

3. What statement, if any, does the book or film make about the social, political, and economic challenges facing your generation?

4. What are the main topics of social critique in the book or film? Please give concrete examples.

5. What values define the people and social structure of The Capitol? Assess those values in relation to your own life.

6. What values are expressed through the character of Katniss? of Peeta? Assess those values in relation to your own life.

7. Present your own analysis and interpretation of the book or film.