Melodrama is the dominant art form of modern, industrialized democracies. In any given year since cinema was invented, most of the top-grossing films are melodramas, continuing themes and expectations established on the 19th-century stage, especially static characters identified with binary moral struggle (good vs evil, innocence vs corruption, dignity vs exploitation). Other characteristics of melodrama include set-piece spectacle (explosions and train wrecks), thrilling narrative (chase sequences), and heroes who are both victimized and misunderstood (Rambo, Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter, Spiderman). The conclusion of melodrama usually involves both stopping the villain and clarifying the victim-hero's status—he was really right, or she was really virtuous, all along!

Melodrama significantly influences nearly all forms of contemporary 21st-century public discourse, including both journalism and political speech. Originating as an iconography of democratic revolution (black opera hats signifying the aristocratic enemy of revolutionists wearing white peasant caps), melodrama has been adapted to the propaganda of left, right, and middle. We'll look at classic examples of melodrama on stage and screen, consider the use and abuse of melodramatic rhetoric, and examine the way melodrama operates pervasively throughout contemporary global culture as an organizing mode of thought. Requirements: response papers; topic proposal, annotated bibliography and lit review, 15-page final paper.

Some texts I'm considering:
Dion Boucicault *The Poor of New York*, 1857 (play)
Adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or Life Among the Lowly* (1855) by George Aiken (1858) and Walt Disney ("Mickey's Mellerdrammer," 1933)
Sergei Eisenstein, selections from *Strike, October, and Alexander Nevsky* (films 1925, 1927 and 1938)
Short fiction by Emile Zola, Upton Sinclair, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Ambrose Bierce

Possible critical readings (usually 1 essay or chapter per week)
Elisabeth Anker, “Villains, victims and heroes : Melodrama, media, and September 11”
Marc Bousquet, "Harry Potter, the 'War Against Evil,' and the Melodrama of Public Culture."
Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*
Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*
Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*
Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*
Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson*