The “now” in the title of this course refers at once to Jane Austen’s present, the contemporary culture within which she wrote, transforming the romance plot into a new mode of realist fiction, and to our own present, the 21st C culture in which we read and reread (and also rewrite) Jane Austen’s novels. Thinking about Austen in terms of the “now” opens questions about the continuing relevance of her work over time and in our time: to what current interests or concerns do Austen’s novels speak? how does writing so focused on the circumscribed experience of a young woman in an English country village appeal to readers all over the world? what can tracing the reception of her novels by writers, critics, and devoted fans tell us about the function of literature in the formation of the personal, the social, and the political? We will read the six published novels, some of the unpublished writing, and various responses to Austen’s work from the early 19th C to recent critical approaches (including feminist and queer), and consider modern adaptations and remediations in order to explore these and other questions about Austen’s originality and her persistent allure. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement for the English major.
The “sublime” is the word eighteenth-century thinkers used to describe a peculiar aesthetic reaction. Impossibly high mountains, endlessly deep abysses, and infinitely involuted labyrinths were the stuff of sublime art and nature. Such powerful and overwhelming subjects seemed to push our capacity to make sense of the world to its very limits—an experience, for many, that was both wrought with anxiety and strangely pleasurable. We’ll examine eighteenth-century accounts of the sublime (Addison, Burke, Kant, the Gothic novel); older works generally seen as sublime (the Books of Genesis and Job, Milton’s poetry); and some contemporary examples of the form. For a fuller description see the English department website. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.
In this course, we will think about politics and cinema as overlapping, competing, and interdependent representational systems. One of our main concerns, therefore, will be the complex reciprocal relations between Hollywood and Washington. But our focus will not be limited to mainstream cinema in the United States; we will also consider political cinema in other countries. While most of the works we will discuss will be full-length fictional films (often based, however, on “true stories”), we will turn our attention to some documentaries and propaganda films as well. Films likely to be chosen include: *Triumph of the Will, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, BlacKKKlansman, Fail Safe, The Manchurian Candidate, Medium Cool, Z, Selma, Vice, Lumumba, Good Night and Good Luck, The Battle of Algiers, The Baader Meinhof Complex, Apartment Zero, We Come as Friends.* Students will be required to write a few short (two-to-three-page) papers and one longer (ten-page) paper.