

HST 202: ONLINE U.S. History W19 (Escobar)

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Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, January 26, 2019, 7:18 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Hollywood History & Mythology topic.

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A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 11:43 AM

As a student of history, which I have labeled myself since long before I began taking college history classes, I have long been drawn to movies which portray historical events. The problem with this most of the time is that the more one understands about the historical events being portrayed on the screen, the more flaws can be identified in the movie. I admit that to a certain extent I like this aspect of viewing movies which are “based on a true story.” I enjoy being able to disseminate fact from fiction and pointing to obvious historical oversights or outright falsehoods. I do however appreciate the problems which this presents for the “average” viewer. The old saying goes that “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and the reality is that most people are more willing to sit down and watch a movie or television show that claims to be based on a true story than they are to pick up a book (or two, or three) about the subject and find out what the true story actually is. The problem comes into play when the viewer begins blindly trusting that the history which they are viewing (which often is created by people in the entertainment industry, not historians) is a true representation of the events which took place. When a movie or television show is entertaining and visually appealing, it becomes easy to forget the “based on” portion of the opening text and simply view it as “a true story.” Of course, it would be preferable if every director who wished to create a program that was historically based would retain at least one staff member with some historical pedigree to help keep the program focused on the historical truths, but this is not the case. Even if it were, I suspect that the programs which were produced were produced would look less like entertainment and more like documentaries (which many people do not find entertaining).

From an academic standpoint, I think the solution lies in a healthy balance between entertainment and historical fact. Movies and television shows are a great way to reach a lot of people if they are made well and present an opportunity to strengthen the historical knowledge of those people if they are presenting information which is true. I think it comes down to an issue of respect. If someone wants to take the time and spend the money to create a movie or television show that is based on some historical time period or event, that person should respect the history which they are portraying. They should also respect their audience enough to present them with information that is both entertaining and historically accurate.

I think that the authors of *Liberty, Equality, Power* were justified in removing their “advertisement” for *Amistad* from the seventh edition and replacing it with *12 Years A Slave*, a film which appears to be much more historically accurate. I enjoy the sections of the textbook which review movies and television shows which are historically based and break down what they got right and where they missed the mark. As I stated earlier, I enjoy watching movies and shows in this genre and critiquing them and having the input of our textbook authors gives me more information to go off. It appears that their review of *Amistad* left something to be desired though, and I think the article by Professor Eric Foner is much more informative.

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Re: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words
by [Jessica Cole](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 10:29 PM

I always knew that there were historical inaccuracies in films in order to make the movies more dramatic and interesting. But I never realized until now how inaccuracies were also used to simply sway emotion, or how an entire race was used as a prop. Movies that were made intending to play on moral emotions like in *Amistad*, actually insulted the race of people that the movie was supposedly in favor of. I like how you brought in respect. I think respect of not only historically accurate information is important - but also how the information is presented. By reducing the black slaves to background characters who weren't allowed to really truly share their feelings, their plight was disrespected and reduced to a plotline for the white people. I agree that the removal of the article on *Amistad* was a good decision. I haven't actually watched *12 Years a Slave*.

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Response to Media form changes based on history
by [Anna Rodriguez](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 12:52 PM

Our own story-telling tendencies have caused some confusion about historical facts over the years. Hollywood directors know they will get more ratings when they add more interesting details to a historical event, even if it alters how the American people feel about said event. I think it is okay for hollywood movies to make these changes, because the fact that they are bringing up an event that people have most likely forgotten about, is all that matters. It is up to the viewers of that movie to do their own research about the event and learn what un-biased historians have to say about it. The only issues I see are when the viewers are teachers, and they then use the movie as an educational tool to teach their students. They need to realize that if somebody as respected as them is giving the students information, then the students are going to believe every detail they hear. Teachers should look more at historical documentaries which are from trusted sources, when choosing a film to use for education. Also, when parents take their children to see the movies, it is up to the parents to make sure their students don't buy into any hollywood fluff, which may be unfactual. Parents should research the historical events that the movie is based on, before they show their kids the event in the form of a hollywood movie. I don't think it is up to directors and movie-makers to make sure their movies are factual and proper. They are doing their jobs by making the event as interesting as possible, so that more people come to the movie and learn about the event in the first place.

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Re: Response to Media form changes based on history
by [Emma Mather](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 10:24 AM

I really like your point on how its okay to let Hollywood make their movies but teachers need to make sure that the video is historically accurate. I think another option they could do if they would rather show a film that would be more entertaining than a documentary to students they could really study the events that took place during the time of the film and compare and contrast the facts from the film.

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Changing history to soften slavery
by [Jessica Cole](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 8:57 PM

I am in my late 30's, and just in my lifetime (especially the last 5 years or so) I am amazed at how much portrayals of race and gender have changed in the media. Using the example of gender - classic movies from my childhood would be boycotted immediately by today's standards. The attractive male leads in movies when I grew up were alpha in nature - aggressive in pursuing the female love interest; something that today is considered in violation of a woman's rights. Movies even went so far as to have men kiss women even when the female objected, because as a

male he knew better, and eventually the woman would swoon to his charms. Males then were programmed by these portrayals in the media to copy this behavior, and females were also taught that they should be pursued and act coyly. It is weird with these new realizations on gender roles and respect, to go back and revisit a movie or tv show that I liked as a child or young adult and realize how grossly insulting the hero's actions often were. I had this same type of realization when watching the trailer for Amistad. I don't remember watching Amistad when it came out - if I did I was still in high school, and I think I would have fell sway to the good feelings of moral triumph. Obviously even back then I would have understood that slavery was evil - but I don't think I would have ever caught on that the subject of slavery in the movie wasn't actually used to really teach us about our country's history involving the abuse of people. The movie was in actuality was a simpering narrative on white moral triumph.

About halfway through the trailer I realized that there seemed to only be one main black actor (and of course Morgan Freeman), but that as the trailer progressed,,,he wasn't really given much importance overall. The trailer shifted and the focus began to lay on the white men. I couldn't quite put my finger though on why this all bothered me and seemed off until I read Eric Foner's article. He states that "*Amistad's* black characters are essentially foils for white self-discovery and moral growth.", and once I read that sentence I realized exactly what felt off about the trailer. I wasn't as upset about the historical inaccuracies, because I am aware that happens in Hollywood movies all the time. It seems cheap to me (for example to continuously use the sentimentalism associated with the Civil War even though the Civil War wasn't close to happening at all - or to use this as an example of a step towards abolition when that wasn't the case at all), but I understand that is how most historical movies used to be presented. Watching the video by David Bright though was like a slap in the face because it made me realize how much I believed what I was taught as a child about the Underground Railroad and how much it stuck with me. I have vivid memories of reading books as a child and pretending that I was the farmer's daughter helping the slaves escape (I don't remember the book exactly). I remember a radio series where the main building is discovered to have been part of the underground railroad: the two men escaping to freedom were easily helped by the white proprietors and handed over to the next white people to help them on their journey. I have forever imagined this well connected network of white people risking themselves to help slaves. And while yes, some of this is true - it turns out most of it is simply sentimentalized embellishments and outright lies. The building in the radio program was fictional, but obviously now I would know that I wouldn't outright trust a claim that a place was part of the Underground Railroad.

I have always loved history. When we were dating my husband would complain that I wanted to spend more time with dead people than with the living (my niche is genealogy), and when I was growing up I would immerse myself in historical stories. I am saddened right now to learn that this network that I used to imagine myself in didn't really exist. Stories and movies like this give an average white American hope that their ancestors weren't total racists and who tried to help abolish slavery. I know there were some out there, but I am realizing those numbers are embellished to make white's feel better about their ancestors. Again, Hollywood movies I expect a bit of this from, but to know it was presented in historical texts simply based off a popular movie at the time made me realize the hype around the books I read as a kid. I am concerned about the lies spread to make this nation's white ancestor's appear more morally concerned than many probably were at the time. I wouldn't even consider the lies about the railroad "mythology" - I would consider it outright manipulation.

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery
by [Anna Rodriguez](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 1:55 PM

I remember listening to the same radio program in elementary school! At first, I couldn't remember any Underground Railroad stories from my childhood which promoted the false level of caucasion involvement. But, you are right, now that I remember this radio program, I know I was given false ideas about this moment in history. This program made it sound like there were many white people involved in the success of this network. However, I remember looking around at my class, while we were listening to the program. My teacher, the one giving me all this information, was white. And all of my classmates, who were taking in the information without question, were also white. There wasn't one African-American person in my classroom! I remember thinking then, "How true are these stories if I don't know anyone who is related to any of these people?" I grew up in a very white town in a very white area of Washington State. Looking back, I have realized that a lot of the lessons I was taught in public school were biased to make White people look better then they were. There were no black students or parents to demand transparency in historical lessons.

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery

by [Jessica Cole](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 10:46 PM

I did notice when reading the textbook again that it mentions that the "underground railroad that helped spirit slaves out of bondage took on legendary status. Stories of secret chambers where fugitives were hidden, dramatic trips at night between stations on the underground, and clever or heroic measures to foil pursuing bloodhounds exaggerated the legend." (Page 450). I didn't realize when writing my first debate above that the rumors were compounded so much already even back then. I understand now why the term "mythology" was used. I still agree that it is a way to help white people feel better (I grew up in Oregon, and yep 99% of my extremely small hometown was white) - however now I can also see that these lies started back then in the hysteria and then those embellished stories were passed down. That radio program stuck very strongly in my mind for some reason too - while I can see it being helpful in teaching kids - I obviously think more information needs to be shared about the actual facts instead of a glossed over white people saving the blacks on their road to freedom approach!

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 6:32 PM

I agree with your use of the word "manipulation," I think it describes this situation perfectly. Like many other people in this forum, I remember learning about the Underground Railroad as a child. I don't remember specifically learning whether the heroes in these stories were white or black, but I doubt I would have noticed one way or the other at that age. I simply remember that there were people who were being treated badly (the word I might have used at the time, not now), and that there were certain people who "banded together" in order to help rescue some of them. I think in my mind at that time, I probably saw the Underground Railroad as something incredibly organized, something akin to Oscar Schindler's system for rescuing Jews from the holocaust as it was portrayed in "Schindler's List." We know of course from the videos this week that the Underground Railroad was not an organized system of depots set up to traffic enslaved people to a better life, but rather a mostly disjointed an unorganized system in which those who made it to freedom had no idea whether they would ever make it to the other side without being captured. Before watching the video for this week, it had not really occurred to me that the Underground Railroad was not the system that I had learned about in school. It made me think about the movie "12 Years a Slave" in which the main character, Solomon Northrup, after being kidnapped into slavery, puts all of his trust and resources into a white man who finds himself down on his luck and working alongside slaves. Northrup believes that this man will mail a letter for him, explaining his situation, and is instead betrayed. Seeing the Underground Railroad through the words of David Bright made me realize that a lot of slaves who were part of this underground network, were not all-but-guaranteed freedom as I was taught, they were taking a huge risk that could very well result in betrayal. The fact that the Underground Railroad did not have the participation level from whites which I had learned about (or taken for granted) surprised me at first, but it makes sense given what I now know about the white south. I agree with many people on this forum that the "whitewashing" of the Underground Railroad is likely the result of white people feeling that they have to tell some story, any story in order to make themselves look better in the context of slavery. I have heard it said that "history is written by the victors." The problem is that nobody won when it comes to American slavery. The former slaves rightfully wanted to tell their stories and the white people who stood by and let it happen wanted to do whatever they could to downplay their involvement, or better yet, make it seem as though they had tried to right this injustice. The fact is that slavery was such an institution in this country that there were very few people who were willing to rock the boat. I think the saddest part is that even now, over 150 years since the Civil War, we still aren't willing to step up to the plate and admit that we did this terrible thing to other human beings; that we could have said no but we didn't. And instead of simply admitting this historical fact, we are still trying to pretend that there was this group of righteous white people who offered their homes, spent their fortunes, and risked their lives in order to help slaves to freedom. History needs to be taught as it happened, not as we wish it had happened. It is a common and accepted fact that slavery was wrong from its inception, but without all of the facts, students won't see how deep the problem really went into the fabric of this country. I agree that it is probably quite common for white people to imagine that their ancestors were a part of the solution instead of the problem. I think especially people in the Pacific Northwest like to imagine that our ancestors simply packed up and headed west in order to get away from slavery, but the truth may not be what we are hoping. The Underground Railroad was remarkable enough given the facts, it doesn't need myths and exaggerations in order to make it interesting or palatable. Let the facts speak for themselves.

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery
by [Jessica Cole](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 11:01 PM

I haven't seen 12 Years a Slave yet (I am hoping to watch this weekend) - but I was in New Orleans a few weeks ago and I visited Oak Alley Plantation where parts of it were filmed. I visited New Orleans last year as well, but couldn't quite make it to that particular plantation. I remember really wanting to go to that one (besides the obvious hoopla of all the movies filmed there) because the tour guides would dress up in historical outfits of the time. Pictures showed female tour guides in beautiful dresses leading the groups. When I finally made it this year, the tour guides were all in uniforms. There were no hints given at what the home life was for the people who "owned the home" from the guides. Instead, almost the entire tour focused on all the slaves who lived there (I think there were around 200!), and what they endured. There were cabins that showed how they lived, the tools they used, the devices used for torture, and even inside the massive house most of the information was dedicated to how the slaves were treated. After we left the plantation I researched and realized that the previous way the plantation had been set up for tours was given wide negative reviews for how it focused on the glamour of plantation life for the wealthy and didn't show the real horrors of that lifestyle. I was ashamed that I had been excited to see the fancy gowns and experience the Scarlet O'Hara lifestyle and I understand why they did away with that. I went to another plantation (Dehestran) where the tour guide (male) did dress up in early 1800s garb and didn't break character - however their approach was to have the tour guide as a servant of the family who shared information on both the family as well as the slaves. Anyways - my whole point is that I completely agree with your quote of "History needs to be taught as it happened, not as we wish it had happened." I was initially bummed that the Scarlet O'Hara approach wasn't used, and even thought - yeah but couldn't you still have them tour in character but also explain the bad parts? And then I realized that it was all bad. Every part of the house and that lifestyle was all based on the use of slaves. To romanticise the Antebellum white plantation lifestyle without focusing on what went on behind the scenes would be unfair.

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 5:25 PM

I agree that the plantation tours should show the conditions in which slaves lived and the terrible things they went through. That sounds like it was a really good trip and it makes me want to go. At the same time though, if you are only showing the lives of the slaves, you are only telling half of the story. I really enjoyed the video "Historians Chat About Slavery," and I particularly enjoyed when the older historian (I didn't see any names mentioned in the video) talked about going to the south even in his lifetime. I thought it was really powerful the way that he said that "It was wonderful to be a white man in the south...and you benefitted from it," (Video 4:30 minute mark). What a powerful testimony from someone who witnessed it long after slavery was abolished. The fact is that it was nice to have slaves. It was not only a means of income, but it was a status symbol. Chapter nine of our text mentions that "In the most common calculation, the ownership of 20 slaves separated planters from yeoman farmers," (Murrin textbook page 317). We like to think of slaveholders as evil and malicious sociopaths, and I do not want to sound like I am defending slavery in any way, but these men were business owners and business was good. They were treated as "masters" and they could do whatever they wanted to African Americans without repercussions. I think that the images of the Antebellum plantation lifestyle need to be seen as a contrast to the life of the slave. It should not be glorified, but it should be understood. Many of these people lived like kings and queens simply because they cause others to suffer and do their bidding. Again, this is not something to be celebrated, but I don't think it can be ignored if future generations are to understand how this was allowed to continue as long as it did.

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery
by [Jessica Cole](#) - Sunday, February 3, 2019, 10:02 AM

I just did a google search to try and find an article to cite and couldnt find anything referencing what I was told on the tour - but basically the slaves that the plantation "owned" was considered part of their amassed wealth. Each slave had a worth depending on their age, health and skills. Even back in the early 1800's I remember one of the slaves was valued at a \$1000 because of the skills he could perform! When abolition occurred, the plantation all of a sudden lost much of it's value. The plantation could no longer sell/trade slaves, or use their worth as a value for credit/loans. I don't

remember the exact numbers but the plantation owners valued wealth plummeted with the loss of his slaves. Before that trip I never realized understood how a slave owner both benefited by the free work they received, but also had additional benefits such as the value of wealth that came with the slave. As you said, these men were business owners. I had of course thought of people who sold slaves as being in the business - but I had never really thought about how owners also could make a business out of it. This particular plantation had almost 200 slaves - so it was a business indeed.

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Re: Changing history to soften slavery
by [Daniela Rosales Name](#) - Sunday, February 3, 2019, 8:21 PM

I would disagree with what you are saying here. I think while it is important to understand the context the time, which includes the people who owned slaves we need to be responsible with what narratives we are showing. It would be too easy to portray the lives of slave owners as powerful business owners who simply enjoyed having people serve them. This completely ignores the racism component. If slavery were just about business then why were African people forcefully brought here to be sold as slaves? Why were black people the only ones to be enslaved? If we push the narrative that white people were business owners and that’s what slavery is about then we are ignoring how slavery began decades of systematic racism that is still present today.

We should be focusing on the African and African-American people who were tortured and were forced into labor after being auctioned and sold which effectively dehumanized them. Again, I think context is important but that shouldn’t be eclipsing the important story of those that were enslaved in an attempt to humanize the white people. We cannot put the value of business over the value of black lives. I firmly believe that racism led to slavery not the other way around. But, slavery helped push and spread the racist narrative.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Miles Long](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 9:28 PM

While watching the movie trailer for Amistad, one thing I noticed is that all of the blacks are portrayed as primitive and foreign, while the whites are portrayed as sophisticated and the heroes. The few blacks that are not portrayed this way are dressed and act similar to how the “white heroes” are. I strongly agree with a lot of the points Forner makes in his review of this film. This film is an example of the white saviors with the blacks being “essentially foils for white self-discovery and moral growth.” Along with this issues I have presented, there is an issues of historical inaccuracy. One major inaccuracy was that the movie revolved around slave trade over the Atlantic, which by 1840 (when the movie takes place) was already illegal. It was also not an issues of domestic slavery. The courts in this movie were also receptive to abolitionist sentiment, when in reality that was no such case. In real life, the courts prohibited Congress from barring slavery.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Madeleine Howard](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 3:04 PM

I agree and also found it quite uncomfortable to see the differences between races in the Amistad trailer. It was strange to watch an almost caricature-like portrayal of slaves raising their arms around a bonfire and speaking in broken tongue. I also like your use of the term "white heroes" as I think that is an accurate description of how the movie (based on the trailer) attempted to showcase white people. I got the feeling that realizing these slaves were real people came as a favor to them rather than a true realization intent on change.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Miles Long](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 9:28 PM

As an Elementary school student I had learned about the Underground Railroad in a similar way to how Professor Blight described it as. As a highschool student in AP US history I learned about what it really was. I'm not surprised that there are a lot of fictitious story about the Underground railroad. That being said I agree with Blight that it is important to have "a passage into our understanding of slavery that is more gentle and savory than it is to look at slavery itself." This makes sense to me, because I don't know that if as a 3rd grader I would fully grasp the concepts of slaves, or what the underground railroad was at the time. It is a good introductory with the fictitious stories.

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Can we trust the sites of the Underground Railroad?

by [Emma Mather](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 10:23 PM

I don't think we can trust the claims of many Underground Railroad sites. It makes sense that there wouldn't be a focused and central organization running the Underground Railroad due to the difficulty of travel and communication. If many cities used the claim of being a part of the railroad so that they could feel like they were doing their part at the time it would make it easy for people to forget which cities were and weren't a part of the railroad. I think if anyone is trying to travel and see parts of the Underground Railroad they should really research and find out for sure if the town actually housed fugitive slaves before visiting the town for that reason.

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Re: Can we trust the sites of the Underground Railroad?

by [Miles Long](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 8:28 PM

I agree with you. Lets say you were to take a elementary or middle school class on a virtual historical tour of the Underground Railroad, I feel like you would have to do research on what sites were legitimate and which ones were just tall tales that people use as their claim to historical fame. While I still think the tall tales can be good stories, the fact should definitely be separated from the fiction.

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Some truth isn't better than none

by [Madeleine Howard](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 11:14 PM

Coming to find out the underground railroad wasn't actually a necessarily cohesive system one had to get to by traveling through literal underground railroads, but rather a group of people trying to help each other in a time of minimal ease in communication and technology, was a great shock to me when I took my first college history class. I vividly remember a cartoon of Harriet Tubman with a lamp guiding a group through an underground railroad in my 8th grade U.S. History book. I don't blame my teachers (especially considering I grew up in the South and was raised with that specific lens on U.S. history), but it made me feel I was lied to. Naturally, when I found out that wasn't an accurate depiction I wondered what else was sugarcoated. Professor Blight explained succinctly how dressing up towns by giving them a "spot" on the underground railroad is really just a coping mechanism of sorts. This realization is why I support textbook authors changing their references to better convey to readers the truth about the history they are discussing. It is concerning to me when the full truth is not revealed upfront, and it is concerning that authors who write the textbooks about our history can pick and choose what to include.

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Re: Some truth isn't better than none

by [Emma Mather](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 9:02 PM

I definitely agree with you I was shocked to find out that that the Underground Railroad was not a complete system and I think that the authors of our textbooks should be include these facts.

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Re: Some truth isn't better than none

by [Jessica Cole](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 11:12 PM

I did find some information in our text (page 450) that does discuss the exaggeration of numbers involved in the Underground Railroad. But I agree that is something I never learned in any of my history classes growing up and it upsets me that this information wasn't just left out, but the supposed overwhelming help the slaves received from sympathetic whites is glorified and presented in school.

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Re: Some truth isn't better than none
by [Jessica Cole](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 11:09 PM

I really like the use of your term "coping". Because I feel that is largely what a lot of the sugarcoating of our past does - to help you feel protected from choices your ancestors made or stood by and watched happen. I am a huge genealogy major and while I haven't uncovered any family that actually owned slaves (most of my family was Irish and Swedish immigrants who were too poor) - I do know that even though they didn't actually have slaves, does not mean that they didn't have the same mentality as those who did. They might have simply been too poor or in the wrong location (almost 90% of my family resided in the North). I will never really know - but the sugarcoating gives an even easier out to think "Oh well not every white person in America supported slavery. So many of them helped slaves escape! I bet my relative was one"....when in fact, that wasn't the case at all. It is hard to accurately describe the association with ancestors and what that means...but I love family and genealogy and want to feel proud of my roots. It is hard to feel pride when the subject of racism is so often approached in our country, and as a white person you often have to analyze your reactions and thoughts and guilt around the subject. I have heard many people respond to someone "well, I'm not racist - my family didn't own any slaves!" - but obviously, it is not so simple as that.

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Re: Some truth isn't better than none
by [Madeleine Howard](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 2:55 PM

I think you make great points discussing how a lot of modern attitudes toward dealing with racism are often about personal responsibility rather than the overall repercussions. It is easy to excuse yourself and say, as you said, "Well, I'm not racist - my family didn't own any slaves!" This ignores slavery's systemic roots in our country by shoving away blame. I don't believe white people as a whole need to necessarily feel individually responsible and guilty, but I do think it is important to acknowledge the harsher truths. I think Uncle Tom's Cabin was a great wake-up call for our nation. As the book says, "Throughout the novel Stowe spoke directly to white women readers, asking them to imagine being torn from their own children...Men, too, wrote of being deeply affected by the tragic story she told (p353)." I hope the overarching feeling of realizing black people were just as human as them was embarrassing.

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Re: Some truth isn't better than none
by [Jessica Cole](#) - Sunday, February 3, 2019, 10:18 AM

There is a quote in our text from a former supporter of slavery after witnessing the case of Anthony Burns (a fugitive slave who was forceably returned to his "owner")..."I put my face in my hands and wept I could do nothing less...We went to bed one night old-fashioned, conservative, compromise Union Whigs and waked up stark mad Abolitionists." (Page 452). Like you said, I think witnessing the lengths people went to to escape slavery first hand, or hearing more emotionally appealing stories like Margaret Garner who was willing to kill her children to save them from a life of slavery forced a lot of removed white American citizens to really think about what was occurring in their country. I am assuming that the embarrassment you speak of that many white people felt that they hadn't spoke up to stop slavery sooner is why the mythology of the Underground Railroad grew and continued. Saying or even believing from family lore that your household or town was involved in helping slaves escape was a way to remove one's self from the horrors of slavery and to distance themselves from blame. I am still upset though that this hype was taught to so many generations incorrectly, and also the fact that so many of the people helping slaves were black as well.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Christopher Kinney](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 4:09 PM

Christopher Kinney

Forum 2

When watching Historical movies that are based on true stories , it is best to remember that the details are not always true. Hollywood has been known to gloss over details or had their own. When I watch those types of movie and find out that they left something out or add something that's not true I kinda feel like their insulting the person. It's like their saying the persons life isn't exciting enough so lets add more drama. For example in 12 years a slave there is a scene where a slave fights a kidnapper from raping a woman. Noah Berlatsky stated in The Atlantic. "Shortly after Northup's kidnapping, he is sent on a slave ship. One of the sailors attempts to rape a female slave, but is stopped by a male slave. "The sailor unhesitatingly stabs and kills [the male slave],"this seems unlikely on its face—slaves are valuable, and the sailor is not the owner. And, sure enough, the scene is not in the book.

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Why historically accurate films are important

by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 5:34 PM

I think it is incredibly important to make sure films and textbooks are historically correct. It’s important to make sure they are correct because that is our history and in a film most likely it is being displayed across the country. If someone watches a historically inaccurate film that claims it is accurate, and they do know have much knowledge of our history that would be terribly confusing for them. Not only confusing but they would have the wrong facts of our history. Yes, Hollywood makes incredible films that are not always historically accurate and I think that is okay for the film industry as long as they make it known their film is fiction. I also believe they could definitely make films that are historically accurate, and that aren’t boring so they attract an audience. Academically I think historically accurate films are very rewarding. It’s a great way to learn and also enjoy the subject. Exaggerations give the wrong idea and can make many people turn away from learning our history or being interested in it.

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Re: Why historically accurate films are important

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 7:09 PM

I had a wonderful history teacher in high school who understood the value of using movie references and recommendations in order to get historical points across to a group of high school students. He was very careful in the movies which he recommended, and in a lot of cases he would point to specific sections of a movie for their historical value, while also explaining the aspects of the movie which were not accurate. I think that for some people, seeing history on the screen is a much more effective way for them to learn what happened, but obviously this only works if the movie they are watching is historically accurate (or they at least realize the parts that are not). I agree that it is not reasonable to think that everyone in Hollywood is going to make movies which are 100% historically accurate, but if they make a real attempt to demonstrate the historical facts of what actually happened and still embellish a few details in order to make it more exciting for the viewer, I don't have a problem with it. Where I have a problem is in cases like *Amistad*, where there is already a perfectly interesting historical event, and yet the audience is manipulated into believing a half-truth in order to make one group of people look better than they actually were. If the filmmaker wants to make a movie like this, then they should not put the words "a true story" in their trailer. I understand that this is a tactic which draws a lot of viewers in because they want to believe that human beings would do these wonderful things for each other, but it is dishonest to present the information this way. It's strictly a marketing ploy and it is disrespectful to not only the historical figures, but also the viewer who is suddenly taking an interest in a historical event based on a fabrication. In some cases, these movies will inspire a viewer to go read the book that the movie was based on, only to be disappointed because the movie which they enjoyed so much was nothing like the book at all. I've said it in this forum already but the facts are interesting enough. In this age of superhero-mania and remakes of remakes, I would like to see some genuine historically accurate films put out which also inspire the viewer because that's what really happened. There are plenty of historical figures who have lived a Hollywood-worthy life because it was the right thing to do, those are the figures I want to see on the screen.

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Who tells your story?



by [Daniela Rosales Name](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 11:56 PM

When I think of history I think of the phrase “take it with a grain of salt” because over the years I’ve learned and seen just how history has been manipulated to fit a narrative and how damaging that can be. One that stands out for me is Christopher Columbus. I am not from the US but received an American education and what was in the textbooks about Columbus was not what my country knew to be true. And when I came to the US and I saw how Columbus day is still celebrated and that there seems to be this “mainstream” image of him as a savior; although it does seems to slowly be changing. This article is from 2011 but I think it highlights how history has ignored the horrible treatment of Native people: <https://detroit.cbslocal.com/2011/10/19/in-1492-columbus-sailed-the-ocean-blue/>. In my home country in we have long stopped celebrating Columbus Day and now celebrate Indigenous Peoples day. And I know that this is not the case for all history but we can not ignore that historical manipulation is a common thing. We need to always be thinking of what perspective we get to study and whose perspective we leave out. And these are nuances that often get ignored. If we don’t look at the full picture it is easy to manipulate the facts to our advantage.

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Re: Who tells your story?

by [Emma Mather](#) - Sunday, February 3, 2019, 8:38 PM

This is a very interesting point you made. It made me think of the idea that "history is written by the victors". I think it is very important that it's not just people who really enjoy studying history that know the whole picture of what has happened in history. I remember when I was in elementary school we would celebrate Columbus day every year and I never knew about the horrible treatments that were given towards the Native American people. After learning what we have this week I think our education system needs to take another look at what they're teaching our kids and making sure it's historically accurate.

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Closing Thoughts on Hollywood

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Sunday, February 3, 2019, 7:23 PM

Although the textbook did not provide an abundance of information on the Underground Railroad, it certainly made it clear that the legends which have persisted in the American educational system cannot be entirely trusted and this is a shame. We are sent to school to learn, we are sent to history classes to learn what happened and why it happened. We send our children to school to give them the information they need to live fulfilling, purposeful lives, we pay for college courses in order to learn the truth. I understand the uncomfortable nature of the discussion of American slavery, I understand the desire to alter the facts in order to avoid embarrassment, I even understand wanting to inspire our children by claiming that slavery was strictly a "Southern problem" and that people in the North and even righteous people in the South did everything they could in order to help the slaves. I understand it, but I do not condone it. I have always been drawn to history because of the two things I mentioned above: I want to know what (actually) happened, and I want to know why. I have mentioned in these forums before a quote that I have heard saying that "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." I think that it is important to learn history as it happened because times change fairly quickly, but people often take longer to change, if ever. If we don't understand the lessons of the past, then we cannot apply them to modern times. I am not asking every Hollywood producer to ensure that their historical films are 100% accurate, I understand that they are in the entertainment business. I do think it falls on parents and teachers to ensure that if they are using these films as educational aids, the students be in possession of the facts. I think this adds another aspect to watching "historical" movies. When you know what the facts are and you can point out the flaws, if only to yourself, then you know that you have a full understanding of what actually took place. Some of my fellow students have mentioned in this forum that Hollywood movies could be used once the facts are known and that students could contrast them with the movies (much like our extra credit assignment), I think this is a great idea. I think it challenges the viewer to sort out what happened from what is being portrayed, and asks them to consider the time period in which the movie was made and the social reasons for certain embellishments. This may be the only way to balance the entertainment industry with the educational system.

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Popular Media Can Foster Interest

by [Alvin Iskender](#) - Sunday, February 3, 2019, 11:47 PM

It's easy to be cynical about the inaccuracy of popular films like "Amistad", that seem to skirt around the truth when it's convenient. I, too, am often frustrated at the inconsistency and inaccuracy of information from historical films.. That being said, I think popular media is a powerful tool when in the right hands, and the point-by-point accuracy of a film is often not as important as the lasting impact the film can have on its viewers.

If a film truly captivates its viewer and is artistically of high quality, it can be a conduit to more academic sources of information. There's been many times where I've seen a movie or some other piece of media, and became inspired to do in-depth research on that topic. The fact that a piece of popular media can get someone engaged in a topic that they might have not otherwise bothered with is more important than whether the media itself teaches that information as accurately as possible. Ideally, the viewer will be properly informed after having done the proper research. If they want a viewing experience that focuses on information rather than story, there are always documentaries.

I suppose the problem is that not everyone receives popular media the same way. Some might just settle with the "feel good" conclusion a film might give, or take the information it presents at face value. The films themselves are also not without fault- the embellishments can get pretty ridiculous. The "Amistad" trailer that was linked reeks of cinematic eye-candy, overly cathartic soundbites, and general sensationalism. I don't disagree with that. If a film is targeted at anyone other than an audience that would already seek out this information for themselves, however, I feel like it needs to do a good job of appealing to its audience first. It's better to engage the audience with imperfect information, and get them to think about the topic, than to bore the audience with accurate information that they won't retain. Again- documentaries exist and they exist for the purpose Professor Foner seems to want from "Amistad": to inform. Documentaries also often do independent reporting or research to help back up their claims. Popular movies serve a completely different purpose: they have to tell a story.

It's not easy to tell a good story with arcs, themes, and proper character development while also being historically accurate to a t. That's not to say it's not doable, and I certainly think filmmakers should do a better job of being as accurate as they can be and really challenging the audience with difficult moral, philosophical, and historical themes- but if a filmmaker feels they need to take creative liberties (as these are *creative* works after all) to make a more interesting story, it's hard to fault them for it. If it gets the audience thinking about the topic, and therefore inserting that topic into the public discourse, I consider that a success.

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