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**Hollywood History & Mythology**

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 12:11 PM

This forum thread is for Hollywood History & Mythology posts and replies.

After studying the required materials, address the various questions. For purposes of encouraging discussion, you may decide to separate your responses into SEPARATE posts. To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it
RE:Hollywood History & Mythology

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[Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Falsehoods Highly Concerning**

by Delaney Crook - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 3:28 PM

The Film *Amistad*, other Hollywood movies and many stories told to youth about history have set this standard that Hollywood movies and other stories are extremely misleading and contain false information. While I knew this was a problem of many Hollywood movies, I did not realize how severe it really was and how concerned we need to be about these falsehoods. Recalling back to information I learned in elementary school about history, it is apparent to me that many of the resources, such as books and films, that we used to learn about the past contained false accusations and information and were leading us, as youth, to believe a past that was not true. I think this is highly concerning for all students in today's education, because we so often try to use various resources like movies and books as an alternative way to learn, but we do not understand how not only are we not learning from them, we are learning false information.

As Historian, Eric Foner, put it "If the authors of the study guide really want to promote an understanding of slavery, they should direct students not to this highly flawed film, but to the local library." I believe this quote is essential when it comes to learning about history. While films and stories tend to be more interesting and appealing to students, the only place where we can truly get valid, accurate information is from the proper text. Films and stories lead us to false information, and also leave out highly important information, which leads us to interpret history in a way that is not accurate. I think especially in the subject of history, this issue is only going to continue to get worse as Hollywood and other producers continue to make films and stories of historic events.

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I am not surprised!

by [Cody Garrison](#) - Monday, January 26, 2015, 6:30 PM

While looking at this topic I think to myself is this a concerning topic? When presented with the facts about the movie "Amistad" and the truth about the underground railroad, I feel somewhat relieved. I can now say that what is presented to me from Hollywood is not always true! Being misguided by people's opinions is what makes Hollywood. To get the real and honest information there is only one place to look and that is in a dusty old textbook. I feel now days what is being taught in our public schools is a very small percentage of factually information. Half the teachers in public schools don't even know what is right from wrong when it comes honest information. What is concerning to me about this is that the amount of mythology in our society outweighs the true and actually history of our coming to be.

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Re: I am not surprised!

by [Michael Leopold](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 8:08 PM

I think that you bring up a good point here and one that I've griped about for much of my adult life. The schoolbooks used during elementary, middle, and even high school did very little to inform of us of the true happenings of our history. I fully understand that we cannot teach our third grade children every detail about war, death, and slavery but I feel as though on many, many topics we were straight up lied to. Things still, to this day and this very class, come up and we find out what really happened and I just feel lied to. But to get back to the point, if we are going to be so upset about mythologies and misinformation in the mainstream, I think that we should direct that at Houghton Mifflin and those supposedly "educating" us, and less on Hollywood writers and directors that are solely in the entertainment business.

As an aside, I found it funny how people get so angry about movies having half truths and exaggerations in them but yet the Davy Crockett/ Alamo movie we talked about in class on Thursday was TOO historical and "boring". Sometimes I think that people just need something to complain about.

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Take It With A Grain Of Salt

by [Jesse Bowman](#) - Monday, January 26, 2015, 6:49 PM

The line between absolute historical truth and the sensationalist appetite of Hollywood seem to be blurred in the minds of the filmmakers attempting to capture historical events on the big screen.

Personally I think this can be a beneficial thing to the nation by Hollywood's attempt at "historical based" film they can draw their interest to certain topics people might typically not have realized were so crucial before. However, academically, an attempt to highlight certain issues for the people also has the potential to drown out other important issues that were taking place during the same time period.

The movie Amistad, for example, is one of the films that bends the perception of the events of history in order to tell a particular story. On the one hand, having watched the scenes depicting the Middle Passage, Spielberg (Director) manages to capture the horrific, gruesome, painful journey that slaves endured through the middle passage in a way that made my stomach turn, as it should have with such an event. But on the other hand, the movie glosses over the actual events of Amistad and replaces it with the debate over the morality of freedom, "the film gives the distinct impression that the Supreme Court was convinced by Adams' plea to repudiate slavery in favor of the natural rights of man, thus taking a major step on the road to abolition." explains historian Eric Foner, "In fact, the *Amistad* case revolved around the Atlantic slave trade — by 1840

outlawed by international treaty — and had nothing whatever to do with slavery as an domestic institution.". This is the academic danger to the double edged sword that Hollywood bears as it attempts to depict certain topics. The overall lines of historical truth for are difficult to decipher for me because I do not believe that there is any absolute truth available and that our only hope to understand our past is through stories and documents. I value Hollywood's attempt at focusing on history but I caution the easily manipulated exaggerations that ensue with such a feat.

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Re: Take It With A Grain Of Salt

by [Delaney Crook](#) - Tuesday, January 27, 2015, 1:56 PM

Your ideas that Hollywood can attract attention to these important historical events that may have not been recognized before and it can put an emphasis on these events are valid and have raised some questions and ideas for myself. As you were saying with the fact that they can also drown out other issues, I would also add that they can lead us to false information or over exaggeration of issues. Like we saw in the Amistad film, it did draw attention to this historical event, but it also led us to believe certain events took place, when in fact, they did not. So, it becomes a fine balance of which is more important? Drawing attention to the events and issues? Or having the full knowledge and comprehension of what really went on?

Perhaps we could attain both of these by using Hollywood and films to draw our attention to events and issues, but then using other information and resources to fact check and find out the actual truth behind the event. I think this is crucial for young students today to realize that these films, like Amistad are not completely honest and true to what actually happened, and it is extremely important to understand the differences in the film and in the actual history.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Take It With A Grain Of Salt

by [Jesse Bowman](#) - Thursday, January 29, 2015, 2:31 PM

You're absolutely right, the double edged sword Hollywood wields seems to have an effective influence over their audience whether it's informing them of important historical issues that they will further explore on own or the ever so dangerous influence of "I've learned all I needed to from that movie" that it can easily have on people.

Greed in the danger for Hollywood and "historically accurate" films and could very well be the down fall of accurate knowledge being passed on to future generations unbeknownst to them. I also think we need to take these popular movies in the category of "Historically based" with cation.

For example, the Golden Globe Award winning movie of 2012 'Lincoln' was a thoroughly enjoyable movie that focuses on the primary issue of Lincoln having to sway the House of Representatives into passing the 13th Amendment and abolishing slavery. However, even this movie managed to capture my interest and imagination it posed some serious issues when it came to historical accuracy.

Lincoln inherited his office in a time when the nation was in deep divided turmoil over the morality and/or constitutionality of slavery. The film attempts to depict Lincoln in such a way that seems to care more about freeing the slaves than reuniting the nation. This isn't the case, unfortunately. The biggest example comes with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, which in the movie seemed like a just moral cause, plain and simple. However, the E.P was not purely a move of moral consciousness rather a political-militarymove as well. Lincoln was as

president's powers were limited by the constitution and he could not repeal state-laws but he did have the power as commander-in-chief to use his Executive Order to undermine the Confederacy and strengthen the Union.

Eric Foner (the historian who reviewed *Amistad*) wrote a book called a "The Fiery Trail: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery" which addresses this exact issue in the movie, "'Never before had so large a number of slaves been declared free...By making the army an agent of emancipation and wedding the goals of Union and abolition, it ensured that Northern victory would produce a social transformation in the South and a redefinition of the place of blacks in American life."

My final point is that in order to enjoy "historically based" Hollywood film is to recognize the danger of tiny fallacies used in order to make a bigger impact on the story, because even though I know the details behind the story it is still difficult for me to separate the information a pulled from that influential movie (being so entertaining for me) and historical truth that was learned from with high academic standards.

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Re: Take It With A Grain Of Salt

by [Jesse Bowman](#) - Friday, January 30, 2015, 2:51 PM

Just to add another example to this most likely overly extensive post in proving some of Lincoln's motivations that weren't portrayed in the movie.

"We must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued. The slaves [are] undeniably an element of strength to those who [have] their service, and we must decide whether that element should be with us or against us" - Lincoln (E.L.P, 543)

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Re: Take It With A Grain Of Salt

by [Erik Fischer](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 7:12 PM

When I first thought about this issue I agreed with you that Hollywood is bringing attention to historical events and that could inspire people to learn more about the subjects. The problem I see with this is that the number of people who will watch these films and take them for factual will far out number the people who will take their interest beyond into the academic. They will then have to sort out all the pretend of the movies from the facts of history making learning the subject even harder. Overall I feel that "historical" films do more harm than good.

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Another hollywood movie

by [Jordan Towe](#) - Monday, January 26, 2015, 11:07 PM

Hollywood has a fine art of taking history and making it something that it wasn't meant to be. To me this topic isn't to concerning if people don't take it serious and just enjoy it for a movie and not the history lesson they believe. When people made the movie "Amistad" they made it for the good movie aspect not for it to be a history lesson. Peoples opinions make theses movies and hollywood what they are. For the absolute truth you would have to actually search for the information, read a book and maybe talk to a historian or two. The part that concerns me is that a lot of people now believe that what they see in the movie is what actually happened. The myths are starting to become really out of proportion and if the people in hollywood want accurate movies they should find the info before filling peoples heads with nonsense.

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Hollywood exaggerations not new

by [Michael Leopold](#) - Tuesday, January 27, 2015, 9:44 AM

Hollywood has always been known (for the most part) for pressing the lines between "historical truth" and making a movie that people will sit and watch. For one, it is hard to cram an event or time period into a two hour picture and not have to omit, change, or pacify certain facts. They also are in the business of entertainment, and not necessarily truth. I think that we have to take into consideration these facts as we watch movies with historical elements. Remember, as we watch, that not everything we see in the movie theater is going to be 100% accurate. Our textbook makes a perfect example when it explains the "fictive" interview between Adams and Cinque before the Supreme Court saw his case. This interview never happened. Spielberg made it up, as directors will often do to explain or explore a point that he is undoubtedly trying to make with the movie. I feel as though it is not the job of Hollywood to explain the truth exactly as it has happened. Eric Foner makes a great point that if we want to know about history, the library is probably the best place to go, not the theater. But I feel as though these movies should not be omitted, they just deserve a grain of salt. If a storyline in a movie incites us, we need to take it upon ourselves to seek out the "rest of the story". Hollywood would not make very much money if they did not produce things that entertained us, and pulled at our heart strings, and steered away from shaming us for the horrible mistakes that happened generations ago. David Blight explains how we Americans, especially northerners, need and want to believe in certain "mythologies" about slavery and that time period because it becomes easier for us to swallow the atrocities that took place then and the horrible things that African Americans endured at the hand of our ancestors. It was a dark time in our history that we don't like admitting to. So, if Hollywood and others can give this dark time a spin toward a story of hope and overcoming adversity, it makes it an easier pill to swallow as we responsibly look further into the real truth of this part of history.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Issue in the viewer, not Hollywood

by [Delaney Crook](#) - Thursday, January 29, 2015, 12:15 PM

After listening to today's lecture in class and thinking more about this issue on Hollywood films and the reality of history, I have recognized a few more ideas that have changed my thoughts and opinions on this issue. First, I recognized the fact that Hollywood makes films to make money and draw the attention of the audience. To do this, they must make the films entertaining and attractive to viewers. If they were to simply follow history directly and not add to the story at all they would lose interest of the viewers. Adding to this idea, they must also alter the film to fit the correct rating and audience that the film is directed towards. Therefore, major editing of the details of the film must happen in order to make the details fit the criteria of the audience. Also, people watch these Hollywood films purely for entertainment, and that is what Hollywood is going to cater to. The issue that arises with this is that people watch these films for entertainment, but think they are getting a history lesson out of it as well. What we need to do as viewers is watch the film purely as entertainment, knowing that the information is based on true events, but it not the exact depiction of a historical event. So, maybe the issue arising is not with Hollywood, but with the viewers and our perspectives and ideas about these historical films.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Issue in the viewer, not Hollywood

by [Candice Oster](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 1:26 PM

I agree with your statement, "maybe the issue arising is not with Hollywood, but with the viewers and our perspectives and ideas about these historical films." I know that when I watch a movie based on historical events, many I do not feel I have any expert

knowledge about, I watch them for entertainment. I feel that watching a "based on true events" movies does leave the viewers with some responsibility to be discerning in what they are taking in from the film. I felt that Eric Foner wrote about some of that when he says, "*Amistad's* black characters are essentially foils for white self-discovery and moral growth." Is that what the movie viewer would take away from the film? That as long as the white characters come out looking good at the end of the movie, it's all good.

Isn't that a lot of what we learned about the Underground railroad in school, too? I know I remember thinking that there were white people supporting the fugitive slaves all over the country. In Professor Blight's essay he takes care of that myth by saying, "most of the people that actually worked in the underground railroad where black not white."

In the review that Joe showed in class on Thursday about *The Alamo*, I felt disappointed that the critic felt the need to be so negative about a film that followed a more historical base, but lacked in action and violence. It is understandable if all you want is entertainment, but I would like to think that more Americans would want to be educationally enlightened as well.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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Re: Issue in the viewer, not Hollywood

by [Erik Fischer](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 7:01 PM

I Agree with you that the viewers should realize that movies are for entertainment and not history lessons, however the teaching packets that distributed to educators to help them use these films as learning tools is more than a little disturbing. I understand that Hollywood is in it to make a buck but I don't feel that it should be at the expense of peoples education. This seeking of an uninformed audience with a clear intention to feed them made up "facts" is where the blame is passed back to the movie industry.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Hollywood: entertainment not education

by [Erik Fischer](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 4:33 PM

The fact that movies are fake should be common knowledge, even ones based on a true story are at best loosely associated with the actual events. Given this understanding, the fact that movie producers are trying to get educators to use their films as teaching tools is very disturbing. Teaching facts is far more important than entertainment value or the sugar coating that movies put on events. We have been shown that the way events are depicted are already biased by the background of the teacher or institution. An example of this is the way Americans see the Mexican-American war, defending Americans on American soil, as opposed to the Mexican view that Americans took a bunch of their land out of greed. By adding the made up parts that make movies entertaining only adds to the confusion and helps to bury the actual facts. Unless you are teaching acting or another aspect of film making Hollywood movies have no place in the classroom.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Re: Hollywood: entertainment not education

by [Michael Leopold](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 8:16 PM

I do feel as though movies COULD be used as teaching tools, IF done correctly. If everyone had a history teacher like Joe that will take the time to point out where and how there may be non-factual information or half-truths in such a movie, I still feel as though there are benefits to using them. However, many teachers(at least, in my experience) will simply misuse them as fact and students lose because of it. On the contrary, however, there are many documentaries that have been coming out over the

last several years that are produced much like a Hollywood movie would be, but actually holds more to the historical truth and empirical standards than Hollywood is.

The History Channel and countless other cable channels make these films and they can be quite entertaining to watch, yet not fluffed with lies or speculation. However, we must still be careful, even with these.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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A Matter of Balance

by [Kai Seltman](#) - Saturday, January 31, 2015, 10:58 PM

Although Hollywood's grossly inaccurate depiction of historical events is of concern, it cannot be helped to a certain extent. Hollywood's main interest is to entertain the masses and make money after all, and it is doing a fine job of it and I don't see that changing in the near future. One does not watch a Hollywood movie to learn, that is what documentaries are for. (That being said, Hollywood should stick to fiction and leave historical subject matter in the hands of documentarians and avoid historical movies if the sole purpose of the movie is sensationalism. On the other hand, if a movie could more accurately portray a historical event whilst drawing attention to it like in the case of "12 Years a Slave", I feel there is leeway to change the facts (a bit) in order to make a watchable movie.) However, in the case of Amistad, the extent to which it bastardizes historical events for capitalistic intent is something that needs to be addressed. After reading Professor Eric Foner's review of the movie, I feel that it does not even qualify as a 'historical' movie. The characters involved were different, one even being made up. The portrayal of the political and judiciary systems of the time were mistaken. The most alarming misinformation watching the movie may convey is the overall sentiment regarding race issues of the time, which was not warm and fuzzy as the movie would like one to believe. Like in the case presented by Professor David Blight in regard to people's misconceptions about the Underground Railroad, it seems to be an attempt to gloss over a darker aspect of history which Americans would rather not face. This example of the mutilation of historical facts for personal reassurance, such as the myth regarding the actual death of Davy Crockett that was discussed during Thursday's class, should not be perpetrated on such a wide scale, and in the public education system nonetheless. Although I have never learnt about the Underground Railroad as I am from Japan, I have had my own moral conundrums involving the historically controversial Japan-Korea-China relationship, and feel strongly about bias in history. On a further, I was disappointed (but unfortunately not surprised) to hear that Hollywood encourages teachers to use these movies as a study guide to further capitalize on the movie. Not all teachers take the time and care into lesson plans as one would hope, and to provide them with such an easy way out is damaging to future generations. Personally, I have to admit I would probably watch Lincoln instead of a documentary about Abraham Lincoln, and that a certain amount of factual inaccuracy in historical movies is excusable if it is to engage the audience. Academically, I feel that students do not benefit from a culture that values instant gratification over meaningful learning experiences, and that Hollywood should not instigate such misconceptions so readily. Considering its mass influence, Hollywood has the responsibility to more carefully navigate the fine line between a interesting historical movie that would highlight an important turning point in history, and a exploitative source of entertainment that replace historical facts for shock value.

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