

HST 202: History of United States W18 (Escobar Meta 30898 30897)

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Hollywood History & Mythology

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Forum 2

Hollywood History & Mythology

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Hollywood History & Mythology

by Joe Escobar - Friday, January 26, 2018, 8:25 PM

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

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, something that describes which question(s) you are addressing . Do NOT simply leave it RE: Hollywood History & Mythology

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Protecting our own image

by Banyan Ryan - Saturday, January 27, 2018, 4:33 PM

After listening to Professor Blight talk about why we need the "mythology" of the Underground Railroad by saying "It's our passage into our understanding of slavery that is sometimes gentler than it is to look at slavery itself", it reminds me of my own optimism and faith in humanity and how it stings when I'm given more and more evidence that it's not worth defending. I don't think that many people are in denial that we haven't caused and continue to cause terrible things to happen in the world, but I'm sure it makes a lot of people feel better

about humanity to look at something like slavery in the U.S. and be reminded of things like the Underground Railroad to help support their belief that even in times of tragedy, there will always be small flickers of justice and happiness.

Eric Foner clearly disagrees with this film's portrayal of the Supreme Court during this case. I have not seen this movie, but from what he explains, the hearts of the Court justices' are changed by Adam's speech in defense of freedom for the African's. But Foner shoots this portrayal down by stating that "Rather than being receptive to abolitionist sentiment, the courts were among the main defenders of slavery...and proclaimed that blacks in the United States had 'no rights which a white man is bound to respect'." (paragraph 8). We like to BELIEVE that the justices could be persuaded by abolitionist sentiment, just like we believe it when, in this Hollywood portrayal of the events, the Africans's freedom is defended by "reluctant and confused politicians" who eventually join their side, as explained by the textbook's recap.

I admit, it is unsettling to think that history is being, in some ways, rewritten to help support this pacifist ideal of humanity that a lot of people have. We need to know the facts, no matter how tough it is to accept. Because how can we atone for what we've done in the past when we're too busy trying to convince ourselves that what we've done wasn't that bad?

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3



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Amistad's Inaccuracies Overlooked by our Textbook

by Rachel Gragg - Sunday, January 28, 2018, 2:50 PM

It is frightening how the media and hollywood and even the things we learn in school attempt to change history and teach the public different things than what actually happened. As I watched the trailer for *Amistad* at first, it seemed like it would be historically accurate and like it would be a good film for me to watch. When I explored the other materials talking about the inaccuracies of the film, I was shocked.

In the old version of our textbook it seems that the authors don't seem to question the inaccuracy of the movie that much. They simply give a synopsis of the film and barely talk about whether or not it is inaccurate. The only attention that seems to be drawn to it is when it says, "Spielberg shaped [the main characters] to tell his own story, beginning with reluctant and confused reformers and politicians who, along with the audience, gradually realize the moral imperatives of the case" (OLD excerpt from *Liberty, Equality, and Power*). It makes sense to me that Hollywood movie makers would want to change/ make up their own story in order to make it more entertaining, but it is concerning that textbooks would promote it as a good source of learning when historian Eric Foner says it "...presents a highly misleading account of the case's historical significance, in the process sugarcoating the relationship between the American judiciary and slavery" (Eric Foner's essay) and all of the other inaccuracies he addresses. What do you guys think? Why do you think our textbook authors specifically would present this movie as one to watch?

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3



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I'm currently shaking my head



by Chelsea Sheltman - Sunday, January 28, 2018, 9:08 PM

All I can think about is how disappointing it is to have learned false information repeatedly throughout the years. What baffles me most is that books are being released to millions of vulnerable minds, and these minds are going to soak in the information and remember it until they hopefully take a class with a teacher willing to instruct the truth. It worries me, that this is only one thing that was over-exaggerated, so what else has been? I also dread sending my children to school in the future, because I want them to be educated correctly. I was personally sent to a private school (that can be quite expensive), an institution that should have been above public school teachings, yet I distinctly remember learning these things there as well. I also watched the movie Amistad when I decided to take AP United States History in high school, a class that is supposed to be almost equivalent to college. I hope that this can be recognized as a real issue, not number one, but still important.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Also Shaking my head

by Jack Swisher - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 7:41 PM

I agree with you that it is quite disappointing. I think there are two big examples that stand out to me. First, the underground railroad. The fact that I thought the whole underground railroad was a bunch of nice white people helping african americans to freedom my whole life scares me. Now, don't get me wrong, there were white people who helped yes, as well as churches. But that is what most people think of today, so they can feel as if they helped the cause.

My second example would be the Alamo movie starring John Wayne. In class on Tuesday of week four, it was said "Who cares about the movie being historically accurate, entertain me." Wow. That right there is why there is so much false knowledge out there. Speaking of people with no knowledge, another example (not that there is a movie) would be the fact that Mexico pulled the same thing Trump is trying to pull. By not letting migrants into their territory. People will argue all day about the fact that Trump is a terrible person for doing this, but something just like this has already taken place, and I bet you that not many people know this.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: I'm currently shaking my head

by Jason Yeager - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 6:02 PM

I am also concerned with the "half-truths" that kids are taught in our schools. I have kids in elementary and middle school, so I witness this issue frequently. My oldest boy, for example, is studying immigration and Ellis Island. He is learning about this subject in a way that portrays this period in American history as a positive and prosperous step in the lives of the immigrants. But what is blatantly left out is what happened after Ellis Island, when many immigrants were unceremoniously dumped in New York with nothing except what they could carry, and left to fend for themselves. This didn't always turn out so good for the immigrants, and I'm sure more than a few regretted their decision to come to the "Land of Plenty."

I was discussing this forum topic with a friend of mine (who also has kids), and we were wondering why history is sugar-coated at lower levels of education. I really don't think that kids come away from learning about the Underground Railroad "story" with the idea that slavery was somehow a good thing. Textbook writers and educators are probably right to take any event in this period in history that had some positive elements, and spin it in a way to not only make learning about the ugliness of slavery more palatable, but to also shield kids from the horrors that actually took place. I certainly don't want my second-grader to be learning about whippings, rapes, lynchings, and any number of other violent atrocities committed during this time, no matter how true. I guess this raises the question of at what age in a child's cognitive development does learning the "whole truth" become appropriate. I am clearly no expert, so I can't really say. But I do know that my kids are too young to be having those images in their minds.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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I am not suprised

by Stephen Sorber - Friday, February 2, 2018, 3:57 PM

Chelsea, although I agree that we should learn the true history of things like slavery and the slave trade I feel as though there should be a sort of censor to our youth until they are ready to learn the true history. I don't feel as though 2nd graders should be shown the murdering and whipping of African American slaves and I hope that you see my point of view. Thanks.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Romanticizing history

by Jason Yeager - Monday, January 29, 2018, 6:35 PM

This topic interests me because I actually have a personal connection to the subject. A number of years ago, a major Hollywood movie was produced which was partly based on the exploits of a relative of mine. While a thoroughly entertaining and very well made movie (it won a number of Academy Awards), and while the core deeds accomplished by my relative are fairly accurately represented, the majority of the accompanying circumstances are pure fabrication. As my family and I know the "true" story, we chalked up the inaccuracies to "creative license." Had the full story been told--which in reality spanned a number of months, instead of the few days depicted--the film probably would have been quite boring to the masses. So I understand the need to condense and fictionalize historical fact in order to increase the entertainment value of a film. But as I have so often experienced when people ask me about the film, I realize that the skewed (skewed?) truth leaves unknowing consumers with an inaccurate view of historical events.

The romanticizing of historical events by Hollywood is understandable, as the goal is to sell tickets, not to tell the "truth." I do however have a problem with historical inaccuracies in textbooks. My vision of the Underground Railroad is of a thrilling, clandestine, and well coordinated network of white people helping slaves escape to freedom. This is probably reflective of what I learned in elementary school. But as Professor Blight discusses in the video, this view of history is misleading. When giving a reason for this, he states that "it's a passage into our understanding of slavery that is sometimes gentler and sometimes more

savory than it is to look at slavery itself." (Blight, *What is the Underground Railroad* video) Seems like sometimes, "history" is written (and taught) in a way that softens reality in order to shield ancestors of the original offenders from the true nature of atrocities--or inactions--so that they can feel better about themselves.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Hollywood entertainment vs. Educational documentaries

by Lloyd Higgins - Monday, January 29, 2018, 8:26 PM

Considering the academic integrity of Hollywood movies, I would wager that most 'historical' movies made by Hollywood then and now are likely exaggerated. For the simple reason that history is usually neither as cut and dry as some movies would have us believe, nor is it as exciting. A perfect example could be the movie 300. In the movie, there is a small garrison of 300 Greek Spartans, facing off against millions of Persian soldiers. Disregarding the obviously fake creatures that were also in the movie, the actual battle of Thermopylae had roughly 7,000 Greek troops from all over the city states, and only about 100,000 Persian soldiers (scholars debate even less were present at the battle). This exaggeration of historical facts helps sell movies, it does not, however, paint an accurate portrait of history for someone to see. While movies are incredibly entertaining, they are just that, entertainment. History documentaries on the other hand, while not necessarily accurate 100% of the time, at least interview and consult experts in the field that the documentary is showcasing. Peer review of facts, historical and otherwise, is essential for information to be as accurate as possible.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Thermopylae-Greek-history-480-BC>

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Lied to

by Jack Swisher - Monday, January 29, 2018, 9:01 PM

I personally feel lied to in a way, being told things from my grade school years and finding the true meanings of certain things now in college. I understand why movie producers change things, or dramatize films to make the movie better, or to make some more money at the box office. But they really are changing things for the worse, just like in Amistad. In the article written by historian Foner talks about parts of the movies that give false impressions to the viewers. Like claiming the court case as a turning point in the struggle to end slavery. Really, the struggle had been going on for quite some time before the time period of the movie. The turning point to me was the civil war where the north got a real chance to fight for what they believed in. Groups had been trying to end slavery for years, and this one event really wasn't a turning point. Foner also mentions about how blacks were the foils for the white characters, for self discovery and moral growth. "The main characters are white, not black." These false statements are not just in the movies, but also in the classroom. The underground railroad for example of something that I have been taught as a young kid. The fact that the railroad was a group of nice white people helping slaves to freedom, was the message I received all of my life. But come to find out, according to professor Blights interview, mostly blacks were helping

blacks. Now, he also mentioned that there were white folk who did help, but I really had no clue that blacks helped blacks, and that they sometimes they stayed in cellars. That honestly frustrates me.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Lied to

by Elliot Rooy - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 11:46 AM

I completely agree with you and it's a betrayal of trust when you are mislead, especially in the classroom. Obviously Hollywood can't afford to produce movies that people don't find interesting so is there some compromise that we can reach? I'd love to have the option to see a well made and perfectly accurate portrayal of some events in history but at the same time, there are movies (like 300) that are not historically accurate but are still a lot of fun to watch as long as they are presented as fiction.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Hollywood is Not History

by Kate Weiss - Monday, January 29, 2018, 9:31 PM

I will start by stating that I don't rely on Hollywood movies for the full historical truth, but I appreciate the Historical Fiction genre because of the entertainment factor. I also don't think Hollywood films, and study guides produced along with them, should be taught in schools because they "erase the distinction between fact and fiction, urging students, for example, to study black abolitionism through the film's invented character, Theodore Joadson, rather than real historical figures" (Foner essay pg 3). I'm not surprised the authors of the textbook changed their film review after the release of 12 Years a Slave, since it "was instantly hailed by critics and historians as the most accurate, powerful film depiction of slavery ever made" (Textbook pg 330). I'm surprised Spielberg's Amistad review made the earlier edition of the textbook, since it was clear that even though it was based on a historical event, "Spielberg shaped this group to tell his own story" (Amistad Article).

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Hollywood is Not History

by Chelsea Sheltman - Tuesday, January 30, 2018, 5:42 PM

I think you made a very important claim with your title, "Hollywood is Not History". As simple as that statement is, it seems it is being ignored by many. I did not question how accurate the movie *Amistad* was when my history teacher played it for the class because I trusted it would not be shown if it was over exaggerated.

Many people enjoy watching dramatic films rather than accurate representations, but the difference is the purpose of the films. Movies dramatized for effect are meant to entertain, while movies based on fact are intended to educate.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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History & Mythology or Simply Mythology?

by Elliot Rooy - Wednesday, January 31, 2018, 11:13 PM

I think that the amount of deviation from fact permitted in “historically based” media is much too wide and the Amistad is a perfect example of this. Changes in the way that the abolitionists are portrayed or the way that the courts handled such events will warp our vision of the past. Even from what might seem to be a subtle change in the course of events can have a massive impact on the way that the public understands important events in our history. This entire topic speaks for itself if we ask ourselves how our understanding of history affects the decisions that we make today. Of course Hollywood can’t produce movies that people don’t find interesting but to sell the Amistad as a historically accurate movie is outrageous especially when we see it appearing in textbooks. Perhaps a good compromise would be to relabel these types of movies as “historical fiction” and allow only historically accurate movies to become “historically based”. Anything less is a brazen injustice to the people who forged the path of American history.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Underground Railroad Exaggeration

by Lloyd Higgins - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 12:53 PM

Upon watching Professor Blights interview, I thought of some interesting points he brought up about the myth of the Underground Railroad, versus the historical facts. He says that many towns across the United States choose to believe that they participated in the Underground Railroad and helped fugitive slaves escape from their masters. Where as the historical facts tell us that the Railroad was loosely organized, with small outposts that were miles apart from each other, led mostly by nonwhite escaped slave sympathizers. This brings an interesting point to the incorrect claims that towns and cities across the U.S choose to make when making their history appear brighter, and more optimistic, than it actually is. I think the reason they do this is simply because few people want to remember the horrors that their ancestors may have committed, or better yet, the indifference that they had when evil had crossed the threshold into their lives. While many today (I would hope) are staunchly against slavery and human suffering, it is the indifference of common people that allow such acts to take place without critique or opposition. The notion of a 'savior' complex that various landmarks and towns wish to adopt is a blanket to cover the shame of having been truly apathetic to the horrors of slavery that took place. It is even worse when people grow up with these false facts, believing that somehow, in the 19th century, people were as aware as they are now of social problems and education. Without historical context, it is easy to see why modern fiction would paint the past in such brighter colors than perhaps it was.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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What else has been overlooked?

by Chelsea Sheltman - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 4:13 PM

I agree with you. Many people have allowed these fables to be passed down from generation to generation, and why? So people can feel big and a part of something good during a time of injustice.

I do not think the exaggeration of the underground railroad is something they needed to keep from us. In fact, I believe allowing the information to be known could have been helpful in a better understanding of the time where many were struggling for their freedom.

I did not have thorough knowledge about the Alamo before this class, but the way it was depicted in movies and through stories of fiction allowed people to feel the same as they did with the underground railroad. Texans wanted to feel a part of something, so they neglected fact when relaying the events.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Dramatization of Underground Railroad Watering Down History

by Rachel Gragg - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 4:09 PM

The information about the underground railroad managed to make me feel as though I had been lied to. I have always grown up hearing these incredible stories of the underground railroad and the intricacies and the intensity and the heroic white people helping to end slavery. After watching the video of Professor David Blight I feel hoodwinked. I think the dramatization of the underground railroad, as Blight said, is something that Americans, ESPECIALLY white Americans, *need* to believe in. As Professor Blight said, most of the people that actually worked in the underground railroad were black. This is an example of white Americans trying to rewrite history and make up for the atrocity that was slavery. The dramatization and romanticization of the underground railroad is very significant.

I think our textbook handles this pretty well in that it only talks about the underground railroad for a short half of a paragraph. It says 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." (*Liberty, Equality, Power* Pg. 450). According to google, the definition of a legend is: "a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but unauthenticated." Our textbook tells us that the underground railroad is often times exaggerated and I think it's so that white Americans can feel better about the fact that this country partook in slavery for so many years. If white Americans can believe that a large amount of them helped these slaves escape, they can help to not feel as guilty for what our ancestors did not all that long ago. What do you guys think?

Do you think the exaggeration of the underground railroad is essentially just to help Americans feel better about the slavery that took place in this country for so many years?

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Disagree with Falsehoods on Historical Events

by Decker Robinson - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 6:08 PM

For my academic sake, I wish that movies and textbooks didn't exaggerate or create their own version of a historically based event. In my opinion, it obstructs how we think of an event that took place and we don't get the real facts of what really took place. After I watched David Blight's video about the Underground Railroad, I can honestly say I was genuinely surprised because the textbooks I grew up with romanticized the Underground Railroad as a huge

network of anti-slavery white and free black people coming together to help runaway slaves; however, that was hardly the case. Textbooks and Hollywood productions have created a false perception of “historically based” events when they create their own narrative of that event. I believe that as kids grow up they should be not fed fiction when learning about a historically based event.

With all that being said, I am not discrediting why they do this. The entertainment industry is there for our enjoyment and although I wish they didn't do it, they believe that sometimes it's better to add or subtract things from a true story in order to make the story more entertaining. In the movie Amistad, Steven Spielberg believed that adding fictional characters in order to get a cast that included Morgan Freeman, and Anthony Hopkins was more important than making a movie about an event that wasn't as historically significant as perceived in the film. In the end, this paid off for the film when it was nominated for several awards. I believe that Blight said it best in his video, when he explained that the reason that we learn about the mythology of the Underground Railroad is that it is a passage that eases us into the issue of slavery rather than giving us the blunt truth about slavery itself. I couldn't agree more because not every kid is ready to learn about the real truths of slavery. This obviously doesn't only apply to slavery because there are other subjects that not all kids are going to be able to grasp, especially at a young age where romanticizing historical events will at least give them some knowledge on what took place.

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Re: Disagree with Falsehoods on Historical Events

by Banyan Ryan - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 10:13 PM

That's a very good point in regards to learning about the Underground Railroad at a young age and how it works as a segue into discovering such a tragic and uncomfortable subject. But films like Amistad are made for adults who really should know the truth about history and how unfair it was. If this rated-R film can show the gruesome take over of the ship itself, then it should know to treat its audience with enough respect as to not change the events of this very true story.

It isn't just that it added new characters and gave it more of a plot, but that this film was focused on civil rights and insinuated that the debate of whether the Africans deserved the right to go home was what drove this court case. When in reality, as Foner puts it, "the Amistad case revolved around the Atlantic slave trade - by 1840 outlawed by international treaty - and had nothing whatever to do with slavery as a domestic institution". The film may have been made to entertain and to make money, but they could have at least been honest about what the case was about. I'm sure they could have still made it entertaining regardless. Maybe they could have spent more time on the ship itself and actually built up to them taking over the ship. They could have done a lot, but they chose to put in false information about what the Amistad event was about when they really didn't have to.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by Kyle Schmidt - Thursday, February 1, 2018, 6:20 PM

Kyle Schmidt

2/1/18

Hollywood History and Mythology

When first hearing about this I wasn't at all surprised. My personal experience with slightly warped history is something almost everyone who has been a kid or exposed to the media has had to deal with at some point. Growing up each year the textbooks would be slightly more adult and closer to the truth less and less got glanced over. Every textbook it seemed was pre approved for an age group and what the school thought that group was "ready" for even if it meant sugarcoating important parts of history. However in Hollywood movies there is no reason for censorship being an R rated film there is no reason to glorify certain aspects and to ignore points in history. Now I haven't seen the film but judging from what the critic said the movie was mainly glorifying the abolitionist movement and that the court case was simply a way of proving American integrity by starting to end a practice we put into place. This is the same for the underground railroad, as a kid I heard the glorified version of the underground railroad and learning about it now I can see the parallels with this movie. The focus again was on white abolitionists who fought for freedom and where a well organized group of activists.

The reality of the situation in both cases is much more complicated and with less heros.

Mainly I'm learning it was mostly just a racial struggle and that Americans were not only the good guys but also the ones we were against meaning it's really just politics. Historically there is a mythology surrounding events and organizations like these ones that have been glorified and blown out of proportion. I think this is mainly to "protect" youths from the darker reality history sometimes shows but also to promote a sense of nationalism. Academically speaking I think this is very dishonest and teaches a warped version of actual events. Changing or retelling events to fit a certain character or view that is somehow considered better is not fair to students because it tells different versions of the same events and only adds confusion.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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The falsehoods of our childhoods and how it effects our lives today

by Stephen Sorber - Friday, February 2, 2018, 1:29 PM

When reading these articles about movies such as Amistad and the false history of the Underground Railroad I feel as though it makes sense to censor and make it seem more like a story to get children to understand and possibly get excited about our nation's history. Amistad is loosely based off of the story of Africans revolting against the slave traders who captured them and killing them and overthrowing their ship. I think that obviously, any movie is going to have historically inaccurate scenes because the movie is meant to be for entertainment and not for historical accuracy. Moving on to the video of Professor Blight talking about the falseness spread throughout the country of the Underground Railroad, I felt as though throughout my childhood the Underground Railroad was a tight-knit system of predominately white people helping black slaves escape the south. Yet, the facts state that black people were predominately the conductors of the Underground Railroad and not whites. The Underground Railroad was also far more spread out than I thought it was and at times wasn't a consistent path that slaves followed. However, I do think that the point of making up the falsehoods of the history keeps children entertained and excited to learn about history because of how triumphant and passionate it perceives that the conductors and slaves were about freedom.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Movies as an Empathetic Tool rather than Historical Fact**

by Carley Kramer - Friday, February 2, 2018, 6:11 PM

First, I don't think hollywood movies should be treated as a source of historical fact or accuracy. Hollywood movies, even when they consult historians, always have an ulterior motive to attract viewers and make money, and often have an intended response or point they try to make. While they can reflect historical truths and involve accurate history, movies require so much detail that we can simply never verify, especially for a time period like the 19th century. While documentaries may also be editorialized or not entirely accurate, the difference to me is that documentaries attempt to present the historical fact without the details that are impossible to know while hollywood movies can be based off of historical fact, but have to fill in these details to create a story. I think that the people who fill in these details are always very likely to include some personal bias, whether that's an intentional manipulation of the viewer or simply them trying to write what they think makes the most interesting story.

Personally, I'm okay with textbook authors mentioning movies like Amistad and 12 Years a Slave because I think it can be very helpful for some people to have some kind of visual or empathetic connection to the history, and movies can provide that very effectively. Updating the movie that they use seems like a way to help them provide that connection to the largest audience. However, it seems important for the textbook authors to discuss what about the movie was correct and incorrect historically. If they want to use movies as tool to understand history and our connection to it, then they should discuss the faults of the films and what that says about our connection to history as well. I think it would only be problematic if the authors presented a movie as totally historically factual rather than as an empathetic tool to help us connect to history, as that will help fuel the expectation that hollywood movies are a source for unbiased historical truth. In the end, I think the issue really boils down the viewer or reader's ability to think critically about the information they consume, whether that information is presented as historical fact or fiction.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Movies as an Empathetic Tool rather than Historical Fact**

by Jason Yeager - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 12:48 PM

I agree with your point about how references to movies in history books can be a useful tool in increasing interest and awareness of historical events. And that the authors need to include acknowledgements about the accuracy of a film. Even just a brief synopsis of inaccurate portrayals, or a note saying "Some historians dispute the accuracy of the events depicted.....", which might encourage readers of the textbook to research those inaccuracies on their own, thereby increasing their knowledge of the subject.

Usually when I watch a movie "based on actual events," I invariably look up the true story afterwards. I find Wikipedia to be a pretty good resource for this, as the movie will have its own extensive page, along with links to internal and external resources about the subject and characters. I've found that most of the pages about historical movies have a section titled "Historical Accuracy," in which experts on the topic are brought in to set the

record straight. I looked up *12 Years a Slave* and *Amistad* to see what they had to say. I have not seen the former, and the latter I saw so long ago that I can't remember it or how I felt about the events shown.

Both sites have sections discussing the accuracy of the films. *12 Years a Slave* is clearly the more accurate of the two, with some experts pointing out minor flaws as they relate to Solomon Northrup's book (some questions are raised regarding the accuracy of Northrup's story), but most praise the film for its accurate depiction of slavery. The expert reviews about *Amistad* are a bit more scathing. Our friend, Eric Foner, makes an appearance, and is quoted on the site as stating that "In fact, the *Amistad* case revolved around the Atlantic slave trade--by 1840 outlawed by international treaty--and had nothing whatsoever to do with slavery as a domestic institution." (Wikipedia) There is also a bullet-point list of other inaccuracies.

I'm all for textbook authors bringing in any modern media that relates to the topic they are discussing, as this helps generate interest in the subject by basically asserting that "This story is good enough for Hollywood, so it is good enough for you." But acknowledging inaccuracies, either through vague references or specific points, would lend to the credibility of the authors as educators.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Movies as an Empathetic Tool rather than Historical Fact

by Carley Kramer - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 9:08 PM

While reading the review for *Amistad* that was in the 6th edition of our textbook, I looked for examples of the authors discussing the historical inaccuracies of the film, as I feel that this would be important for textbooks authors to include. I found that they did mention the historic faults of the film, such as "Spielberg's abolitionists are Lewis Tappan, a black activist (Morgan Freeman), an obscure young white lawyer (Matthew McConaughey), and, in the grand finale, congressman and former president John Quincy Adams (played wonderfully by Anthony Hopkins). In the historical case, the defense was handled by veteran abolitionists or by persons who had been working with abolitionists for a long time. Spielberg shaped this group to tell his own story, beginning with reluctant and confused reformers and politicians who, along with the audience, gradually realize the moral imperatives of the case." (Liberty, Equality, and Power; 6th Edition) Here the textbook authors identify how the film was inaccurate, and acknowledge that it is ultimately a story that has been fictionalized for the sake of entertainment.

In our 7th Edition textbook this *Amistad* article has been replaced with one about *12 Years a Slave*, which begin with the quote, "Upon its release in 2013, *12 Years a Slave* was instantly hailed by critics and historians as the most accurate, powerful film depiction of slavery ever made, helping it to win the Academy Award for best picture. Unlike other films that explore the issues of race, slavery, and freedom in 19th century America, including such strong productions as *Amistad* (1997) and *Glory* (1989), *12 Years* is told entirely from the slave's perspective." (p. 330) In the article, the authors mention not only the accuracy of the movie, but also how it differs from and improves upon the movie discussed in the previous edition.

I'm not upset by the authors changing the textbook based on the release of a movie, as they updated the movie they were using when a more accurate and relevant example became available. I think it's actually much better to include the more historically accurate movie in the textbook. For these reasons, along with the examples of the textbook addressing historical inaccuracies of the movies it uses, I think our textbook uses movies as a tool to provide a modern connection to history effectively.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Historical Dishonesty

by Decker Robinson - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 9:24 PM

I think the fact that there is a high possibility of more dishonesty with other historical subjects is a bit alarming. Like I said in my previous post, I was pretty shocked when I found out that the Underground Railroad wasn't what I thought it was. I understand that as kids the education system would rather us learn the foundation of a subject rather than to make sure we're getting the full story; however, I still feel as if I've been lied to all these years.

I don't think that it is a huge deal for our textbook authors change their content after a Hollywood movie is released IF the movie is proven to be historically accurate. Some people are visual learners and a topic can be easier to grasp if they watch a movie on the subject. When I read a textbook I expect nothing but facts so if the textbook contained content on a falsehood with a historical event I would have a huge problem with that.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Historical Dishonesty

by Chelsea Sheltman - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 11:29 PM

I think it can be difficult to be both historically correct and entertaining for some Hollywood movies, but teachers should know if the movie is factual before writing something about it in the first place. Especially if they're relying on it as a source of education in the subject they teach.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Amistad movie review

by Justin Oljace - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 10:44 PM

It's crazy to me how history gets changed overtime. You wonder about whether the information about history you've been given over the years is even accurate. In Professor Eric Foner's article on the Amistad movie he says, "Amistad presents a highly misleading account of the case's historical significance, in the process sugarcoating the relationship between the American judiciary and slavery." I personally think it's okay for Hollywood movies to not be 100 percent accurate for entertainment purposes, but I don't think schools should be allowed to present Hollywood movies as a way of learning history. Eric goes on to say, "The film's historical problems are compounded by the study guide now being distributed to schools,

which encourages educators to use Amistad to teach about slavery. The guide erases the distinction between fact and fiction.” I am concerned that historical truth has been kept from me over the years.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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History in Movies

by Jacob Spriggs - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 10:58 PM

It has always been obvious to me that when watching a movie based on a historic event, it's best to take it with a grain of salt. Until a movie is proven to be historically accurate we should assume it is completely fictional, and because of this I am okay with textbook authors changing textbooks when a more historically accurate movie comes along. When I'm reading a textbook written by experts I want to know that any movies I might come across are historically accurate, and not just based on an event with most of the story made up to make more profit.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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The Underground Railroad

by Justin Oljace - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 11:11 PM

In the video Professor David Blight talks about how a lot of what students are taught about the Underground Railroad isn't historically accurate. It was a loose system of African Americans helping slaves escape. Not many white people helped with the escape process. He says, “The biggest problem of the Underground Railroad in the United States is that it has become a deep mythology.” In high school I was taught that the underground railroad was a complex system of Americans working together to end slavery on a large scale. The fugitive slave law scared people from helping slaves escape because they didn't want to get arrested. In the textbook on it says, “Probably fewer than 1,000 of a total of 3 million slaves actually escaped each year” (447). Doing this research has helped me realize how exaggerated this subject is in United States history.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Is Hollywood That Guilty?

by Aidan Jewett - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 11:35 PM

I wasn't very surprised to read about the factual inaccuracies in Hollywood movies such as Amistad. Hollywood's, and the movie industry in general, primary goal is to make money. I think that they are completely willing to make sacrifices in accuracies if it means that more people would pay money to watch it. While it would be nice to have a perfect movie, there are many difficult decisions that go into writing and producing a "historically accurate" film. These

type of films try to bring out emotion from the viewer. Causes like abolitionism took decades to centuries to manifest. It is difficult to portray that in a couple hours. I do not blame the writers and directors for tweaking aspects of history to make a more interesting and provoking movie. I hope that the average person, who doesn't know that much about history, would take an interest into the subject after watching a Hollywood film, and then they would take the time research the topic further. There are many, many ways people could get better informed. As Eric Foner said in his review "The Amistad Case in Fact and Film, *"For the past forty years, no subject has received more scholarly attention. All American history textbooks today contain extensive treatments of slavery, almost always emphasizing the system's brutality and the heroism of those who survived"*.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Re: Entertainment vs. Education

by Jesse Elizondo - Saturday, February 3, 2018, 11:43 PM

Personally I don't have as much of a problem if movies aren't entirely based on facts, because movies are just meant to entertain and tell a story that appeals to majority of people to make money. If it's something that's more educational like textbooks or documentaries then I think they need to present real factual data. Looking back on when I was elementary school, I am concerned with the level of misinformation given to me regarding history. I think this is especially scary for people who go on believing this misinformation for the rest of their lives without learning what really happened. I think even in elementary schools students need to be given the facts. Now I don't think we need to go out of our way to find all the gruesome details to children that we can find, but we should give enough information so they know what actually happened.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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