

HST 202: History of United States W19 (Escobar)

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Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Joe Escobar](#) - Friday, January 25, 2019, 9:49 PM

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

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IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Hollywood History & Mythology

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Hollywood vs History
by [Meri Pedelini](#) - Sunday, January 27, 2019, 8:33 PM

The "History" genre of movies has been going strong for many years. With big box office movies such as Gladiator, Pearl Harbor, and 300, its hard not to be pulled into these epic tales but it becomes hard for one to separate fact versus fiction. I find myself being concerned with movies being historically accurate, I can see how watching the Amistad and feeling inspired and good about history only to find its essentially all embellishments can be extremely disappointing, but that feeling is temporary. What isn't temporary is the impact one of these movies could have on your education. A movie like the Amistad should not be used as educational material if it doesn't historically check out. Foley points out many examples of this movie being historically inaccurate and for "sugar-coating" the history of slavery. Foley explains that "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." and as we have learned and red about in our textbook, the courts were not so sentimental in the slavery issues and many times took the side of the slaveholders. The movie also makes it seem like the court case was more concerned with the rights and freedom of a man (For example Ch 13 and the Fugitive Slave Act) but instead with the Atlantic slave trade. Or how the movie discusses the civil war which isn't supposed to take place for another 20 years. Not to mention the mess of the subtitles and languages. This is highly misleading especially for a student who's trust in the text and teacher is very high. I don't think it is Hollywoods job for making movies completely accurate. I think they should at least TRY otherwise they should be at the mercy of reviews and critics, but at the end of the day Hollywood is a business and they are going to make whatever story they think will help it sell. However, when it comes to schools, using Hollywood films that are not under strict analysis in their classroom is irresponsible and contributes to creating an ignorant and naiive population of people. Its very hard to rewire your brain after so many years of "history" that you learned in k-12 schools. I find myself doing it almost every session in this college course!

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Elijah Cowsill](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 6:01 PM

From my personal point of view I find the exaggerated historical retellings (and occasional outright lies) found in Hollywood movies to be detrimental to people’s understanding of historical fact versus fiction. I believe there should not be any inherent boundary set upon art and film making in general; though for supposed historical retellings I believe that freedom should be reigned in. It is important to respect the source of the material you are going to be showing mass audiences, this is even more important when you are dealing with real people and events. I think filmmakers have an obligation to accurately portray historical events, if not for the sake of accuracy then for respect of the people who you are portraying. From an academic point of view I take a similar stance, I think inaccurate portraying of history has a very tangible negative effect on academics and schooling. I find that in my life I’ve had many instances of this misinformation causing issues with my own understanding of history. Much I what I think I know is often different from reality, sometimes to an extreme degree. Though accurate and trustworthy sources like text books are generally a good way to find more precise summaries, it can feel troublesome when you are presented with blatantly biased articles. For instance the article in our own book that paints the movie ‘*Amistad*’ in a better light than it perhaps deserved. These biases and inaccuracies in media and entertainment only add more fuel to the problem of historical ignorance and misinformation.

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History a skew

by [Terry Monks](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 8:05 PM

I personally don't mind some mythology behind historical fact. I feel it can give the grimmest of situations some substance, an identity per say. Historically based movies have always been a favorite of mine, but movies are for entertainment purposes only! Academically, I'm a little concerned the truth can be skewed and changed over time, but I'm not losing sleep over it. I do enjoy the mythology behind stories, like that with the under ground railroad. It took a horrific situation and it gave it heroes and hope. If towns or places want to be recognized or affiliated with the history behind the under ground railroad, than so be it. Unless they were making a profit on cave tours or something.

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Fact v fiction

by [Meri Pedelini](#) - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 12:31 PM

I also think it’s important that we are paying attention to who is telling the story, who are the hero’s etc. Foley criticizes The Amistad film for this same reason. He says "The guide erases the distinction between fact and fiction, urging students, for example, to study black abolitionism through the film’s invented character, Theodore Jordon, rather than real historical figures." This takes me back to what you said in class about 12 Years A Slave, and how that film is monumentally more credible because its written and narrated by someone who was a slave. Someone who actually lived and experienced life as a slave compared to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Toms Cabin”. Yes, this book helped support the anti-slavery movement by ripping into people’s emotions and opening their eyes about the horrors of slavery, so it IS important to history. However still a work of fiction (just like the Amistad) I do not believe it is suitable to use as material in studying it from a history perspective unless you are comparing and contrasting with the more “real” and thoroughly researched material.

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Underground Railroad

by [Meri Pedelini](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 11:18 PM

When David Blight talks about the Underground Railroad and its mythology, he describes it as an easy "passage" into our understanding of the history of slavery, and that is exactly what a lot of these "Historical" movies do. They make the stories seem more "palatable" to learn about. In the “Amistad” they have John Quincy Adams sticking up for the rights of a slave making us feel proud but in reality, he never even talked to him before, kind of silly. But anyway, Blight is discussing the Underground Railroad and the misconceptions people have harvested into “myth” along the years. For example, a lot of classrooms (mainly childrens classrooms) seem to be under the impression of a CLOSELEY knit system with white abolitionists helping to free slaves. But in fact, most white northern abolitionists were against the underground railroad because it broke the law and they wanted to find a legal way to end slavery. Blight reveals that the underground railroad was actually a very LOOSELY connected network and the people who operated it were mainly black. It is also interesting to me how he talks about the North and how they want to believe so badly about places in their community being sights on the underground railroad, but like he says, there’s no possible way for all the sights that they are claiming to be weigh stations, could actually be weigh stations. The North wants to think they were never involved in slavery but the reality is abolitionists at this time were not the majority of the population. But for some reason we are still taught to think this way and put people in categories (North=good south=bad) but like we talk about almost every day in class, history is never that simple! Sometimes history is not discussing events in history can be uncomfortable but it’s important that we don't stop talking about it and putting these “myths” to rest. I think more accurate historical representations in movies can help, even just a little bit, us achieve this goal as a population.

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by [Maximillian Prentice](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 9:17 PM

I really enjoyed looking through all of the different articles, clips, and accounts of history presented here. It really does showcase how much misleading information is out there and taught in schools. While I appreciate that the truth can be hard to hear, I feel as though it is important that everyone knows the real truth.

In regard to *Amistad*, I feel there is two was to look at it: as entertainment, or as something to teach in schools. I have not seen the movie, but based on the trailer, it looked interesting and entertaining. It was nominated for academy awards, had a star-studded cast, and all around seemed like movie I would probably enjoy. That does not mean it belongs in the classroom with lessons planned around it. I think it is all around best practice to keep Hollywood out of history class, especially if the director plans on making decisions to jeopardize the historical accuracy of the film.

Eric Foner, based on Professor Escobar’s description of him, seems like someone that is well respected in the academic community and his review of the film was verging on scathing; it was much different than the review in the text book. The review of *Amistad* from the text does mention that “Spielberg shaped this group to tell his own story” (History Through Film) but leaves out many of the inaccuracies that Foner brings to light in his review. All these clashing accounts and opinions about something is how the facts get skewed.

I think back to talking about the Alamo in class. Before last week, I never knew the American side lost the battle at the Alamo. It just goes to show how much misinformation is out there, as well as how ready and willing people are to substitute a nice story for the truth.

There is another movie review in the book now, for the 2013 film *12 Years a Slave*. The book gives high praise to the movie’s accuracy, but also hails *Amistad* as a “strong production” (p. 330, text book). These differences in opinion make it hard to trust 100% of what the text book says, and I think it is a good reminder not to trust everything you hear in general.

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Hollywood movie myths

by [Brayden Lane](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 9:27 PM

A concern of mine is that when growing up you watch movies such as the Amistad. When watching these historical movies you think wow that's so cool or interesting or did that actually happen. You end up believing what you see and in reality its a myth that Hollywood spins in order to get the viewers attention. Teachers will even show this movies in class to students believing its factually right. It imprints on students at a young age and most will never even learn the truth overtime. When textbook authors change their content based on new movies it becomes harder and harder to trust the actual textbook. How are you able to believe other information the textbook gives if the change information based off a historically inaccurate movie, the textbook is supposed to be a source students can go to, to get the right and correct historical information.

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The truth behind the underground railroad.

by [Brayden Lane](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 9:45 PM

When it comes to the underground railroad and the truth behind it there is one interesting part that I find which shocks me. In the video with professor David Blight he says that "Most of the people who actually worked in the underground railroad were black and not white". When growing up I was taught there was a lot of houses on this route run by white abolitionist and to me that's a big part of the story. So the fact that it was actually African Americans that mostly worked the underground railroad is a story changing fact. Another big part of the underground railroad myths that I was taught growing up is that the system itself was tightly ran and there specific houses you go to. When in reality it was "loosely connected networks" and it wasn't as clear of a system as once thought. These myths and historical lies I've been told are huge to me in the mere fact that I believe these are 2 of the biggest components to the underground railroad.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Elijah Cowsill](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 10:15 PM

The main demographic that is being afflicted by misinformation from entertainment isn't going to be well informed history enthusiasts, but average consumers who don't care to fact check everything they're consuming. Generally, when it comes to entertainment this isn't an issue but when you bring real historical occurrences into the mix problems arise quickly. What I find most disturbing isn't just inaccurate movies or TV shows, but the blatant bias or favoritism in certain published textbooks. I would be hesitant to suggest any Hollywood movie in a history textbook, let alone a blatantly misinformed and inaccurate one like *'Amistad'*. This ignorance plagues most people because it is not common for us to check the accuracies of every movie we watch. When you are changing history in movies you are literally changing the history people perceive who would have otherwise known better. This goes the same for people and towns pretending to have helped in the underground railroad, when in reality they didn't. Though this issue does not pervade society to as deep a level as film, it is still rooted in the same concept. Blatantly lying about historical facts to gain attraction warps people's mental perception of history, which can easily spread to others. In my eyes it is a great disservice to both people alive now and to the people who lived through these times. The mistakes we made in the past will be forgotten and for nothing if we let ignorance and misinformation spread throughout our society. It is the duty of our education systems to teach people to differentiate between fact versus fiction. The more people who are taught accurate history and critical thinking, the less likely we are to relive past mistakes.

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Historical Fiction
by [Michael Krobatsch](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 10:43 PM

Personally, in the past, I did not pay much attention to what was historically accurate and what was not. But I have been finding out that it is important to know which is which. For example, I almost feel mislead when I now watch a historical fiction movie. Because when it comes down to knowing what truly happens those memorable Hollywood movies will get interlaced in my thoughts and get in between knowing fact and fiction. Just like the other day in class when Mr. Escobar was talking about the Hollywood Alamo and the factual Alamo movie. I was very surprised and let down to find out that the movie I actually really liked and grew up on was incorrect. But at the same time, historical fiction movies are much more exciting then factual movies. From now on I will be more aware of what I will watch and know the true facts beforehand.

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