

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.

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.

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Amistad Inaccuracies
by [Tyler Weiss](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 1:21 PM

In the case of historically based Hollywood movies, I am always concerned with the accuracy of the representation. While I have never actually seen the movie Amistad, it is made pretty clear, in the information provided for this forum, that Spielberg was less concerned with accurately portraying how the real participants in this event were affected, as he was with using this event to tell his own story the white main characters, “rescuing the black heroes from oblivion,” (Foner, paragraph 2). Historian Eric Foner goes on to explain how this was not a movie about 41 slaves fighting for their freedom, but of white political leaders coming to the understanding that these Africans are human too. Foner explains his frustration at how initially, Spielberg had planned on having all of the Africans’ lines be spoken in the West African language Mende, with English subtitles, but ended up cutting most of those scenes when he realized Americans don’t like reading subtitles in movies. In doing this, Spielberg essentially is saying that portraying their side of the story accurately was not as important as the court scenes with the white politicians, which Foner also condemns as inaccurate, stating that Spielberg was, “Sugarcoating the relationship between the American judiciary and slavery,” (Foner, paragraph 5). It does greatly concern me that this movie has been so widely used in school curriculum as a guide to learning about slavery, especially when it encourages students, “To study black abolitionism through the film’s invented character, Theodore Joadson, rather than real historical figures,” (Foner, paragraph 9). I am glad that our textbook authors decided to replace the article on Amistad with one on the much more historically accurate film, 12 Years a Slave, which follows the first-hand account of a real historical figure who was captured into slavery and later freed.

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Re: Amistad Inaccuracies

by [Nolan Hart](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 12:44 AM

I really like the points you've made here, but I feel like much of it can be condensed into the need for it to be cinematic. To me, this borders on historical fiction, as the film is based upon events that really happened, but with a bit of a stretch, both to fill gaps in the story, and to make it appealing to audiences. While historical inaccuracies do concern me, as the one that I notice may only be one of many, my main issue is the push for the film to be considered historically accurate, as you mentioned. The idea that the film was to be used as historical fact is disconcerting to me, especially considering the push behind it for classroom use.

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Concerns about historical truth and use of films in textbooks.

by [Quinton Liebl](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 5:59 PM

It is very concerning when historical truth has been changed or dramatized. There have been many counts during class that I have been shocked or blown away by what facts had been presented. Facts such as "Civilized Tribes" (found in "Liberty, Equality and Power" (Pg. 384)), and how Indians integrated into society by adapting to such norms like Schools, roads, and even slave-maintained plantations. This tones down the dramatic lesson I learned growing up, which was that all Indians were tortured, hated and forcibly banished from America.

I believe I understand why a textbook would alter their texts upon a new release of a Historical Hollywood film. Hollywood has lots of influence on individuals, so using something as popular as an award-winning film to relate to their content seems helpful. Though the film Amistad may have not been historically accurate, it gave a general understanding of a certain time period. "12 years a slave" was a more accurate representation compared to Amistad, of what slaves and plantation owners went through during this time, and if it helps relate actual facts to the lesson, then so be it!

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Re: Concerns about historical truth and use of films in textbooks.

by [Pablo Carrasco](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 3:58 PM

It's really disappointing that a textbook would have to alter their text for a Hollywood movie. Is it better to have people have portions or the historical truth or be completely unaware in the first place? For me this is a serious gray area because I want people to be aware but I also want them to be have the historical accuracy. That's why in my piece I mention that Hollywood is a business first and only a handful of directors have full control on their projects. This why I never rely on films in historical accuracy.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Pablo Carrasco](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 9:26 PM

When it comes to Hollywood depiction of a historical subject I almost always view with some skepticism. Hollywood is a business first rather than historical accuracy, and shouldn't be seen as a way to learn your history. Eric Foner states that the subject of slavery has received more scholarly attention than ever before, and a film like Amistad should not be used for academic purposes. To the contradiction Professor Blight states that we should be wary what read in our textbooks because even then the truth can be bended.

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Can we trust anyone?

by [Benjamin Planck](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 9:47 PM

It deeply disturbs me when I realize there are probably multiple times throughout my childhood in which historical accounts were fed to me that had been manipulated in various ways. At first, the trailer for Amistad looked really intriguing and I actually felt compelled to go watch it, that is until I read the article on the movie by Eric Foner. I realized then just how easily persuaded I am? It wasn't pleasant. What furthered this upsetting news was the fact that our textbook that we

use actually cited Amistad as factual? Is that supposed to make me feel that I now have to be skeptical of anything I read in our textbook? It seems to me that issues only become relevant in this country when the masses witness the extremes, giving Hollywood the keys to have free reign over what matters to general public because of the reach they have and America’s obsession with movies.

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Re: Can we trust anyone?
by [Nolan Hart](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 11:43 AM

I definitely agree. Children often don't know better, and can be easily manipulated to believe the first thing that they are told. They often don't possess the critical thinking skills of adults, and especially in schools, they can be taken advantage of in that regard. Hopefully the future will bring with it a clearer line between romanticized history and actual fact.

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Re: Can we trust anyone?
by [Sebastian Garcin](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 6:55 PM

I think it is good to have a moderate level of skepticism in regards to all sources used to find out information, but you can't be so much of a skeptic that you don't regard any historical textbooks to be inaccurate without putting in effort to find out if it is accurate. You are correct in your statement that issues only mainly become relevant in this country when it affects the masses and even then in extreme cases. However I think you are incorrect is saying that Hollywood has free reign over what matters to the general public because of the reach they have due to America's obsession with movies. While there does seem to be an obsession with movies, I think that most people have the common sense to take all movies regarding history with a grain of salt. I am not saying that their perspective of history isn't at risk, but that it is up to each person to look for the most accurate historical sources.

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Historical Truths
by [Alivia Garcia-Irwin](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 10:20 PM

After listening to the Professor in the video (Eric Foner) it helped to shape also what I read in the article. He explained some interesting points during the discussion of the Underground Railroad, such as how we depict history may be what we want it to be. We don't want to write ourselves negatively in history and sometimes like the said we often try to "gentle" our understandings or truth on the matter. But it is important to recognize and face the reality of it both negative and positive than to ignore it. Of course those movies are for entertainment but the bases they go off is really important. Changing key parts of history into a manipulated more often "positive" view is something that of course has a bad effect but its also Hollywood and "historical based" movies often have little real facts they are going after.

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Re: Historical Truths
by [Kyla Rudd](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 11:50 PM

Being able to recognize both the negatives and positives of history is really important. I think it is something that should be taught to students throughout their educational journey. History often seems to get erased and exaggerated to showcase the positives. While it is important to remember and praise what past generations did well, it is also important to acknowledge what they did wrong to avoid it happening again in the future. Movies sort of immortalize these stories, so I can see how people get upset when they are not perfectly historically accurate. Like you mentioned though, they are for entertainment. They are based off important things, but at the end of the day, Hollywood aims more for high spots in the box office.

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Misleading information



by [Ben Crawford](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 10:31 PM

Personally, my response to the exaggerations and falsehoods portrayed by media is simple. No matter where you get your information, there is always going to be some sort of misleading material presented to you. That goes for information presented in movies, news, media, and pop culture. Everybody has a different outlook on historical events that are shaped by different experiences and different understandings, therefore the only way to really understand the full truth is to research multiple sources and compare them. Obviously in movies, the story and the facts are going to be changed around to what is most appealing to the target audience and what is most suited for the average American to understand. An example of this in the movie "Amistad" is how it portrays the Supreme Court acquitting the Africans because of the natural rights of man. Professor Eric Foner explains in his review for the movie that 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. Incongruous as it may seem, it was perfectly possible in the nineteenth century to condemn the importation of slaves from Africa while simultaneously defending slavery and the flourishing slave trade within the United States". In summary, one of the only reasons the slaves were acquitted is because the Atlantic Slave Trade was illegal. If this case had happened prior to 1840, it is very likely that the slaves would have never seen the courtroom because shipping slaves was still legal. Steven Spielberg, the director of "amistad", instead decides to pull the heartstrings of audience members across the country by making the movie a case for man's natural right to freedom, which the majority of viewers can relate to and understand the concept of.

As far as my response academically, I believe we have nothing to blame except human nature. The reason it falls on human nature is because as the days of slavery get further and further in the past, more and more generations have the understanding that slavery was bad and should have never existed in the first place. Therefore, people want to believe that their ancestors were good people and did something to help end it when it existed. As time continues to go on, the more the lines between reality and perception will be blurred. In the 4 minute video where Professor David Blight discusses the historical accuracy of the Underground Railroad, he states that in the north, so many communities want so badly to believe that their town or their city helped played a role in freeing slaves and putting an end to such an awful act. He also says that if the amount of obscure annex's and underground tunnels that claim to have been underground railroad sites were legitimate, slavery wouldn't have been around past 1860. Responsibility falls on each individual to educate themselves and find out the historical evidence to determine what actually happened.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Kyla Rudd](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 11:00 PM

I personally and academically respond to the falsehoods in "historically based" Hollywood movies by trying to know about historically accurate information about the events in the movie. It allows me to pick out the good and bad in the movie while still considering the history it was inspired by. I feel like Hollywood movies are slowly but surely becoming more true to the events they were inspired by. In the past, they seemed to exaggerate things to please the audience, who, for the most part, did not know every detail about what the movie was based on. I do not blame them for doing that because that is how the film industry is. However, most people will not pick up that is exaggerated or adapted and will believe that they are the closest thing to the true events, which is a major problem.

Movies are not the only thing that changes or embellishes history. Our own textbooks and grade school teachers seemed to romanticize history. I can understand elementary teachers not telling their students the full truth, but a more idealistic view of history is constantly taught to students throughout middle and high school for most people. It was not until a few years ago that Christopher Columbus stopped being seen as an absolute hero. Before watching Professor David Blight's video, I did not know anything about the truth of the Underground Railroad and how most of what we were taught to believe in school and textbooks were actually just folklore to make America and the North look better than it was. I tend to research historical events that interest me so I can know the details about it that most textbooks do not provide. Textbook writers most likely change and adjust history to create an image of America that helps boost national pride and make people feel like it was not completely terrible.

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How Detrimental Not Being Informed Can Be
by [James Hebert](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 11:02 PM

Seeing the different ways that the movie is portrayed through eyes of different people can be very informative. Without these different viewpoints, though, we wouldn't be able to make an informative statement for ourselves. Seeing that this historically inaccurate movie is being used as fact in our schools is quite disappointing, for multiple reasons:

1. The teachers are not doing the research that they need to be doing in order to inform student with the correct information.
2. The students aren't looking into this themselves. When they receive an assignment for their teacher they need to be able to refute any fictional history that they see, even in the classroom.
3. Is there anything that is being done about it? I'm not sure if there is?(maybe I need to do my own research, haha!)

Teaching students to act like sheep whenever a new historical film or article in the news comes out will lead to a new generation of people who aren't able to differentiate between fact and fiction. This will be detrimental to our ability to succeed as a people, forcing us to learn an ability that we should have learned in school, making it harder to focus on the problems at hand.

Let me know what you think!

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Nolan Hart](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 11:02 PM

On a personal level, exaggerations, such as La Amistad would be better served if written as, and treated as historical fiction. On the note of the underground railroad, and other such historical inaccuracies/exaggerations, I do believe that it is part of a coping mechanism (namely around slavery) that makes it easier to teach children difficult subjects. While I will acknowledge that this can be helpful with children, it is also harmful. Children are naive, and can be easily manipulated. For me personally, it does raise some concern that truths like these are exaggerated, namely in the case of education, as that will affect the future of this country. I personally would doubt any town that said it had a history in the underground railroad, but would also do my own research to validate their claims, as anyone should before they consider anything a fact.

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My concern with Historical Truth
by [Sebastian Garcin](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 11:13 PM

When it comes to the historical truth, I am not overly concerned with it being kept from me due to manipulation or the spreading/persistent mythology. To be clear, I am not saying I don't care for the accurate historical truth, but rather that I am not to worried of the truth being hidden away. Each person, no matter how truthful/reliable tend to modify history even to the smallest extent. By that I mean that they have the tendency to include their own bias and beliefs into their accounts of history. But by looking at several sources and taking everything at face value, the historical truth can be found.

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Re: My concern with Historical Truth
by [James Hebert](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 4:36 PM

I think you're right. Looking at several sources to find the truth is important. I think it generalizes people too much to say that people will always add their own bias. Simply because when it comes to historical fact there should be no discussion of personal bias. Facts are things that are/should be generally agreed upon as things that have happened, good or bad. When it comes to this history in this forum, it is very important to recognize

that the movie makers didn't do an adequate job of making this film historically accurate. They have an obligation and responsibility to do so. For the one reason that it is being used as educational in our educational system, only worsening the credibility of our teachers and movie makers of today and the future.

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History vs Hollywood

by [Ben Crawford](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 7:38 PM

When discussing how historical events are inaccurately portrayed in films and media, I am not concerned that the truth has been kept from me. This is mainly because I think that if watching movies is your way of learning history, you have nobody to blame but yourself for believing everything you see portrayed. Because of the nature of Hollywood, a lot of critical details and facts are most likely going to be left out of films so it doesn't get too boring. Also ten times out of ten the director will usually sacrifice historical context for the sake of a good scene that has the audience on the edge of their seats. To fully grasp a historical event it is so important to research multiple sources, the authors background and credibility, and to compare all your findings. Even then you still might have to do more research, but it's a whole lot better than getting your knowledge from a movie and then being upset that it isn't what actually happened. Some might say that the problem is actually Hollywood in the first place since they are allowing historical inaccuracies to be shown to millions of viewers. However, I do not fault Hollywood because it is not an educational industry, but instead an entertainment industry. Eric Foner's article hits the History vs Hollywood nail directly on the head when saying "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, urging students, for example, to study black abolitionism through the film's invented character, Theodore Joadson, rather than real historical figures. And it fallaciously proclaims the case a "turning-point in the struggle to end slavery in the United States". Essentially, the root of the issue is that people believe a lot of what they hear and see. They think that because it is a big time Hollywood movie, everything that happens is true. Which if you have done any of the reading you would know is not that case.

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Re: History vs Hollywood

by [Kyla Rudd](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 11:34 PM

I completely agree with your view on Hollywood. Hollywood movies sacrifice historical accuracy for a good scene constantly. It's just show business at the end of the day. A lot is on the line for the writers and directors with their big budgets; historical accuracy is the last thing on their mind. From what I have observed and learned about the film industry, they do a lot of research for movies. The writers usually know they are leaving out details and just picking the most interesting parts and throwing a love interest into the mix. I also agree with your view on more so blaming the audience that only learns their history from movies. If they have seen a movie based of their favorite book, they know things are left out to make it interesting or to fit the plot into 1-2 hours. If they are truly interested in learning about certain events in history, they could watch a Hollywood movie, but also do some research outside of that movie. Just reading the first few results on Google would probably teach them more than the movie.

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Fiction=Fake

by [Christopher Bischoff](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 11:41 PM

I think that hollywood movies can be very misleading to the types of people who take the movies too literally or do not care to know the real historical facts behind a movie. This is a problem because it can lead to a skewed perception of history. I do however think that hollywood movies can be great because they offer visuals and a different medium of learning if they are used in conjunction with historical facts. Otherwise it's just entertainment. I can see why publishers would include a movie in their textbook in order to compare it to real history, but I don't think they should be included in the textbook. It makes me question if they are receiving funding from the producers of the movie, and the validity of the information regarding it.

One of the things I found very interesting is when Eric Foner said "If all of the places that claimed to have been depots, or sights on the underground railroad really were sights on the underground railroad slavery would not have even lasted until 1860." because I would not have have guessed that a historical sight was lying about its former function.

3/14/2019

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