

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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Historical Truth
by [James Croxton](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 2:20 PM

Yikes.

I guess I'm one of the many who *thought* they knew what the Underground Railroad was. Instead, I've been confronted with this reality that it wasn't as "grandiose" (for lack of a better term) as people have said it was.

It really struck me that in the Underground Railroad video with Professor Blight, he summarizes that slavery wouldn't have lasted nearly as long as it did if the U.R. was truly that large and sophisticated.

At the same time, he argues that Northern states have to create this myth that there were several stops in their town(s), or whatever, but the fact of the matter is that they didn't.

I see it as a way for a community to feel self-important when in-fact, they're no more interesting than the folks down the road.

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We Learn Lies Because Lies Are Entertaining
by [Enya Smith](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 5:13 PM

The Underground Railroad was the single most soul crushing lie of my young historian life. In my mother's hometown of Rensselaer, local legend has it that one of the early churches in the area (the same one found on Saint Joseph's College is currently standing) was some sort of 'Underground Railroad' hub. Now, any fool that believes that is laughable; the oldest building on campus was built in the 1880s, and nowhere near where war

was being torn. I think the moment I realized that my education was really suffering, however, was when one of my middle school peers claimed that Martin Luther King Jr. had anything to do with the [Civil War](#), and my teacher agreed.

If you weren't up to speed yet, unless Martin Luther King Jr. mysteriously managed to invent time travel and go back a hundred years, Martin Luther King Jr. had nothing to do with the Civil War. This would lead me to continuously point out (and research my own uncertainties) about how much of the history I had learned in school was actually accurate, whether it was my misunderstanding or not.

Colson Whitehead, the author of *The Underground Railroad*, wrote as close to a historically accurate account to slavery in a way that was entertaining, kid-friendly, and educational. In his [interview with NPR](#), he states, "I actually didn't research the slave catcher's point of view. I think the slave catcher's point of view is probably the default setting on American history. I think it's the dominators — the slave catchers and the slave masters — who write the chronicle of 17th- and 18th-century America." (*Fresh Air* podcast.) He was thrilled to get to write a book about a young woman who actually used trains to travel to different states, constantly on the run from slave-chasers. The book captures the accuracy and just how spread out the Underground Railroad went -- but still dips its toe in historical fantasy: A real underground railroad. Will Colson Whitehead's attempt at historically accurate fiction be washed out by the idea of a real train? Does that factor of fiction undermine Whitehead's academic research and presentation of the authentic escaped slave 'experience'?

I ask myself that when I see books with historical inaccuracy used to present an idea. While *Amistad* was white washed beyond belief, can we really blame the creators? After all, they were creating an engaging, inspiring story that talked about the slave trade and horrors of the world. Hollywood is unfortunately successful in one thing: Making the story worth watching. Should we invalidate film based on a few historical inaccuracies? Or can we teach using them?

I spend a lot of time thinking about how we can use film in education. The [Journey's in Film Organization](#), an advocacy group for using films in lesson plans, claims that "65% of the world are visual learners, and 30% are auditory learners." In my experience, attending a hands on learning school that used film helped me increase the amount of knowledge I had compared to just reading a book. JiF recommends using film near weekly to enhance the learning experience. I think that film can be used with inaccuracies to teach **if the teacher is presenting the knowledge correctly afterwards.**

Perhaps it's just something I'm used to, but my teachers had us often write reports on books that were inaccurate and then have us go and do a google search to search for the 'real history' of our chosen books. Historical fiction was far more entertaining for me to read than hefty text books (and more cost effective in the long run thanks to open access internet) and it was a great way for us to learn and remember differences. I think I only really got into airplanes as much as I did thanks to an incredibly historically inaccurate account of Amelia Earhart. But it still got me into history, shouldn't that be the point of education? To build interest?

I stand on a weird pillar between, "We should always push for historical accuracy, all the time!" but history that was is just so *boring*, that I can't help but to support the textbook. However, what I appreciate about film and historical fiction is almost destroyed by the misconceptions and lack of further discussion on historically inaccurate films. A film, really, should be used as a stepping stone into the conversation.

Unfortunately, not a lot of teachers know how to do it well. Our professor is the first I've seen in a long time to do it in a way that feels productive.

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What is important?
by [Ha Neul Lee](#) - Monday, January 28, 2019, 10:49 PM

People tend to believe what they want to believe, descendants of slave owners want to believe either to justify slavery at that time or forgetting the fact that their grandfathers or great-grandfathers were slave owners. Some people want to believe that they ancestors were part of the underground railroad and helped fugitive slaves from the south even if its not the truth.

So, what do we leave in history and what do we not tell in the books? Are myths and heroic deeds are only a fairy tale or is it a real definite truth of valor and courage? I think they all would have want to be told to their children that they were good people and they something that was the right thing to do not something to be praised upon. This nation may have been built upon the so called greed of the 13 states but, it is true that this nation was built by freedom, liberty and justice.

So, it doesn't matter why or how they did it. It matters what we think about it today, do we value the self-sacrifice of them? or do we just proclaim it as a show for self-righteousness? President Lincoln said, "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."(Gettysburg Address, 1863)

Before we criticize them, we should have a closer look into the acts of ourselves and what we will do tomorrow.

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The Dangers of Trusting Textbooks: Irresponsibility in Education Via Historically Inaccurate Media
by [Enya Smith](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 12:29 AM

Before I started studying here at Lane, I studied media at Green River College, with a specialization in representation in media. One of the biggest controversies we covered at the time had to do with historical accuracy in context of sensitive material. Americans tend to “white-wash” media, especially in reference to teaching history. There’s a comprehensive study done by Maureen Costello, the director of Teaching Tolerance, discussing the lack of historically accurate materials approved for teachers to use in their [curriculum](#). If you ask my personal opinion: I have never truly trusted textbooks, and tend to avoid them as much as possible in favor of different sources. Even with the quizzes, that I could just easily find the answers in the book for, I tend to research as I study. Even though there’s an answer the textbook *wants* you to know, there is often more to the story that the text book just doesn’t cover. It’s actually discussed in our reading material – there are so many falsehoods, and for some reason, our education system doesn’t even bat an eye. I feel uncertain and always approach non-fiction (especially with history) with an air of speculation, on a constant watch for bias in subtext as I read any document.

Professor Eric Foner puts his frustrations about inaccuracy within textbooks and “Historical Hollywood” being used to educate in a very explicit manner: “Most galling,” he writes, “ist he assumption that a subject does not exist until it is discovered by Hollywood.” (Foner, Paragraph 10). He is absolutely baffled that a movie like *Amistad* would be used in textbooks, as the film is so clearly inaccurate down to the blatant white-washing and dehumanization of Africans through language barriers. I’ve always personally been wary of white men directing anything involving culture – it seems to be a Hollywood trend to completely [white wash cultures they had no business touching](#), and Steven Spielberg definitely is on my radar for people I can’t trust to learn history from, period.

You see, if Spielberg *actually* wanted to tell a story about slavery, or the book *actually* wanted to present a historically accurate presentation of the slave trade in the 1800s, they wouldn’t have needed to create the characters they had. Spielberg created three abolitionists, consisting of a black activist, a lawyer the book admits is ‘obscure’, and a John Quincy Adams (who’s actor’s acting was referred to as ‘wonderful’. Remember that whole “reading into bias” thing I talked about earlier? This is a good way to tell if something is written to teach or written to express opinion.) The book review goes on to give the group a purpose: “Spielberg shaped this group to tell his own story.” (Paragraph 2 of the review.) without even touching light on the fact that they knew Spielberg was making things up, and with the sheer ignorance that the story was being told through the lens of fictional, white men. Foner absolutely calls out Spielberg and *Amistad* in his essay: “Despite the filmmakers’ orgy of self-congratulation for rescuing black heroes from oblivion, the main characters of *Amistad* are white, not black.” (Foner, paragraph 2.) Not to mention the film is disgustingly riddled with inaccuracies that Foner lists; things like the court being receptive, vs. the reality of them being pro-slavery, sugar coating the reality of the slave trade, mentioning the Civil War 20 years before it even happened, and even goes beyond *Amistad* to call out Debbie Allen, the producer of the movie, for her ridiculous hypocritical belief that historians don’t talk about the “real history of slavery.” (Paragraph 10.)

As the question asks for our bias, my review is biased. I suppose I just have a hard time wrapping my head around how a textbook dedicated to presenting accurate history to students using it would so ignorantly use a film riddled in inaccuracies and not mention a single one of them. It shows a certain degree of irresponsibility on the author’s part.

I will discuss my opinions and research on buildings and beliefs; the video on it was intriguing and David Blight’s lesson on the Underground Rail Road and commentary on locals and their pride in their settlements’ histories has a lot of potential for engaging conversation.

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Re: The Dangers of Trusting Textbooks: Irresponsibility in Education Via Historically Inaccurate Media
by [James Croxton](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 11:16 AM

I have to agree with you in that I'm also having a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that the book would choose to use this film considering its inaccuracies and such.

It, in a way, almost comes off as revisionist history. But not the type where the entire story is flipped on its back. Here, instead, I feel that Spielberg made the artistic decisions he did in order to sell a movie to the lowest common denominator.

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He's Not The Only One
by [Enya Smith](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 6:04 PM

Even though it's not necessarily part of the class material we're discussing in depth, but I had this weird moment of de'ja'vu today thinking about Laura Ingalls Wilder. If you don't know who she is, she wrote a number of books depicting [her childhood during the late 19th century](#). The books were eventually made into a T.V. series based around the tales in the book, and during my mother and I's childhoods, was regarded favorably as an 'accurate account of a little girl's life in the 1800s.' Never mind the whole 'end of the century' part of that claim; never-the-less, Laura Ingalls Wilder was my hero. I wanted to be her: A simple girl who grew up to be a teacher. A part of me still really wants to.

Unfortunately, Laura Ingalls Wilder has been under pressure because her books are kind of very terribly racist as far as depictions of black and Native American folks go. It was so bad that the [Association of Library Service to Children \(ALSC\) renamed the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal to the Children's Literacy Legacy Award](#). The group claimed that they thought that Laura Ingalls Wilder was a poor reflection on the fight against racial discrimination. To an extend, this is fair, but to another extent, it feels like an eraser of history.

The trend supporting these books is known as the "Banned Book Movement", and author Lisa Nifsom writes about them from to time. In her article, ["Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder is Not the Same if You're a Parent"](#), Lisa talks about her experiences rereading *Little House on the Prairie*. She both justifies and calls out parts of the book series that are historically inaccurate. " Despite the trail of adversity the Ingalls faced, the books—especially the early ones—offer the sense of a happy busy childhood where the troubles and worries of adults are absent,," Lisa writes, "[But] there was some self-censorship. Wilder never included the family’s stay in Iowa, where her only brother died in infancy, where Laura and her sisters were hired out for domestic work at a local hotel, and where Pa Ingalls woke them in the middle of the night to leave town and their debts behind...and there was the family of neighbor children who froze during a blizzard in Minnesota, which Wilder wrote about in her early unpublished memoir, “Pioneer Girl,” but did not put into the *Little House* books." Laura and Lisa both recognize that the books are in fact written for children, not necessarily to educate but to share and reflect on the innocent of childhood.

The entire article is worth a read if you're interested in censorship in pioneer history. I have a few historically accurate historical fiction books about immigration, the Holocaust, and the like to recommend as well.

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Where do we find historical accuracy?
by [Owen McCoy](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 7:15 PM

Sometimes I come across historical information that differs from what I already know, and it is disconcerting. It has surprised me how different the history is at a college level as opposed to K-12. But it is concerning when it is hard to find historical information. I am reminded of the example Joe gave us in class pertaining to the updated website of the Democratic Party and how there is much information lacking. I also went to the website of the Republican Party

to see what I could find there in the way of history. It was very hard to find (the link was down at the bottom of the page in small lettering next to the copyright information and all that), but I did find their history page. It included the party's founding (unlike the Democratic Party website), but unfortunately, it doesn't include anything more recent than 1987.

Finally, I can understand how the textbook authors would want their book to contain recent information, but if they are changing their content after a new movie came out then that would make it more difficult to get to the actual historical truth.

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Re: Where do we find historical accuracy?
by [James Croxton](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 11:19 AM

Something I always like to point out when people mention the Democrats' website is one that I find hilarious.

If you go and check out the "Our History" page, they claim their beginning is in 1920 with women's suffrage as of they weren't the party that we now know they were having discussed it in class.

Another bit of "revisionist history" that I mentioned in an above reply.

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Hollywood's Inaccuracies
by [Amanda Francis](#) - Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 7:48 PM

Historian Eric Foner had many issues with the movie *Amistad*. Besides it being "simply a bore" Foner goes on to list the ways in which the film is historically inaccurate and how it's mostly a "filmmakers' orgy of self-congratulation for rescuing black heroes from oblivion, the main characters of *Amistad* are white, not black." Although I do enjoy movies that are true to history, I don't necessarily think it's Hollywood's responsibility to educate children. *Amistad* doesn't claim to be a documentary. The bigger issue at hand, in my opinion, is why teachers are choosing to use it as part of their curriculum. Instead, as Foner mentions, "They should direct students not to this highly flawed film, but to the local library." It is not Steven Spielberg's responsibility to educate the youth. We can still have entertainment, right? I do, however, think it is great that the authors of our textbook updated their Hollywood historical example of slavery to *12 Years a Slave*, because if there is movie in the teaching curriculum, it should be historically accurate.

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Re: Hollywood's Inaccuracies
by [James Croxton](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 11:20 AM

I'd go as far as to say that since *12 Years a Slave* did better commercially, that may have had an affect on future textbook placement. More people would be able to relate to it having seen it more likely.

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Trust in History
by [James Croxton](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 11:27 AM

I couldn't have imagined before this Forum 2 that many towns across the country have claimed - falsely - that they have been major stops on the Underground Railroad.

Not only is that lying in an effort to elevate the stature of your town - for whatever reason that may be - but, it is simply abhorrent to me that people would use such a dark-time in our history as the basis in doing so.

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Re: Trust in History
by [Ha Neul Lee](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 5:26 PM

I think its a natural thing for the want of being praised. In ancient Greek many general or warriors have claimed to be desendents of Greek heroes like Hercules or Perseus. Even if they did not have anything to do with those legendary heroes they would lie to obtain fame and reputation from the people. I does not suprise me today that people would lie to other people and their children that they were associated with the underground railroad i mean who don't want fame? Sometimes you lie to become recorded in history. Ancient people in general believe that was the true meaning or immortality even if your dead your name would be praised from generations to generation because you are remembered in history.If you are forgotten you are dead.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Mitchell Bell](#) - Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 4:45 PM

Personally it is har for a young person to believe in a lot of the history you are taught k-12 because so much of it is very loosely based on the truth. In turn we are teaching are youth mainly folklore instead of the truths of what actually happened. Secondly movies that are based on a true story are so rarely the actual facts of what happened and the problem is so many people go to watch movies that when the movie says based on a true story the majority tends to believe well it must be all true then. As a society we need to stop teaching the folk lore side of things and actually teach the facts because if we keep doing it the way we are a majority of our society is ignorant to the facts. When it comes to the underground railroad it is hard to believe if a town was apart of it or not because it was not a very planned out network it was some people over here and some people over there helping fugitive slaves so I would tend not to believe when a town says they are apart of it. without actual facts to back it up.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology
by [Enya Smith](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 6:39 PM

I've been responding with a lot of statistics the last few posts, but instead of that I'd like to talk about how film can be used in education, even when the facts are absolutely cringe-material.

In 1995, Disney Studios made a terrible decision to make a movie about Native Americans without actually consulting anyone on the historical accuracy of the film. The movie is called [Pocahontas](#), and never in a thousand years would I ever place it in front of a child and say, "Watch this, it is the true history of how we got this country."

See, Pocahontas is a ridiculously historically [inaccurate film](#). For starters, Pocahontas was the nickname of Amonute, who also went by Matoaka, the daughter of Chief Powhatann. This tribe was not small by any means. The tribe reached an estimated 25,000 people in population, but the movie presents the Powhatan tribe as small and defenseless. If that didn't throw you off, this will: Amonute was not a young adult, or even a teenager, when she saved John Smith's life (twice, for his own good and nothing more), she was 12, and she was kidnapped at a young age and forced to assimilate in Europe. She was not happy, she died a poor and miserable life, and the film turns that horror story into a white-washed, happy go lucky film.

It is untrue to say that historically inaccurate films have no place in education. When we acknowledge films are historically inaccurate, we can turn them into food for thought, prompts of research, educational lessons. "Okay, you watched the film on the early wars between Angleo-Americans and Native Americans, now go out there and research the true history." In my experience teaching peers about children's movies, it absolutely blows their mind how much more interested they were in history when they were presented something entertaining and then challenged it's historical accuracy.

Too long, didn't read: We should present historically inaccurate information, but only when we can teach the historical accuracy, as well.

Side note: If we don't talk about how we taught historically inaccurate information, we erase a part of history and the proof that our country once white washed. When you erase history, you erase progress. We must pursue to teacher better, while using the mistakes in the past as an example of what we need to teach better.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology



by [Ha Neul Lee](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 5:17 PM

I also thought the same way about the movie Pocahontas. If you learned American history you know why that movie is a fairy tale fantasy. I think Disney movies try to not tell the bad things about a story and only focus on the good guy and the bad guys. Life is not simple like that you can't be always black/white everytime there are some grey areas as well. However it doesn't matter what you are or how you live its what you think is the right thing to do that matter. I learned that lesson from watching the movie "A Bridge of Spies" a American lawyer who protects a Russian spy with all his heart and his reputation, a Russian spy who refuses to cooperate even to the threat of death. I think thats what we need to show young Americans today.

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falsehoods

by [Levi Savage](#) - Friday, February 1, 2019, 1:58 PM

When people look back on history they try to create a bad guy and a good guy. Especially when it comes to the subject of slavery regarding the underground railroad. when I was in school they taught us that the underground railroad was this vast network abolitionist working together to help slaves escape to the north. after hearing what Professor Blight had to say regarding this "If all of the places that claimed to have been depots or sites on the underground railroad really were sites on the underground railroad slavery wouldn't even of lasted until 1860". From this, we can see a clear and evident attempt by communities along the 36°30' parallel to try and make history sound better then what it really is. To possibly appease some guilty conscience about the past and the role their ancestor could have played in ending this terrible institution of slavery.

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Re: falsehoods

by [Ha Neul Lee](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 5:38 PM

There is a saying that "I live in the worst era of time", many people thought their time in history was the worst and brutal time. That may be true, every thing is a point of view and some people might think that replacing the dark history with something more less shocking and optimistic would make our time of living sound more peaceful. I really can't blame them much because we still hear war heroes from the World Wars or Vietnam and even the middle eastern fronts that people who proclaim themselves were war heroes who would bravely save their injured soldier or shot all of the enemies even in the fear of battle. Sometimes those stories or myths are found out to be lies. I feel shamed of those people but i also feel sorry for those people of what they have been through. War is tough and sometimes PTSD can destroy people forever. Its up to us to decided what we will do when we are in that situation.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Aaron Richards](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 6:11 PM

It is concerning to see how modern senses of morality, pride, and shame alter what version of history we are taught. Academically, I hope that most teachers of history would care more about the facts than the image that seems to be more emphasized. Personally, I try to do as much research on a topic before stating my opinion. To simply be told that something is true and to accept it means that you are a poor student. Historical films by and large are inaccurate at best and purely made up at worst. Cinematography is a business, not an information dispensary. Another thing is that films have been a heavily regulated business. In the 1930s the Production Code was put into effect, limiting what could be shown on film. So the idea of a film being 100% accurate doesn't sound plausible. I find it disappointing that content about a film is put into a historical textbook not focused on the study of cinematography. Textbooks should stick with historical evidence and not romanticized versions of what happened.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Nicolette D Erazo](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 9:15 PM

You make a very good point that just because we are simply told something, doesn't mean we should believe it. When we fall into this pattern, we become the receivers of misinformation and just as David Blight stated about the towns claiming to have participated in the Underground Railroad, passing those fallacies along, it becomes easy to let the truth in history dissolve. I think its important to not trust the word of others who may not be credible sources, in the context of history, but to gain the knowledge for yourself.

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Disappointment in Inaccuracy
by [Nicolette D Erazo](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 8:31 PM

The statements made by professor Foner has brought to my attention the concepts of Hollywood neglecting historical accuracy to make a more entertaining movie for viewers. I find this to be very unnecessary because they are depicting the events that actually occurred in an untruthful light. Foner stated that Debbie Allen, the producer of *Amistad* suggested that historians "suppressed the real history of African Americans and slavery"(HistoryMatters), when in reality it is the opposite. The film *Amistad* failed to represent the true significance of this slavery case. Academically, the fact that this movie was promoted as a teaching mechanism for students in schools makes me question the intent for students receiving facts versus fiction and being able to identify the fallacies when they are presented.

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Identifying Mythology
by [Nicolette D Erazo](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 9:05 PM

I find it interesting that according to David Blight, people of different towns will share historical information that never actually occurred, such as suggesting that a town took part in the Underground Railroad, when in reality they did not. With this type of misinformation being spread, and the fact that the receiver of this information may not be up to date with the historical facts, it is scary that the truth gets lost because people need to feel that events occurred in a certain way to be able deal with them. Its an unsettling thought and I think to be knowledgeable about historical accuracy is important to be mindful of in order to avoid mythology.

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Is it only Hollywood? Final thoughts
by [Ha Neul Lee](#) - Saturday, February 2, 2019, 11:54 PM

I honestly think that people who lie and portray themselves as heroes of certain events are very selfish people. I also can understand why they would do that. Fame equals popularity, respect and money, but its always right to tell the truth or is it? Sometimes its better to not know the truth than to know the real truth. We only look into the past only to learn the mistakes of the ones who came before us and make the future with a better one than they did. Its not our fathers that determine us its what we do that determine the future, die as a hero to not be heard or live as a liar and be told forever its your choice.

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