

HST 202: US History W20 (Escobar)

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Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Joe Escobar](#) - Friday, January 24, 2020, 9:38 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 the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Hollywood History & Mythology

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Interesting but Scary Point by Professor Eric Foner

by [Tanner Hermanson](#) - Saturday, January 25, 2020, 8:57 PM

I do find the thought of the historical truth being kept from me or skewed in some way scary. Anyone can post anything about any topic online and whether it's right or wrong always needs to be further investigated, especially since we now have the resources in order to do so. Eric Foner, in his critique of the movie *Amistad*, makes a very interesting point towards the end of the article about Hollywood and its relationship with American history. He says "Most galling, however, is the assumption that a subject does not exist until it is discovered by Hollywood" (The Amistad Case in Fact and Film by Eric Foner). This to me is a scary thought in that if we are teaching children and young adults through Hollywood, most of that information being taught, is probably fake news or skewed in some way that is not totally accurate with historical events. I am a firm believer that history should be taught by textbook, by looking for books in the library, by visiting places where important events took place, and by only the most credible sources on the internet. The facts are the facts with history and no one should be denied access to the **real** facts of our history as they help us plan for the future and help us shape a better future, where equality is the main focus.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Patryce Miller](#) - Sunday, January 26, 2020, 11:02 PM

I don't care about the Amistad movie to go and see it. The trailer didn't change that and if I was to compare it to the 12 years of a Slave Trailer was much more interesting. It also gave me a lot more information about its movie than the Amistad trailer for its movie. My academically respond to the exaggerations when media form changes to "historically based" Hollywood movies (Amistad) is to not to see it. I can accept a little exaggeration to keep it interesting but with so much "historical problems" as Eric Foner puts it; I don't see a reason to see it. I mean what is the point of seeing something "historically based" if it is not 90-98% true. It will be a waste of money.

I don't even remember what I learned about the Underground Railroad, but it does sound familiar. I think that most of my middle school and elementary history were "basic histories". I mean "basic histories" is that we won't go into detail on topics we touch them then go on. I just remember remembering dates of things that were important to the US like 1492 Columbus sail the ocean blue. It wasn't until High school that we got in-depth about some topics of history.

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I am in agreeance with you

by [Tanner Hermanson](#) - Monday, January 27, 2020, 11:48 PM

I agree with you in that for me also, it is pointless to see a "historically based" movie if it does not depict the events that actually happened in a factual manner. I believe that it is important, even for Hollywood, to fact check as much as possible in order to reenact these major events in American history factually and correctly to the T. Unless you are at the theater to see a documentary that may actually be factual and correct, "Hollywood takes" on historical events are usually manipulated in such a way that people want to come see the movie. It's all about views and sold movie tickets. The drama is exaggerated, the characters speak in language that they would not have in a particular historical time period, events are dramatized. Why? So they can get butts in seats. I personally do not subscribe to the idea of watching a historically inaccurate and dramatized movie, I would rather watch a documentary and know the facts.

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Re: Hollywood History & Mythology

by [Marcus Mantanona](#) - Tuesday, January 28, 2020, 1:49 PM

Students are being taught versions of slavery that is not adequate and is often sanitized. Students are taught heroic stories about figures like Harriet Tubman who helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad, before they are taught the horrors of enslavement and what they went through. When Underground Railroad are taught in classrooms they're taught as it was a full time "farm", or "site" that was ran by a master. That is false, the Underground Railroad were run by black people. In the video by professor David Bright, he mentions how classrooms teach about how we are taught that there are multiple sites/depos that helped slaves escape. He then mentions how if that was the case then slavery wouldn't haven't lasted till 1860. I also observe how in the movie Amistad, which was released in 1997, Africans were speaking Mende with English subtitles. This is not okay, students are being taught the wrong information. Textbooks just skim over surface of slavery. I believe that textbooks should be telling the personal stories of enslaved people, the cruelty they went through, the sexual violence inflicted upon them. In many classroom slavery is taught as something in the past, however slavery still shapes our lives today.

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Historical truth

by [Patryce Miller](#) - Tuesday, January 28, 2020, 10:03 PM

I won't be concerned if the historical truth has been kept from me by spreading/persistent mythology (depending on if it is old mythology or a new one). If it is old mythology then it probably got transform down the generation. So it was an accident and not on purpose. Even so, it is still made of truth. If it is a new one (like 10-years-old) or outright manipulated then I would be concerned cause I would know if someone trying to hide something and I want to know why they are lying to me.

We already have a biases History in the world as the old saying goes "History is written by the winners" but every day we find something new in history to make it fewer biases in our History. If someone hides History truth because they don't like it then I am outrage. They are lying to everyone and are disrespecting the people that made things right, or that did those because they believe in it. Either way, they are erasing those people's lives and efforts. I will not stand for that. Besides, how can we stop ourselves and those around us from making a similar mistake as the people of the past if we don't know what they are?

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Sugar coated history

by [Ailah Altemus](#) - Wednesday, January 29, 2020, 8:22 PM

The decision of our textbook authors to promote the movie Amistad was undoubtedly poor. I'm still unsure why they decided to choose it, but as Professor Bright said about the "mythology" of the underground railroad, "it is a passage into our understanding of slavery that is sometimes gentler and more savory than it is to look at slavery itself." I think the same idea can be applied to the movie Amistad.

Eric Foner further solidified my point by saying "*Amistad's* black characters are essentially foils for white self-discovery and moral growth," in his critique of the movie. My interpretation of movies like Amistad, and false claims of underground railroad sights, are people trying to avoid any guilt or shame they might carry about the history of slavery. People don't like to look back at the bad parts of history because we'd like to look back at our country in a positive light. Because of this we emphasize or dramatize how white people helped slaves, instead of looking at the real history where most white people were nither heroes or villains but could be better described as bystanders to slavery.

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A Thought On The Underground Railroad

by [Tanner Hermanson](#) - Wednesday, January 29, 2020, 9:13 PM

There is a ton of fact and fiction that surrounds the Underground Railroad and how this so-called 'network' worked. The Underground Railroad is typically considered a northern white abolitionist run 'network' of houses and 'stations' and 'station masters,' however, this is just simply not the case as Professor David Blight mentions. "Most of the people who "worked" in the Underground Railroad were black, not white...and these were loosely connected networks of fugitive slave escape" (Professor Davide Blight, Underground RR Video). While there have been many places in the border states that divide the north and south of old that have been proven to be parts of the Underground Railroad "network," there are also many places that have very little or no evidence of being a safe house for slaves on the Underground Railroad, that claim that they are. These places rely on the folklore of previous generations to prove their place in history. Over generations, the Underground Railroad has essentially become just mythology with only a few select places and people that have been proven to be a part of this great escape of fugitive slaves from the south to the north. Near the end of Professor Blight's remarks, he brings up an interesting thought in that "if all of the places that claimed to be depots or sights on the Underground Railroad, and really were sights on the Underground Railroad, then slavery wouldn't even have lasted until 1860" (Underground RR Video). Professor Blight is essentially calling out some places that claim to be important stops on the Underground Railroad, as fake and that if there were truly that many safe houses or places, slavery wouldn't have been practiced for as long as it was. At least in my early schooling experience, I was taught the first version of the Underground Railroad that I mentioned above, instead of Professor David Blight's *real* version of what actually occurred. It is truly unfortunate that some of us have been and are being taught the wrong version of a story that is so important in the abolition of a horrible practice in our nation's history. Slavery and the Underground Railroad should be taught through the lives and experiences of those affected and of those involved rather than dramatized heroism, which I will address in my next post.

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Hollywood's effect on historical perception.

by [Leon Bohmer](#) - Wednesday, January 29, 2020, 11:02 PM

When a movie is produced that wraps itself in the guise of 'historical accuracy' I treat them, in most cases, as a comedy; something to be watched, enjoyed, and then forgotten. I do this because these Hollywood movies are not produced, to educate, but rather to earn a profit. To this end, a movie based on historical reality will not take the time or effort to portray the event or time period accurately. Instead, preying upon popular notions and generalizations, the movie attempts to reach the broadest demographic possible, thus earning greater ticket sales.

Eric Foner gives a great example a movie pandering to its audience in his review of Amistad. In the movie the mutineering Africans speak Mende, a West African language, that was then subtitled. The movie, however, was being marketed to an American audience, an audience that does not like to read subtitles. Most of the scenes, therefore, in which the Mutineers speak were cut in the final edit, to better adhere to the preferences of American audiences. As a result the Africans, which the movie revolves around, are rarely heard from, reduced to a mere wal dressing.(The Amistad Case in Film and Fact, by Eric Foner, par.4)

It is this money first attitude prevalent in Hollywood's 'historically accurate' movies that leads to the half-truths, oversimplifications, and outright false information that plague movies of a historical ilk.

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Part of the underground railroad

by [Patryce Miller](#) - Thursday, January 30, 2020, 11:00 PM

I won't unless they prove it. Professor Blight stated, "if all the places claims yo be depots or sight on the underground railroad really were sights on the underground railroad, slavery would have even lasted until 1860"(video underground railroad 3:00). Which tell me that more than half are the towns or places are lying. It also tells me that the north don't really care about the slave So I want some kind of truth that it was them. For example where the slave came from where did they go? I they can't tell me hat information. The there the part were Professor Blight claims that the "people in north need to believe in, because so many northern communities wanted to believe that the was a sight or[sights] in their community...that help fugitive slave escape"(video underground railroad 2:52). It tells me that I can't trust the north when it the underground railroad.

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Amistad in Teaching Today

by [Phoebe Fergus](#) - Thursday, January 30, 2020, 11:53 PM

Although I do not personally think it is fair for people to be too upset about the movie "Amistad", I also don't think it's fair to use it as a way to explain true events.

The earlier editions of the textbook make the movie out to be very accurate and of great significance to learning this part of history by praising the movie in their review (Textbook, 6th edition), even though the movie is not an accurate depiction.

However, "Amistad" is marketed as historical fiction, which means that it is not going to explain events the exact way it happened, which I feel is fine. Still, I do not think it is okay to be showing this movie in schools, involving it in textbooks, or showing it to students during class time as a teaching of history.

Froner explains all of the inaccuracies he noticed throughout the movie such as, President Martin Van Buren's campaign for reelection, the Supreme Court being in favor of the abolitionists, and so on (Eric Foner Amistad Review). Even though he points out that many things are historically incorrect, I feel that that is okay as long as they are marketed as such, and not used to learn the true history.

I believe that it is important to always teach historical truths, even if they are hard to swallow. The interview about The Underground Railroad with Professor David Blight did a good job at touching base with the freeing of slaves and what it took instead of sugarcoating the story. It was not as easy as the Supreme Court simply deciding that slaves should be freed (Eric Foner Amistad Review), but that if there were as many people and places helping to free slaves as we originally thought, we wouldn't have had slavery in 1860 (Underground Railroad David Blight Video, 3:18 minute mark). Even with this, Professor Blight makes some very good points, but does still point out the myths and folklore of the underground railroad, and how we know it today.

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The underground railroad

by [Ailah Altemus](#) - Friday, January 31, 2020, 8:58 PM

The underground railroad is undoubtedly a major event in US history. However, false claims to be part of the underground railroad baffle me, and further strengthen the argument I made in my last forum post. That this sort of, for lack of a better term, white guilt, can lead to false history. As Professor David Blight said in the underground railroad video, "The underground railroad in action was a loosely connected network of weigh stations across the border state regions of the united states." despite this information when I, as well as many Americans, think of the underground railroad, I think of a carefully curated network of workers who's main job and priority was to help migrating slaves. As a matter of fact, when we look at history this was not the case at all. Due to this "white guilt" that I have been arguing, our vision of the underground railroad has been skewed, and things like fake underground railroad sights are unfortunately things we have to deal with.

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Re: The underground railroad

by [Phoebe Fergus](#) - Saturday, February 1, 2020, 11:49 PM

Hi Ailah! I liked how well you summed up how you feel about the teaching of the underground railroad. I fully agree that it should not be taken advantage of, in a sense of who the places/people were that were helping slaves. I was curious on your opinion of the Amistad trailer and reviews? What did you think of reviews of the movie being put into the previous editions of the textbook? Especially now that they've removed it from ours? I believe that if they felt the need to remove the reviews from the newer editions of our textbook, it definitely should not have been in the textbooks in the first place.

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Dramaticized Heroism and Innaccuracy in the Portrayal of Slavery

by [Tanner Hermanson](#) - Saturday, February 1, 2020, 12:46 AM

In schools all over the country, students are being taught about slavery through dramatized heroism in that our history lessons of slavery seem to be gentler and very sanitized. We are afraid to tell the full story to our future generations. Slaves were whipped, beaten, raped, and sometimes slaves had to whip other slaves. Needless to say, they were not treated with any sort of respect as human beings. However, this does not get taught in numerous school districts and classes due to slavery being the blood-soaked bedrock in which the United States was built on at that time. In regards to the Underground Railroad, Professor Bright makes an interesting point that furthers this concept of covering up the gruesome parts of slavery by mentioning that the "mythology" of the Underground Railroad "is a passage into our understanding of slavery that is sometimes gentler and more savory than it is to look at slavery itself." The sheer inhumanity of slavery is not taught in many schools due to the fact that it is a hard piece of history to comprehend and talk about for many. It is especially hard I think at least for teachers to talk about the foundation of white supremacy that slavery was built on. Moreover, it is hard to teach kids, who live in a society where slavery has long since been condemned as malpractice, about the people who believed in and abided by the laws of slavery. Lastly, I believe that many teachers of European descent believe that it is quite embarrassing to teach about a time in history in which people of color were exploited, abused, and heavily discriminated against by people who were of European descent as well. Slavery was not just a southern problem, it was a national problem and it was not all about the glorious heroes who escaped to freedom and helped others escape to freedom, no, it was about the deprivation of personal liberty that was brought to people of color by white, European immigrants. We need to teach our future generations the truth about slavery and not fabricate the truth in any way, no matter how hard it may be.

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New and Old Information

by [Beth Trower](#) - Saturday, February 1, 2020, 7:07 PM

For me, it is frustrating to see information not being shared correctly because the information is inaccurate or not easily accessible. It's even worse when it comes to a very clearly black and white issue, except that there are different interpretations of said black and white event and it becomes so much more complicated than it needs to be. This particularly applies to new information regarding an event.

As time goes on, newer editions of books are made and most of the time, those editions are better than the previous one. However, this isn't always the case, and my frustration stems from those editions that aren't really an edition at all.

Case in point: the "Enhanced 7th Edition" of our textbook. While replacing the review was necessary, I don't understand why they would keep old information that is inaccurate and doesn't serve its purpose anymore.

Presenting all the facts of a situation, or in our case, historic events, is very important, but keeping redundant or old information for the sake of record-keeping in an edition that is meant as an update makes no sense to me.

Those are my thoughts. What about you guys?

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Academia vs Entertainment

by [Alexander Marx](#) - Saturday, February 1, 2020, 7:55 PM

When it comes to the entertainment industry and historical films, there should be an understanding that the number one goal is pretty much always going to be ticket sales. With this understanding in mind, it makes sense for certain filmmakers to portray historical inaccuracies in order to have a more cohesive or interesting plot with the intention of being more enjoyable to watch. As we saw in class on Thursday with 2004's *The Alamo*, putting in the time and effort to make a movie historically accurate can result in a film that gets negative reception from critics for being slow and boring and the film can be quickly forgotten. That being said, there would be no issue with hollywoodifying historical events for entertainment purposes if everyone took it for what it was, entertainment, and put in the effort of critical thinking and independent research. Unfortunately this is not the case.

Eric Foner outlines one of the key issues with historically inaccurate films in his review article of *Amistad*, where the flawed historical depictions are used as an educational tool. Teachers are encouraged to use the film and an included study guide to teach about slavery which Foner criticizes due to the flawed history and the fact that there are much better resources available. This well represents the dangers of manipulating history in movies for entertainments' sake.

With *Amistad* focusing more on the white characters' development than anything else, and Professor Blight's explanation of the Underground Railroad mythos being used as a way to "lighten up" history and to allow white people to give themselves a sort of pat on the back, the seemingly innocent act of doctoring up history to make it more interesting or appealing for entertainment purposes gets extremely problematic when the entertainment crosses the line into academia.

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Amistad + Final Thoughts

by [Tanner Hermanson](#) - Saturday, February 1, 2020, 9:20 PM

Manipulating history for more entertaining movie plot lines can be very dangerous if people do not do their research or fact check these movies after watching them, which most people don't. When a movie mentions that it's based on historical events, that can lead people to believe that the movie is accurately depicting these events, which in most Hollywood renditions, is just not the case. In class Tuesday I believe, Joe showed us a poster that was made for teachers about the historically inaccurate movie, *Amistad*. On the back of the poster were some worksheets for teachers to pass out to students to work on so that they would invest their attention towards the movie. I understand that this is the easier way to teach a lesson on slavery for a teacher, however, is it the right way? I think not. As Eric Foner mentions in his movie review of *Amistad*, the movie focuses more so on the development of the white characters in the movie instead of focusing on the black slaves, whose freedom was literally resting in the balance on a court case decision, *The United States vs The Amistad*. The movie appears to sugar coat how slaves were treated back then and almost seems to give the white folks a free pass for the events that occurred. In order to fully understand the concept of slavery, students need to watch historically accurate documentaries or movies on the topic. On the other hand, a movie that showed the truth about how people of color were treated would most likely not be shown in most schools, due to violence and obscene language. Nonetheless, it is important that students understand how it really was back then and how times have changed since then.

My bottom line on this topic is that manipulating history in any way, shape, or form is wrong, however, when these movies are shown for entertainment, I believe that is acceptable. However, on the other hand, when these historically inaccurate films are shown in the classroom, that is where the line in the sand needs to be drawn. Teachers need to understand the implications of showing these historically inaccurate films to students and that even the darkest sides and stories of slavery need to be told in order for students to grasp the concept of what being a person of color in the 1800s was truly like.

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changed content

by [Patryce Miller](#) - Saturday, February 1, 2020, 11:00 PM

If the authors of my textbook changed the content based on the release of a new Hollywood movie, and that movie is not accurate. Then I will wonder If I can trust them at all whether to teach/read it. I will also ask my self if there is any other content in the textbook that could have changed not just with movies. I mean did the author watch or read the reviews of the movie by other Historian like Eric Foner? who state's " *Amistad* presents a highly misleading account of the case's historical significance"(article on Amistad). This person who is one of the most if not the most knowledgeable historian about this part of history. So why did they recommended that same movie?

Anyways I will write to the authors about my concerns and if it was changed I will keep using their books, but if they don't I will you a different textbook about the same time of history. I will use my textbook now and then after I fact check it to see if it is correct or not.

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