

History 205 – The Americas

For this assignment, you are required to assess the historical accuracy of a film that is based on or around historical events. In order to do so, you are required to draw on a variety of resources to determine a film's historical authenticity. You can use critical reviews of the film, as well as primary or secondary sources about the particular events.

SEARCH TERMS FOR LOCATING CRITICAL INFORMATION ON FILMS

It is relatively easy to locate reviews of films, whether they are located in the library (in electronic or print formats) or through the World Wide Web. In either instance, you will need to employ a series of terms that will help you locate the materials.

Keywords that you should consider employing to locate general sources include:

- ~ film
- ~ "motion picture"
- ~ cinema
- ~ "feature film"
- ~ movie
- ~ flick
- ~ specify the name of your film (i.e., *Apocalypto*, *The Black Robe*, etc.)

The preceding terms can be paired with the following terms to help you narrow your search:

- ~ review
- ~ critique
- ~ critic
- ~ commentary
- ~ evaluation
- ~ history/historic
- ~ authenticity
- ~ inaccuracies

It is important to note that there is more than one way to describe anything, so mix and match your terms to yield the best possible search results.

In the Library's online catalogue (<http://darius.uleth.ca/search~S2>), use the word AND to connect terms from one list to another when employing a keyword search to find print resources in the Library.

If you cannot find enough information in the library's print resources, use one of the databases/online periodical indexes (<http://www.mhc.ab.ca/library/databases/>). Databases that you might want to use include:

- ~ any under the *General/Multidisciplinary*
- ~ any under the *History* headings
- ~ *Art Full Text and Film & Television Literature Index with Full Text* databases (under the *Fine Arts* heading)
- ~ *MLA International Bibliography* (under the *English (Language & Literature)* heading)

You might need to use the Interlibrary Loan Service (http://darius.uleth.ca/screens/illreq_s2.html) to order articles that are not full-text in the database or library.

Online search engines (e.g., A9, Google, Yahoo, etc.) do not require you to use AND to connect terms – those search tools assume that for you.

SEARCHING FOR HISTORICAL RESOURCES

All the movies in this particular assignment are centered in the midst of historical events. If you are unfamiliar with the general events of a particular era, consider employing a bibliographic dictionary (“Who’s Who” books), chronologies, or encyclopedias. From these types of sources, principle events, movements, and figures in particular eras can become more apparent.

Regardless of the search tool you employ, whether it is the Library’s online catalogue, databases or Web search engines, you will need to locate historical resources to subjectively evaluate the accuracy of the films that you are viewing.

You should consider the characters and events that are depicted or mentioned in the film – context is all-important. Some names that some of you might consider employing include:

- ~ Christopher Columbus
- ~ John Smith
- ~ Pocahontas
- ~ Jesuits
- ~ Queen Isabella/King Ferdinand
- ~ Charles Cornwallis

Also consider employing geographic or event names, either singularly or in combination with a historic figure, to help define the dates and events mention in the films. Some terms for events that you could employ include:

- ~ Canada (missionaries)
- ~ American Revolution/American War of Independence (1775-1783)
- ~ 17th century history (1600s)
- ~ South America (slave trade/slavery)
- ~ 19th century history (1800s)
- ~ Spain (exploration)
- ~ Portugal (slavery)
- ~ Maya (history)

PHRASE SEARCHING

Phrase searching allows you to look for very specific information. By putting a series of words between quotation marks, a search tool (such as the Library’s online catalogue or Google) will look for that particular set of words.

- ~ “The New World”
- ~ “Christopher Columbus: The Discovery”
- ~ “1492: Conquest of Paradise”

BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY’S CIRCULATING COLLECTION

Barta, T. (Ed.). (1998). *Screening the past: Film and the representation of history*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Carnes, M. C., Mico, T., Miller-Monzon, J., & Rubel, D. (Eds). (1995). *Past imperfect: History according to movies*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Rosenstone, R. A. (1995). *Visions of the past: The challenge of film to our idea of history*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rosenthal, A. (Ed.). (1999). *Why docudrama? Fact-fiction on film and tv*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Wilson, W. S., & Herman, G. H. (2002). *American history on the screen: Film and video resource*. Portland, ME: J. Weston Walch.

BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY'S REFERENCE COLLECTION

Collins, P. C. (Ed.). (2003). *The Columbia companion to American history on film: How the movies have portrayed the American past*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Film review annual. (1982-2002). Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer.

WEBSITES FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Film Review Sites:

The Movie Review Query Engine

<http://www.mrqe.com>

This website can connect you to thousands of online movie reviews.

Rotten Tomatoes

<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>

This website contains brief reviews for both television and feature films.

EfilmCritic.com

<http://www.efilmcritic.com/>

News and reviews on films.

RogerEbert.com, Movies & More

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com>

Film reviews from one of the masters in the field.

ReelViews

<http://www.reelviews.net>

Some thoughtful movie reviews by independent reviewer, James Berardinelli.

Film & History Sites:

Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies

<http://www.uwosh.edu/filmandhistory/>

Browse the table of contents of this journal that deals with media and its portrayal of history.

Film Literature Index

<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/fli/index.jsp>

Film Literature Index is an open access database containing citations to film and television literature from 150 periodical titles. You will order most of the material found in this database via the library's Interlibrary Loans Service.

Film as Social and Cultural History

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film/socialhist.html>

Film Studies: UC Berkeley Library: Film Reviews and Film Criticism: An Introduction

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/filmstudies/filmreviewsintro.html>

Internet Movie Database

<http://www.imdb.com>

Browse the "goofs" and "trivia" sections of a film's entry. You might find some insights into where a film might have erred in its factual content. It is advisable to find print resource to confirm this.

History in the Movies

<http://www.stfrancis.edu/historyinthemovies/index.htm>

History in the Movies is a collection of mini-essays and linked resources about history and film.

Motion Pictures – Movies – Film

<http://www.teacheroz.com/movies.htm>

This page contains a large list of linked resources to film sites.

Search Engines

<http://www.google.com> (OR <http://scholar.google.ca>); <http://www.yahoo.com>; <http://www.a9.com/>

Try these search engines using the title of you film and the phrase “historical inaccuracies” (or some variation of that phrase). Each search engine will yield different results so try different terms in different engines for the best results.

Thinking about Historical Film: Is it Worth the Trouble?

<http://www.crusades-encyclopedia.com/thinkingabouthistoricalfilm.html>

DVD/BLU-RAY BONUSES, OPTIONS, & SPECIAL FEATURES

If you have a DVD or Blu-ray edition of the film, take a look at the bonuses, options, or special features sections. Sometimes these features will include additional information about the production. Additional information might include things such as costume design, historical contexts, language, settings, etc. You might get additional insight into how, if at all, the production tried to remain faithful to history from either of these types.

Additionally, try listening to the production commentaries. Sometimes members of the production team (e.g., actors, director, writers, producers, etc.) might contribute to the running commentaries. The commentaries are under the bonuses or options setups. The commentators will provide voiceover analysis and insights into the production. It might be possible to glean some insight into what decisions were made with regard to history either being salvaged or sacrificed for the sake of production.