

## Teaching American history through film: Hollywood blockbuster, PBS, History Channel, or the Postmodern?

RICHARD A. VOELTZ

*Department of History and Government, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505 <richardv@cameron.edu>*

---

Let's be blunt and admit it: historical films trouble and disturb professional historians.  
Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 1995, p. 43.

I think many historians come at filmmakers with an attitude and with hostility.  
It's as though history is their territory, and we don't belong.  
Oliver Stone, 'Past Imperfect', *Cineaste*, 1996, p. 31.

Why, may I ask, devote an entire issue to film when there are serious issues to discuss?...  
In the future, please try to be serious.<sup>1</sup>

I probably use historians the way most directors use them: I tend to use people who are well  
versed in historical details, very specifically in the details, but not in the big picture.  
You ring people up and ask whether there were phone booths in 1920.  
John Sayles, *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, 1996, p. 18.

In the spring semester of 2009 the department chair asked me to teach a course that had been in the catalog for a number of years but had not been taught recently. (If truth be known he had in fact put the course in the catalog—his course.) He thought that the course would attract non-majors thus increasing the all important FTE. The title was *American History Through Film* which has the following lengthy catalog description: "This course will provide a broad overview of American history using films as vehicles for in-depth examination and discussion of important eras, people, and events. Students will watch and discuss films in class, conduct research into the making of each film and its historical accuracy, and write interpretive research papers on broad historical themes discussed in class."<sup>2</sup> It certainly sounded ambitious and admirable. The Chair selected me to teach the course based upon my publications in the area of film and history and the fact that I had previously taught special topic courses in the areas of European history and film and South African history and film. I utilize film in all my classes and wrote an article dealing with using film as a teaching device in a Renaissance and Reformation class.<sup>3</sup> Teaching American history using film is common enough in universities, colleges, community colleges, and high schools. And here for the completely uninitiated film means "Hollywood", not PBS, the History Channel, or Films for the Humanities & Sciences. There exist numerous study guides and websites designed to lead the instructor of such courses to the appropriate films for each period in American history.<sup>4</sup> Instructors of such courses at other institutions have their course material and syllabi online.<sup>5</sup> With my background in history and film the prospect of

teaching such a course intrigued me—even though it meant four different preparations that semester. But as I started to prepare the course I found myself confronted by a dilemma: What sort of course in American history and film should this be? The course title and description implied a slavish adherence to pounding through all of American history from *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) through John Wayne's *Alamo* (1960) to Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991). Images and memories from my early teaching career of high school coaches uncritically playing *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) or *Midway* (1976) endlessly threaded through my mind. Yet the course was not really designed to be a history of cinema, American cinema, or even of Hollywood. Concentrating on one era of American history easily presented itself with canned texts containing commentary, reviews, and sources for each film used.<sup>6</sup> Concentrating upon a particular subject, Native Americans, African Americans, war movies, World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam, the Sixties, et al. or even a single director such as Oliver Stone, all crossed my mind, but I found this approach too limiting and not in the spirit of the course description. But overriding everything else was my desire to provide an overview of an increasingly popular, important, and contested subject: film and history. Going beyond using films as historical evidence, I wanted to address the issue of whether Hollywood historical films—traditionally sneered at by some historians but by no means all—make good as well as bad history. Are historical dramas—the now accepted genre of "Faction"—more useful in teaching history than "talking head" documentaries? How do filmmakers, promoters, viewers, students, and scholars understand film as history?<sup>7</sup>

Whether historical films make good or bad history really does matter. There is an old saying about history with different phrasings—and I am not sure who said it first: “There is the history that happened, there is the history that historians create, and then there is the history that people believe.” And that history increasingly comes from films and television programs. In the US-based “Presence of the Past” survey 81% of the 1500 people interviewed in Australia (American examples would be too obvious and easy) indicated that they had watched films or television programs about the past in the previous year. The number of people engaged in that activity was second only to taking or looking at photographs and much higher than the number of people who read books about the past (53%) or who participated in a group devoted to studying, preserving or presenting the past (20%). Moreover, respondents registered a stronger connection with the past when they watched films and television than when they studied history in school. This should hardly come as surprising for anyone teaching history, and remember these are people who are at least marginally interested in the past. What about those who just tune out the History Channel or PBS and do not subscribe to the History Book Club? In the “Australians and the Past” project, one respondent stated: “On a monthly basis I can see documentaries on the Second World War....History has come out of the little box it was in (in) primary school. I feel connected to the past all the time.”<sup>8</sup> Similar results have been reported from other countries. So while the History Channel offers up popular stories on military hardware, “Nazis and more Nazis all the time, 24-7,” and now “Ice Road Truckers,” this same survey surprisingly reveal that people in fact trust books, academic historians, and museums more than historical films and television programs.<sup>9</sup> But trust does not translate into belief, even if it aids in that translation. So trust seems to promote ambivalence. In a postmodern sense has the visual popularity and celebrity of film and television been unconsciously translated into what people call historical knowledge? Or have professional historians simply failed to compete with or respect popular history makers who try to make the past more relevant to the present?<sup>10</sup>

Keeping the above attitudes, questions, and goals in mind, I carefully crafted course objectives that focused on film and history without doing serious damage to the American History Through Film title and description. Firstly, students in this class gained an understanding of some of the major historical events and cultural issues in American history. Secondly, students understood how to read films as cultural texts that open up a window into American history. Thirdly, students learned how to use popular American films to understand competing perspectives on American history, race, culture, national identity, and society, exposing the fault lines between national myths and the historical experience of people typically excluded from those myths. Fourthly, students

understood the interaction and conflict between Hollywood filmmaking and historical scholarship that leads to a long overdue and sober demystification of Hollywood-made history. Fifthly, students gained new perspectives on how films made in the past fifteen years—the post-cold war period of Hollywood historical films—have sought to re-picture and mediate American history for a globally focused Hollywood film industry. Finally, the cumulative effect of all this increased the students’ understanding of the medium of film in portraying history and to stimulate the imagination as to how it can and how it should not be used by addressing a number of central questions about how history is depicted in film: What is lost and what is gained in portraying history through film? How do filmmakers and historians negotiate the tension between accuracy and truth? Some films can be accurate, even meticulous, about historical detail, events, and personalities, yet totally lack any larger insight or truth about the past. Can creative imagination actually enhance a fundamental understanding of the past? Do films, which are capable of not only capturing, but also recreating the emotion of historical events, serve our understanding of the past? Does cinema embody the autobiographies of the scriptwriters and filmmakers more than those of the historical characters portrayed?<sup>11</sup> And most crucially, what do audiences actually experience when watching “history on film?”

I selected texts for this course based upon their support of the course objectives. The books by Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, and McCrisken and Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Film* work well together as critical texts because they take issue with one another.<sup>12</sup> Burgoyne examines a number of Hollywood films that “rearticulate the cultural narrative that defines the American nation;” that they seek “to recover a different meaning for the past, a message that will validate the increasingly hybrid and poly-cultural reality of American life.”<sup>13</sup> (He unfortunately uses a lot of “lit-crit” jargon and theory that most history majors and history professors find off-putting. But historians stubbornly continue to believe that they can still be film critics without adhering to postmodern theory.) McCrisken and Pepper on the other hand are not as optimistic as Burgoyne, seeing many recent historical films as promising revision but remaining “preoccupied with constructing and securing some kind of imaginary affirmative narratives of national and global reconciliation.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, “...films are products of what is now a vast global entertainment industry” and “‘affirmative’ and ‘optimistic’ films tend, in the current climate, to have a greater mass appeal than ‘complex’ or ‘difficult’ ones.”<sup>15</sup> Students in the class were required to write an essay comparing the two arguments. Other texts included Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor, Eds, *Why We Fought* and Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History*. Timothy Corrigan’s much used *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* was an optional, recommended text.<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of *Why We*

*Fought* meant the inclusion of a number of war films, including *Sergeant York* (1941) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Alamo* (1960) and the 2004 remake of the same name, and *Glory* (1989). In an age of DVDs, TCM, satellite dishes, and the Internet, Toplin attempts to address the ambivalence of why the public gets its history from film and television, yet most remain skeptical about the message they receive. While skepticism about Hollywood can be healthy, Toplin believes that Hollywood historical films have been unfairly denigrated by historians.

In order for the students to fully encounter the relationship between film and history, I assigned four film reviews in which they critically analyzed how films might exemplify the larger cultural and social issues in American history and how well the film functions as a depiction of history. They also received specific guidelines on how to judge an historical film and/or a war movie. What historical myths and misconceptions does the film convey? In spite of historical inaccuracies, does the film still convey certain truths about the past? In dealing with war films different questions are in order. These films provide a window into the complexities of group interaction, the strains of combat and command, and the intricate ways people cope with fear and mortality. I allowed them to use any film with an American historical theme, not just the films shown in class. As mentioned earlier, students in the class had to write an essay comparing *Film Nation* and *American History and Contemporary Film*. In addition they had to write on two of the articles in *Why We Fought* that did not include films used in their reviews. Finally, they had the option of writing another film review or addressing the question, “What is lost and what is gained in portraying history through film?” Presumably this summation would be based upon the analysis done in the four historical film reviews. The screening of entire films always presents a problem even for a class that is two and one-half hours long. The classroom communal experience of viewing a film—even if not as comfortable as the local Cineplex—should be a part of the experience as it at least recalls the communal setting in which many of the films were originally viewed. But today many viewers only know films from DVD’s, Internet downloads, or cable television, so using judicious clips from a number of films also works well. I also discovered that with the easy availability of films on DVD, from Netflix, or the Internet, I did not have to worry about stockpiling films on reserve in the library. Films shown in class, either in their entirety or selective clips, were *Revolution* (1985), *The Alamo* (1960, 2004), *Glory*, *Sergeant York*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Salt of the Earth* (1954), *Dr. Strangelove*, *JFK*, *Born of the Fourth of July*, *The Hurricane*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Thunderheart*, *Dances with Wolves*, *Forrest Gump*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Gunner’s Palace*, *Saving Jessica Lynch*, *American Beauty*, *Titanic* (1997), and *Walker* (1987). Hopefully, the overall experience will allow students to not only confront the problem of a film’s importance as a

signifier of influence or reflective meaning, but also appreciate how a film can in fact convey an historical meaning as valid on its own as anything that a historian writes in a book or delivers in a lecture.

Oliver Stone, known for his controversial “historical” films such as *JFK* and *Nixon* (1995) and who actually showed up at an American Historical Association session, makes it clear about the relationship between facts, historians, and filmmaking. Speaking of *Nixon*, Stone wrote, “As far as facts go, I used them as best I could, but the truth is, you can’t use them all. You are forced to omit some. And any honest historian will tell you that he does that, too.”<sup>17</sup> Not afraid of polemics, Stone mercilessly strafes historians and their pretensions in so snarky a tone that it deserves full quotation:

Let’s face it—any historian knows that jealousy plays a huge factor in human affairs. We’re especially vulnerable here in Hollywood to a public fantasy business that is fodder for the media. The outside world thinks of us all as rich and irresponsible. But the truth is, many of us work long hours (60 to 80-hour weeks for some directors) and are harried by the pressure to make films pleasing to large audiences within an expensive financial structure. I think many historians, whether they know it or not, are equally subject to this jealousy, and, thinking that history is their territory only, they come at filmmakers with an attitude of hostility. To them we pervert the paradigm with emotion, sentimentality, and so on. But historians exhibit much pomposity when they think that they alone are in custody of the “facts”, and they take it upon themselves to guard “the truth” as zealously as the chief priests of ancient Egypt; the prophesies must belong to them and them alone. I don’t think anyone who knows of the jealousies extant in any cerebral profession, be it history or filmmaking, will question the petty infighting that results each year for prizes, awards, and tenure—all at the expense of true investigation or creation.

American historians want respectability. They want prizes. Many simply don’t want to rock the academic boat. And some fear that if they take a chance, they will be assassinated in *The New York Review of Books* by another trophy-hunting historian. It seems that the only people left who take chances are dramatists who are willing to undertake a deconstruction of history and question given realities.<sup>18</sup>

Ouch! While clearly an overgeneralization about the historical craft, it still does resonate, even if he does not provide a specific example. That doyen of American historians and a former member of the editorial board of the journal *Film & History*, the late Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., worried about the impact on the unsuspecting young: “But artists have fantasies,

too, to which they are often hopelessly loyal—and their fantasies often hopelessly abuse the truth. Virtual history is not enough. The impact of *JFK* on the unwary young, born long after the events and remote from the atmosphere of the time, should not be underrated. Too many seem to think that Stone is telling it as it was.”<sup>19</sup> And then I hope that high school and college history teachers do at least tell it as Leopold von Ranke said “wie es eigentlich gewesen,” “how it essentially was.” Commentator George Will, while not a historian, but a political science Ph.D, labeled Stone “an intellectual sociopath, indifferent to truth,” and stated that by combining “moral arrogance and historical ignorance”, had produced a film (*JFK*) of “execrable history and contemptible citizenship.”<sup>20</sup> Whereas film critic Roger Ebert cheerfully termed the film “hypnotically watchable,” calling it a “masterpiece of film assembly.”<sup>21</sup> Memory and images are never pure and unchanging texts. As most scholars of film and history argue, history is never settled and stable but open to recurring interpretation and reinterpretation. As McCrisken and Pepper conclude, “Oliver Stone, perhaps more than any other contemporary writer and director, is engaging with American history in ways that make manifest its ultimately unknowable nature.”<sup>22</sup> The style of his films is ambivalent and shifting, just as is historical interpretation. “I make people aware that they are watching a movie. I make them aware that reality itself is in question.”<sup>23</sup> In short he wants to play with your mind.

To conclude the course I utilize Toplin’s *Reel History*, clips from *Titanic*, and *Walker*. James Cameron’s 1997 *Titanic* presents what seems to be a sitting duck for those who blister Hollywood historical myth making. “High tech, low-brain, big-budget”, an example of “Kindergarten Marxism” that has heroic passengers in steerage and effete snobs in first class open the salvo of criticism, that continues with the corny dialog (the screen play was not the strong point of the film), the Jack-Rose-Cal triangle, “while the scenes of Jack and Rose splashing around in Twenty-eight degree water with no signs of hypothermia are hardly believable.”<sup>24</sup> Entire websites are devoted to the listing of historical errors in the film.<sup>25</sup> And to top it all off, anecdotal evidence indicates that the huge record-breaking box office earned by the film was attributable to teen-age girls making multiple trips to the movie because of the sexual, but comforting, and non-threatening, Leonardo DiCaprio as Jack, with his dreamy death in the end. The fact remains however that the film just did not have a couple of big weekends, rather it stayed at the top week after week. Toplin counters the historical fact checkers by arguing that *Titanic* is a “memorable historical film:”

Cameron’s movie communicates a sense of what some historians call “the pastness of the past.” It transports audiences to another era and, with careful attention to detail, gives them a sense that they are witnesses to the

tragic journey. Cameron bombards viewers with genuine-looking images from the past—from vintage clothing to silver ashtrays of the White Star Line and 18,000 square feet of authentic looking carpet....The technical tricks effectively communicate a picture of an extraordinary calamity. *New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin summed up the achievement succinctly when she wrote, ‘Astonishing technological advances are at work here, but only in the service of one spectacular illusion: that the ship is afloat again, and that the audience is ultimately involved in its voyage.’....*Titanic* is “true” in many important respects. It effectively identifies many of the important factors that explain the disaster at sea. It raises significant questions about the confining role of upper-class women in Edwardian society and offers a provocative criticism of class-mindedness in that period. The film also presents its story on a marvelous set that glitters with detail. On many counts, *Titanic* delivers a thoughtful perspective on the past.<sup>26</sup>

As well as some memorable lines in a generally weak script as when Bruce Ismay, owner of the White Star Line, contends that, “This ship cannot sink!”, to which Mr. Andrews, the designer, says, “It is made of iron, I assure you it can.” Or when a sailor in a lifeboat warns Molly Brown not to even think about going back to rescue passengers, “We are in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, do you want to live or do you want to die!” Such quotations may define the experience of the real *Titanic* disaster for generations. Toplin concludes that both “traditional-minded enthusiasts” of history as well as narrowly focused students of film studies both fail to adequately address the contributions of Hollywood cinematic historians. The former “demonstrate little understanding of the different rules under which Hollywood filmmakers operate,” while the latter “look askance at the historians’ interest in finding important elements of historical understanding in Hollywood dramas.” Only with real understanding can these contributions be appreciated and judged.<sup>27</sup>

The course concludes with the film *Walker* (1987), praised by Robert Rosenstone, as an example of a postmodern, self-reflexive film with inventive narrative techniques, another such film being *The Moderns*. *Walker* is about the exploits of William Walker, an American adventurer who succeeded for a while seizing control of Nicaragua in the 1850s. Originally buried by Universal Studios, a new DVD version has been released no doubt because of the different political climate from the Reagan years and Universal’s hope for a more sophisticated reception of the film. What makes the movie unique, or a joke, depending on one’s point of view, is the inclusion of contemporary references and images, such as a Mercedes-Benz, a Zippo lighter, a computer, a helicopter, and copies of *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *People* magazines. In these

and other parts, the film refers to both the Vietnam War and the Sandinista-Contra conflict in 1980s Nicaragua raising real questions about the impact of American intervention in Latin America and other parts of the world. (The leftist partisan political voice over by the director and screenwriter on the DVD extras will make for good political discussion, although constant references to the present Iraq War seems self-serving.) For Rosenstone, such images or anachronisms point to the inevitable interpenetration of past and present: “Beyond destroying the surface ‘realism’ of the film, they work to demystify the pretensions of professional history, cast into doubt notions of historical distance and objectivity, and insist that the questions we take to the past always arise from our current concerns...”<sup>28</sup> Oliver Stone said that he wanted to make people aware that they are watching a movie. *Walker* makes the viewer aware that not only is one watching a movie, but it is not historical reality or even reconstruction. As Rosenstone writes, “The screen cannot be a window onto the past—and not just because the window has been blown away and because that in the real world men do not die in slow motion to the sound of dance music. *Walker* warns us at the outset that the history it delivers is not to be taken as reality and suggests that the literal reconstruction of the past is not at stake in this (or perhaps in any other) project of historical understanding. What should matter, the film suggests, is the seriousness with which we ask and answer, in whatever form of address or medium, questions about the meaning of the past.”<sup>29</sup> In this case as in all good historical films historical reconstruction and accuracy always get trumped by a larger truth—the need to question, disbelieve, and defy. Vergil E. Noble in *Box Office Archaeology* goes even further, “...there is nothing inherently wrong with a little mythic imagery and fanciful history. We need heroes to help us make sense of our lives just as much as we need to know the truth about the collective past. We need not choose between legend and fact, but should embrace the complementary qualities of both.”<sup>30</sup> That remains true for PBS and History Channel documentaries as well as dramatic films, postmodern or not. That would be the final coda for the class.<sup>31</sup>

At the conclusion of this little exercise in understanding and evaluating teaching American history through film, I want to go back to the beginning where I cited surveys that indicated that most people get their history from movies and television. That may be true, but as the papers and reviews in my class have shown, students are just as likely to differ with historical film scholars as with historians, including the instructor. A revealing comment came from the class evaluations, “Opening discussions were good but too long.”<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, a movie is not reality, not even historical reality. Viewers know this, college students know this, and students of American history know this. Levels of sophistication may vary, but the accessibility, drama, action, and simplicity of film narrative will override any ambivalence they might have about the

validity of history on film from placing an historical image of the past in their minds. But the “...meaning of historical films is not inscribed and fixed without viewers.”<sup>33</sup> Those varied visions of history still await full understanding and exploration. The Internet, hidden “Easter eggs,” and DVD options (director voiceovers, production documentaries, trailers, slide histories, interviews with stars, deleted scenes, etc.) have radically changed how historical films are perceived.<sup>34</sup> The availability of viewer/reviewer blogs makes everyone a film critic, if not necessarily an informed historical critic. Yet some Internet sites have raised historical awareness, so any historical errors will be immediately noted and put to ridicule. With more sophisticated audiences, producers of historical films lean over backwards to get it right. Rather than being a defining characteristic of Hollywood historical films, something for historians to carp about, historical mistakes are now just part of the ordinary viewing experience. While always true about cinema since its beginnings, today it is even more apparent that viewers are not passive receptacles for whatever the filmmaker puts on the screen. Instead we have examples of “viewers poaching, appropriating and refashioning historical films and drawing them into their own ends...” along with the “intertwining of commercial and connoisseur activities...”<sup>35</sup> People in fact do react to the message and not just the authenticity, which with computer-generated imagery may reach new levels of perfection. Viewers do not respond just to the image, but rather print and online reviews, DVDs, “Easter eggs,” advertisements, merchandise, friend’s recommendations, and the “stars” in the film, also shape the understanding of an historical film. And are American historians themselves perhaps guilty of appropriating from popular Hollywood historical films for the selection and production of written histories, narratives, and textbooks demanded by the mass market and publishers while proclaiming academic purity? As Hughes-Warrington concludes, “we are yet to chart the depths of how commercial, material and cultural factors shape our understanding of what ‘history’ is and what it is for.”<sup>36</sup> Most historians today under the influence of contemporary postmodern thinking, and even those who are not, certainly do not see themselves as guarding the “truth as zealously as the chief priests of ancient Egypt; the prophecies must belong to them and them alone.”<sup>37</sup> Rather any film may be considered historical if it reveals something about the production of history. So there will never be a single and final American History Through Film, nor should such a definitive treatment ever be considered pedagogically useful in not only teaching American history, but in engaging with student’s understanding of the complex relationship between film and history, about which they may know more than we expect. My experiences in teaching this class left me with more questions than answers, and eager to teach yet another version of American History Through Film. No less an authority than Laurel Thatcher Ulrich of Harvard University and immediate past President of the American Historical Association said

that historians "...need to have a little more humility to recognize people can do what they want with the past. Historians do not own history."<sup>38</sup> But at least they can be acknowledged as being up to date, thoughtful, accurate, and trustworthy enough to relate the past "how it essentially was", if not how it really was, through the study and use of the complex medium of the historical film.

### End notes

1. *American Historical Review*, 1991, vol. 96 (4), and every October issue thereafter includes a film review section until recently discontinued, although there is still a regular feature on film in the American Historical Association newsletter *Perspectives*.
2. *Cameron University Catalog 2007-2009* Lawton, Oklahoma: Cameron University, p. 123.
3. Richard A. Voeltz, "The Return of Martin Guerre, Teaching History in Images, History in Words", *Teaching History, A Journal of Methods*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Fall 1993, pp. 68-72. The cited pleas raised by Natalie Zemon Davis and Robert Rosenstone in the article to create the "pastness of the past" and a "shift in perspective...to represent the world in images and words rather than that in words alone, to touch history" (p.72) no longer seem radical, if not still universally accepted by all historians.. The subject still remains contested. See Philippa Levine, "The Trouble with Film" *Perspectives*, March 2010, pp. 26-27.
4. *Film & History* website has a large number of resources as well as links to useful websites, <http://www.uwosh.edu/filmandhistory/resources/index.php>. Reel American History offers a large selection of films dealing with "real people and actual events" based upon periods of American history as well as a list of sources for purchase and a link to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/rels/resources/films/>. For high school, middle-school, and elementary see Teach with Movies, <http://www.teachwithmovies.org/>, that even includes information on how to clear "adult" themed movies with parents. A new site *American History in Video* will provide access to over 2,000 hours of newsreel coverage as well as some 5,000 titles upon completion. It not only includes newsreels but documentaries from the History Channel and A&E, <http://historyinvideo.alexanderstreet.com/>.
5. Professor Steven Mintz, *American History Through Film, History 4314*, University of Houston, Spring 2001, <http://www.class.uh.edu/mintz/filmsyl.htm> and Chris Lewis Ph.D, *American History and Film*, University of Colorado, <http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/film/intro.htm> are two good representative examples but many others exist.
6. One such popular text is James J. Lorence, *Screening America: United States History Through Film* since 1900, New York: Pearson-Longman, 2006. Another one would be Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, Eds., *Hollywood's America, United States History Through Its Films*, St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 1993 which also focuses on the 20th century with a social and cultural history of the cinema emphasis. An older standby is Peter C. Rollins, Editor, *Hollywood as Historian, American Film in a Cultural Context*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993, 1998. A more topically oriented text is Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film, Representing, Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies, Second Edition*, Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
7. One of the more recent attempts to survey the current state of film and history is the excellent, ground breaking Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film*, New York: Routledge, 2007. Pam Cook, *Screening the Past*, New York: Routledge, 2006, looks at how cinema mediates history through memory and nostalgia. For a very entertaining and readable account see Julie M Schablitsky, Editor, *Box Office Archaeology, Refining Hollywood's Portrayals of the Past*, Walnut Creek, California: West Coast Press, 2007. Two other recent and very useful treatments of film and Hollywood history in general include Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* Malden, MA: Blackwell, Publishing, 2008 and David Eldridge, *Hollywood's History Films*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006. Finally for a new major overview of film history that seeks to overcome the divide between film studies and film history as well as offering useful insights in the use of the Internet in reception studies, see James Chapman, Mark Glancy, and Sue Harper, Eds., *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
8. Quoted in Hughes-Warrington., p. 1
9. *Ibid.*, 2.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.
11. Richard A. Voeltz, Class Syllabus History 3003, *American History Through Film*, Spring 2009, Cameron University. For a full discussion of how certain classical Hollywood filmmakers were actively engaged in a self-conscious and often critical filmic writing of national history see J.J. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Cinema: From Cimarron to Citizen Kane*, Lexington, Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 2006.
12. Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation, Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Film*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
13. Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, p. 2
14. McCrisken and Pepper, p.10

15. *Ibid.*, p. 11
16. Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History, In Defense of Hollywood*, Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002, Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Conner, *Why We Fought, America's Wars in Film and History*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2008, Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film, Fourth Edition*, New York: Pearson Education. 2001.
17. Oliver Stone, "In Filming History: Question, Disbelieve, Defy", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 14, 2000, p. B9.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Robert Brent Toplin, Editor, *Oliver Stone's USA: Film, History and Controversy*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000, p. 214.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 170
21. *Ibid.*
22. McCrisken and Pepper, p. 148.
23. Stone, p. B9
24. Toplin, *Reel History*, p. 63
25. For *Titanic* errors see <http://www.spiritus.temporis.com/titanic-1997-film-/historicalinaccuracies.html>. For historical errors in film generally see *The Greatest Historical Mistakes in Movies*, <http://www.armchairgeneral.com/forums/showthread.php?t=6838>. Sources for mistakes and downright historical deceptions in Hollywood movies abound, see Bruce Crowther, *Hollywood Faction, Reality and Myth in the Movies*, London: Columbus Books, 1984, Joseph Roquemore, *History Goes to the Movies: A Viewer's Guide to the Best (and some of the Worst) Historical films Ever Made*, New York: Broadway Books, 1999, Frank Sanello, *Reel v. Real, How Hollywood Turns Fact into Fiction*, Lanham, Maryland: Taylor Trade, 2003, Mark C. Carnes, Editor, *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, New York: Henry Holt, 1995, and Jonathan Vankin, *Based on a True Story: Fact and Fantasy in 100 Favorite Movies*, Chicago: A Capella books, 2005.
26. Toplin, *Reel History*, pp. 68-69.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.
28. Robert Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 211.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.
30. Vergil E. Noble, "When the Legend Becomes Fact, Reconciling Hollywood Realism and Archaeological Realities," in Schablitsky, p. 242.
31. As for practical teaching outcomes and recommendations for future courses let me refer to the student evaluations: "Great class. I would recommend it to any other student interested...". And more to the point, "The class was very informative and I enjoyed the film selections. I would recommend a more narrowly focused topic though, such as wars through Film or Films about social change in America (something like that). Student Evaluations, History 3003, American History Through Film, Cameron University, Spring, 2009.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Hughes-Warrington, p. 182
34. "Easter eggs" are undocumented features found through key sequences on a computer keyboard or DVD controls. For examples and explanation see <http://wwhiddendvdeastereggs.com/film/33873.html> and <http://www.eeggs.com/>.
35. Hughes-Warrington, p. 182
36. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
37. Stone, p. 89.
38. Quoted in Peter Charles Hoffer, *Past Imperfect: Fact, Fictions, Fraud—American History from Bancroft and Parkman to Ambrose, Bellisiles, Ellis, and Goodwin*, New York,: Public Affairs, 2007, p. 254.