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The Power of Film

“It cannot be doubted that motion pictures are a significant medium for the communication of ideas. They may affect public attitudes and behavior in a variety of ways, ranging from direct espousal of a political or social doctrine to the subtle shaping of thought which characterizes all artistic expression. The importance of motion pictures as an organ of public opinion is not lessened by the fact that they are designed to entertain as well as to inform.”

~US Supreme Court (1952; *Burstyn v. Wilson*)

Slide provided by Dr. Brian Johnson

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Hollywood’s Impact

“...films appear to inspire at least **as much cultural authority and legitimacy** for teaching specific roles, values and ideals as do the more traditional sites of learning such as the *public schools, religious institutions* and the *family*.”

– Giroux, 1997, p. 53

Slide provided by Dr. Brian Johnson

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Why you should be “media literate”?

ALL
 “Media literacy...can give ~~young~~ people the power to recognize the differences between entertainment, television that is just bad and the information they need to make good decisions. What they need is a clear awareness of how the media influences, shapes, and defines their lives.”

~Richard Riley, US Department of Education, 1995

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What importance do the following scholars assign to the impact of film?

- Robert Rosenstone – *Visions of the Past* (1995)
- Scholars quoted on slides in lecture
- Dr. Stallbaumer’s lectures



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What importance do the following scholars assign to the impact of film?

Goals for reading Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past* (1995)

Goal	Essential Vocabulary	Essential Concepts	Essential Questions
Identify the author's main argument and supporting evidence.	Comprehension (verb: comprehend)	Comprehension (verb: comprehend)	Comprehension (verb: comprehend)
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To introduce students to a potential middle ground upon which professional historians and filmmakers might find agreement.

Rosenstone “Study Guide” P. ___ of Lectures

Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*
 Essential Vocabulary of the filmmaker that you need to learn and use when “reading” or evaluating historical films:
 • Comprehension (verb: comprehend)
 • Displacement (verb: displace)
 • Attribution (verb: attribute)
 • Dialogue (verb: create dialogue)
 • Character (verb: create characters)
 • Create (verb: dramatize)
 • Metaphor

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Working Assumptions about "Reading" Film

1. Every film has messages or lessons.
2. "Readers" may learn different lessons or messages than intended.
3. Nothing is accidental; Everything is intentional even what's left out.
4. Hollywood has further reach
5. The medium of film understandably requires compression of timelines and the invention of characters to advance story

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Active Viewer or "Reader"

Pay close attention, watch films more than once, take notes, read written texts, read reviews and discover author motives



Discover and focus on significant patterns that emerge



Ask and answer the "What does that mean?" & "So what?" questions



Arriving at a judgment about whether something is good, bad, or mediocre based criteria informed by the above steps that are consistent and plausible.

Slide adapted from Dr. Brian Johnson

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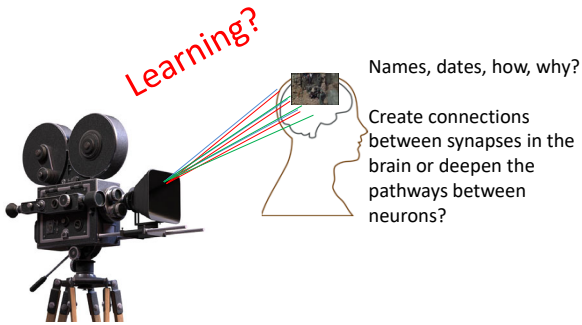
Essential Questions Driving Course

1. What are a historian's obligation to be accurate in his/her interpretations? How do they achieve credibility (i.e. professional ethos)?
2. What are a filmmaker's obligations to be accurate in his/her interpretations of history through film? How do filmmakers achieve credibility with their audiences (i.e. professional ethos)?
3. Do filmmakers have the ability to shape collective, public memory about a past event or person?
4. What have you learned about your expectations/criteria for watching and recommending historical films and documentaries to friends and family?
5. What are the limits and possibilities of filmmakers to teach audiences about past events and persons?

On the syllabus

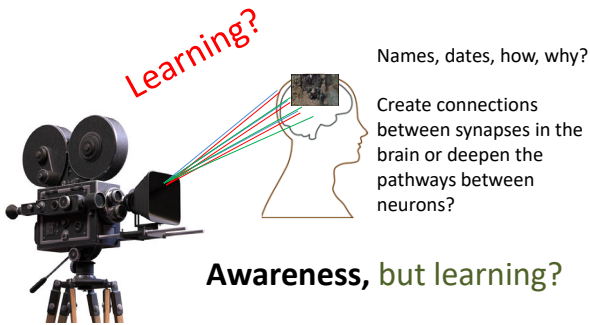
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What can be learned about any historical event from watching a film?



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What can be learned about any historical event from watching a film?



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Can creating awareness lead to problems?



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What if that awareness
contributes to
misinformation,
misunderstanding,
ignorance or overconfidence
that "you got it"?



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What can be learned about any
historical event from watching a film?

1. Personalize and foster empathy or antipathy
2. Ability to motivate viewers to examine their own lives and behaviors
3. Lay the groundwork for further exploration of Nazi Germany
4. Historically authenticity, vicarious experiences

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Potential Lessons from **Nazi Germany**:

1. Watershed era – tell the happening
2. Study in dictatorship
3. Study how evil can develop out of the ordinary
4. Explore the negative consequences of apathy and indifference
5. Warning to others!
6. Explore altruistic behavior

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How and When Screenwriters & Filmmakers' Make Claims to History



1. Claim a link with history by topic selection
2. Period detail (props, costumes, location, sets)
3. Credit historical consultants
4. Claim film is inspired by true events
5. Upon release do they make claims to history and shape expectations of historical truth
6. Use the past to shed light on current issues

Source: Leen Engelen, "Back to the Future, Ahead to the Past. Film and History: A Status Quaestionis," *Rethinking History* 11, no. 4 (December 2007): 560.

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"Ethos of Hollywood is first of all the art of the middle, that is, it's meant to appeal to everyone."

Ticket sales, selling commercial time, or film as art?



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Hollywood & Character Development

1. Identify with characters
2. Origins of behavior
 - accidental or
 - intentional
3. Consequences of behavior

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Nazi Germany & Hollywood Tradition

1. Relate to the protagonist?
2. Need a character → moral compass
3. Happy ending? Uplifting message?
4. Popular topics for Hollywood: war, July 1944 Plot, Last Days, post-war trials, Holocaust

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Portraying Nazis

1. Turn Nazis into caricatures
2. Overstate Monstrosity
3. Humanize risks normalizing or developing admiration
4. Oversimplify distorts complexity → Misrepresentations

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Actors' Challenge

Tom Jicha, TVRadio Writer, reviewing *Conspiracy* and Kenneth Branagh on playing Reinhard Heydrich and Stanley Tucci on playing Adolf Eichmann:

Jicha notes, "Heydrich was such a diabolically ruthless individual, it was difficult for Branagh to meet the actor's obligation to find the humanity in his character. Heydrich and Eichmann 'seem to be without soul, without conscience. One of the disturbing elements of playing it was to discover that,' Branagh says.

"Still, 'You have to portray them as people because that's what they were Tucci says. That the point of the film to me. They weren't monsters. They were people. They ate and slept like we do and they had families. I was able to find Eichmann's own words and find that, yes, there was something like a sense of humor sometimes. And there was supposedly a love for children. ..."

Source: Tom Jicha, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL), 19 May 2001, 10.

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Ordinary Germans

1. Resistance
2. Rebuilding lives
3. Victims of war, especially Soviet brutality
- 4. Potential Misrepresentation: ALL GERMANS are VICTIMS**