

**Historians and Hollywood:
The Clash of Professional Ethos?**
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1

“The fact is this: historians believe the past belongs to them, that their training in the graduate school and acculturation into a profession has given them a unique understanding of the human adventure over time. And so it has. But they (we) confuse ‘unique’ with ‘only possible’.”

~Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (2006), xviii

2

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

Distinguishing features between a costume drama and historical film	Why filmmakers must invent. Distinction that Rosenstone makes between “true/false” invention.	“Hollywood” Tradition and how it will impact filmmakers’ portrayal of history. Are filmmakers historians?	What are the limits and possibilities of watching historical films?	Why historians find fault with Hollywood? Why do historians, even Rosenstone, feel that they may be violating their professional ethos?	Film-making vocabulary: compression, alteration, displacement, condensation, metaphor	How does written history compare to movie versions?
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To introduce students to a potential middle ground upon which professional historians and filmmakers might find agreement.

3

Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*

Essential Vocabulary of the filmmaker that you need to learn and use when "reading" or evaluating historical films:

- Compression or condensation (verb: compress or condense)
- Displacement (verb: displace)
- Alteration (verb: alter)
- Dialogue (verb: create dialogue)
- Characters (verb: create characters)
- Drama (verb: dramatize)
- Metaphor

4

"I am saying that a historical narrative or argument selects only certain traces, and those traces which are chosen become the designated 'facts' as they are used as part of the historical work. For the director of the dramatic film, who must create ... a past that fits within the demands, practices, and traditions of both the visual media and the dramatic form, ...this means inventing some of them."

~Robert Rosenstone, *History of Film/Film on History* (2006), 43.

5

What does it mean to "do history?"



6

Text What is visible/readable, i.e. what information is provided by the source?

Context What was going on during the time period (timelines are a useful tool)? What background information do you have that helps explain the information found in the source (consult the introduction to the document or the topic)?

Subtext What is between the lines? Ask questions about the following:
Author: Who created the source, and what do we know about that person?
Audience: for whom was the source created?
Reason: Why was this source produced when it was?

7

Berlin: July 31, 1941
The Reich Marshal of the Greater German Reich Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan, Chairman of the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich [Hermann Göring]
To: the Chief of the Security Police and the SS Major General Heydrich, Berlin:

As a supplement to the task which was entrusted to you in the decree dated January 24, 1939, to solve the Jewish question by emigration and evacuation in the most favorable way possible, given present conditions, I herewith commission you to carry out all necessary preparations with regard to organizational, substantive, and financial viewpoints for a total solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.

Insofar as other competencies of other central organizations are affected, these are to be involved.

I further commission you to submit to me promptly an overall plan showing the preliminary organizational, substantive, and financial measures for the execution of the intended final solution of the Jewish question.

//signed//Göring

8

9

Historians' Working Assumptions/Ethos

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- 7.
- 8.
- 9.

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Standards of the Professional Historian

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- 7.

11

Historians infer

when the evidence is lacking, ambiguous, uncertain

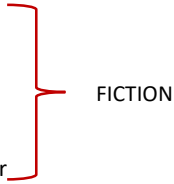
See Rosenstone's "fictive elements" (p. xviii)

12

Unlike Filmmakers, Historians Do NOT

- 1
- 2
- 3

4. Do not compress events or change the order or sequence of events



13

"I am saying that a historical narrative or argument selects only certain traces, and those traces which are chosen become the designated 'facts' as they are used as part of the historical work. For the director of the dramatic film, who must create ... a past that fits within the demands, practices, and traditions of both the visual media and the dramatic form, ...this means inventing some of them."

~Robert Rosenstone, *History of Film/Film on History* (2006), 43.

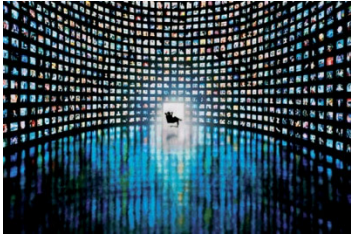
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Messages



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Gullible Audiences



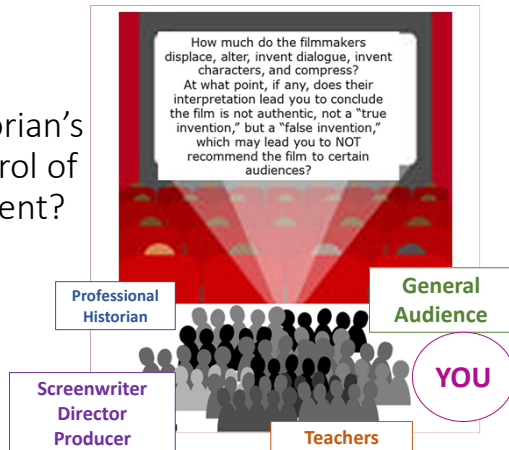
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Characters



17

Historian's Control of Content?



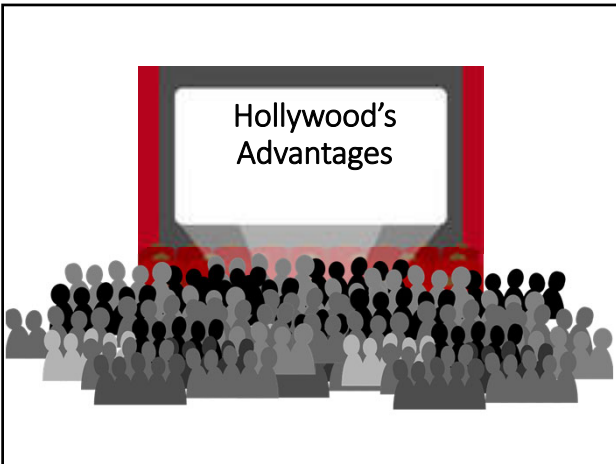
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Historian's Control of Content?

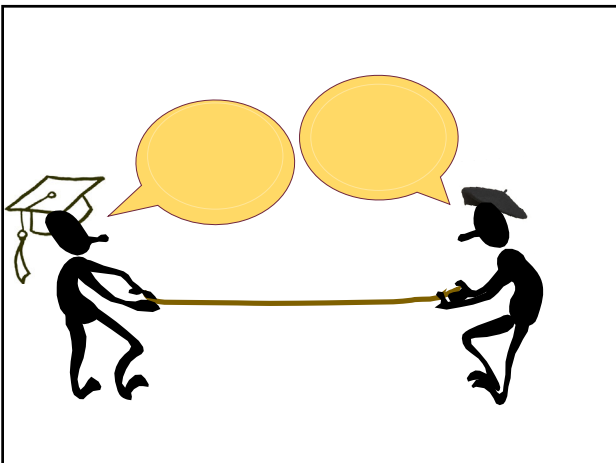
What level of historical errors are acceptable?

19

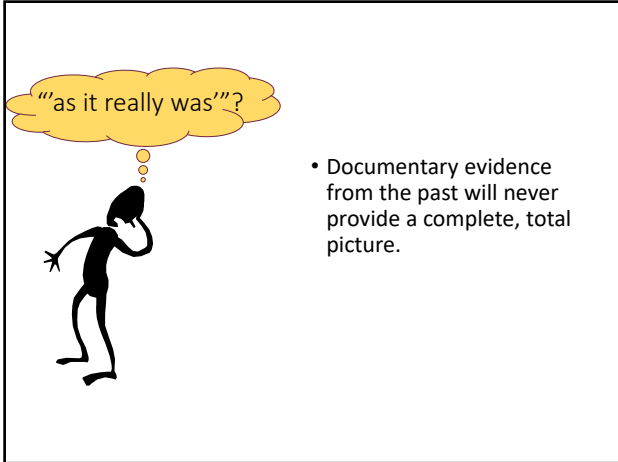
Hollywood's Advantages



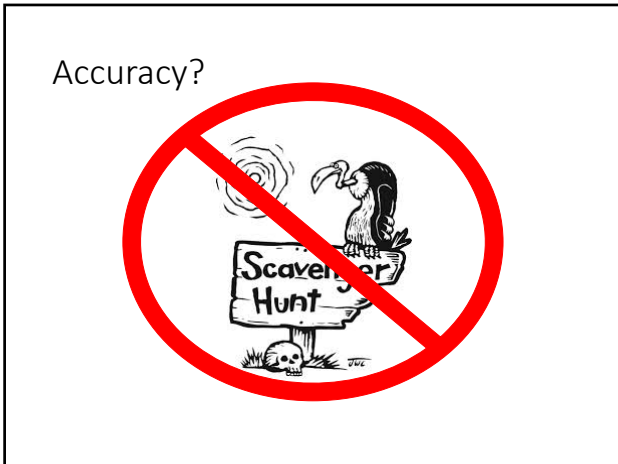
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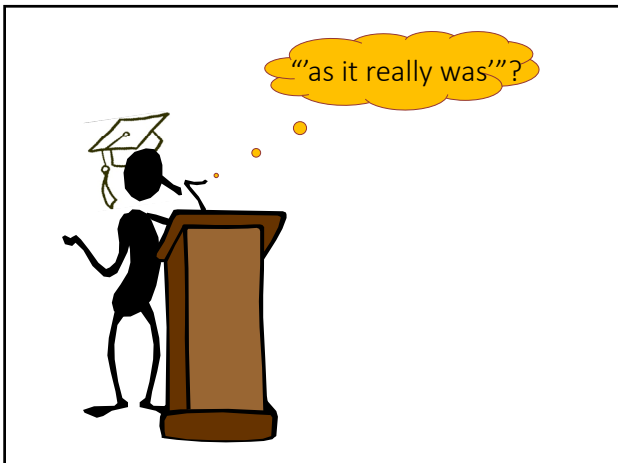
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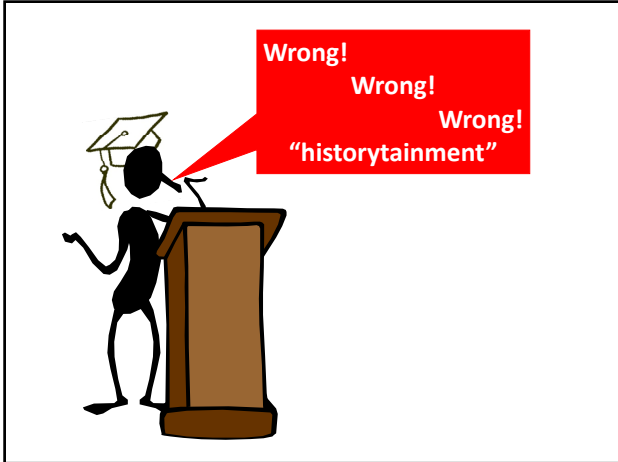
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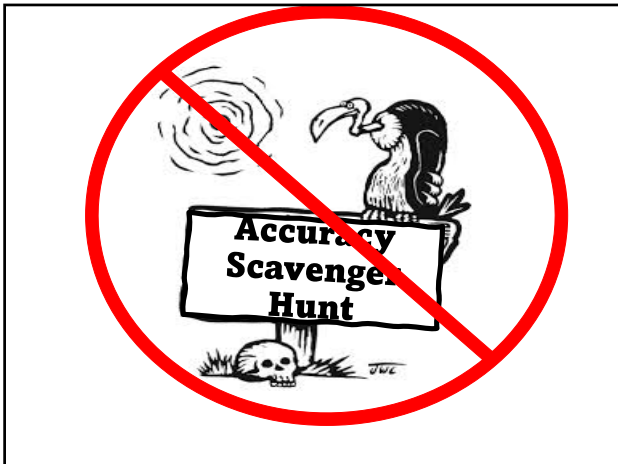
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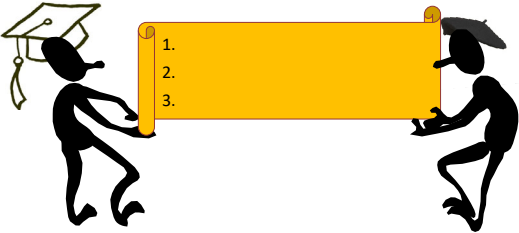
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Authenticity: "the spirit of the period" or the "soul of the times"

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27

Historians & Filmmakers Share Challenges:



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28

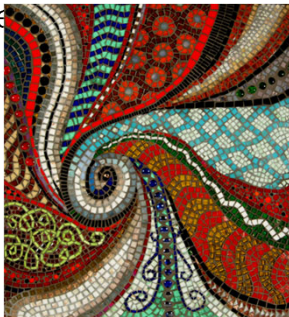
Screenwriter's

- No screenplay, no movie
- What are the guidelines for writing screenplays and adapting historical accounts, memoirs, plays?
- Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*

29

Directors' Challenges

- Script
- Theme
- Creative control
- Funding & budget
- Shooting schedules
- Scenery, sets, backlots
- Weather
- Working with actors
- Costumes
- Camera work
- Editing and continuity
- Sound
- Studio politics
- Communicating visually



30

Filmmakers Ultimate Challenge?

"as it really was"?

The collage features a central thought bubble with the text "as it really was"?. To the left is a silhouette of a person holding an umbrella. To the right are three black and white photographs: the top one shows a trench with soldiers; the middle one shows a city in ruins with smoke rising; the bottom one shows a person hanging from a gallows.

31