

EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENT: HISTORY AND THE MOVIES

HISTORY 150: SPRING 2008

This short paper is an opportunity to gain up to **10 POINTS** of extra credit to your total. It is entirely VOLUNTARY and as such, I will NOT ACCEPT late submissions (however creative the excuses!)

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to analyze a movie for how well or poorly it portrays the history of its period.

SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE MOVIE

- It should be set in a period that our class has covered: from ca. 10,000 BC – AD 1492. That means no “caveman” movies. No American-set movies.
- It should be set in Europe or the Near East.
- It should be placed in an identifiable time and place. So, avoid a movie that is “pseudo-medieval” (i.e. people prancing about in renaissance-faire costumes in an unknown or unnamed country.)
- It should avoid overt “fantasy” elements. Dragons, battling mages, etc.
- If you are unsure about your choice, feel free to clear it with me.

EXAMPLES:

Good:

- Troy
- Alexander
- Beowulf
- El Cid
- Kingdom of Heaven
- The Name of the Rose
- Braveheart

Bad:

- Dungeons & Dragons
- Conan the Barbarian
- Black Knight
- Dragonheart
- Monty Python’s Life of Brian
- A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court

ANALYZING THE MOVIE

Once you have selected your movie (and watched it!), you need to compare how the movie deals with its time-period with what you know from class, from sources that you have read and, if you wish, from extra research. I am less interested in the nit-picking details (I don’t care if a sword is too short or a hemline too long) and more interested in THEMES and CONCEPTS.

Some questions to consider:

- Is the PLOT broadly historical or do it take huge liberties with what we know? Is it accurate in some points but not in others? How?
 - e.g. while the specific story of Balian in “Kingdom of Heaven” is silly, much of the rest of the plot reflects what we know of the Crusades. Consider how.
- Does the THEME of the movie reflect the period?
 - e.g. while many of the details in “Gladiator” are not historical, the “Dream of Rome” theme is actually pretty interesting given what we know of the Roman Empire.
- Does the movie accurately portray ATTITUDES, MOTIVES and MORALITY? Do the characters act like historical Romans or Greeks or do they act and believe in the same sort of things as modern Americans, just in pretty costumes.
 - e.g. In “Troy,” how do Achilles’ actions reflect early Greek ideas of glory and fame?

Thing to AVOID:

Your paper should **NOT** be a movie review. I don’t care whether the acting is rotten. I don’t care whether or not the cinematography is good. I don’t care whether or not you actually liked it. I love some movies that are utterly ridiculous for history.

Your paper should **NOT** focus on details of the plot unless a specific plot point is directly relevant. Assume I have seen the movie in question. Do **NOT** spend more than a sentence or so summarizing the plot.

QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR EACH ESSAY:

Don't try and cover everything. Concentrate upon a few specific points or ideas and really get into detail. So don't just list all of the ways the movie gets things wrong. Use specific examples.

Be specific. Avoid sweeping statements, generalizations or oversimplifications about the past. Such statements are silly. The past is wonderfully complex. If it helps, do not attempt to write a "thesis statement" until you have written the body of your essay.

Please avoid resorting to modern analogies in your essay.

Be COHERENT. Poor grammar and bad spelling make me cranky. Also, if it is not coherent, the strength of your argument may be lost. In particular, I strongly suggest that:

- You outline your essay before beginning
- You read your essay out loud before submitting it. This helps to identify where you become incoherent or incomprehensible
- Be careful not to over-use pronouns, especially if the referent noun is not clear.
- Avoid passive sentences. These often lead to a lack of precision
- Use the spell-checker.

Format

Your essay should be:

- ca. **2 pages** long
- 12 point Times New Roman or equivalent
- Double-spaced
- 1" margins

Please ensure you put your full name and "History 150" either on the top right of the front page or on a plain cover sheet

DEADLINE

The ESSAY will be due by **1.30PM** (the end of my office hours) on **THURSDAY, 8th MAY**.

I will accept them in class, in my mailbox in the History Department Office (Sierra Tower 610) or by EMAIL to helen.steele@csun.edu. If you submit by email, please use either .doc or .rtf formats. Avoid .docx (Office 2007) files. I will acknowledge emails so if you do not get an acknowledgement, then I haven't received it. Remember, because it is extra credit, I will NOT ACCEPT late submissions. It is your RESPONSIBILITY to get it to me.

And finally, HAVE FUN with this assignment.