

Chapter 1

WHY USE HISTORY FILMS?

*'History, I am convinced, is not just something to be left to the historians.'*¹

For much of the twentieth century historians dismissed history films as being no more than romantic historical novels served up as 'harmless entertainment' for a mass audience.² Filmmakers, however, invest considerable resources in the production of these films and often claim they are historically accurate because of the research carried out prior to production. In the 1970s, postmodernism began to question the historian's role and opened up the historical debate as to what constituted a representation of the past. In this context history films could be brought into the discussion, not on the basis of fact but on the basis of representation. At the same time younger historians were adopting methodologies from other disciplines and approaching history from a different perspective – history from 'below.' With the introduction of the videocassette, films became more accessible and the new technology was developed as a teaching aid.

There are currently three players involved in the debate on the use of history films in the representation of the past, although there is not an open dialogue between all three. Historians say that writing history depends upon an accumulation of evidence derived from primary sources. They argue that their training and professional discipline give them objectivity and therefore the ability to reject interpretations that cannot be validated by these sources or cross-referenced. However, whilst there has been some acknowledgement by historians of the place of film in representing the past, the problem of accuracy still looms large.³ Filmmakers accept that history films may have to invent and manipulate the historical record to assist the narrative but, they argue, that what they can uniquely give is the 'feel' of history. Historians, sympathetic to filmmakers, contend that the use of invention and fabrication does not invalidate the use of history films as they give something more: they show things that written history is less able to do. By marrying truth and fiction these films can represent the past in a symbolic way. However, even sympathetic historians still find that filmmakers want to control the whole process and outcome, as the conversation between Eric Foner and John Sayles in *Past Imperfect* indicates.⁴

As it stands there seems to be no resolution. However, an entirely different perspective can be brought to the debate by regarding history films as historical documents in their own right, documents that contain information about the time in which the films were produced. As products of popular culture, films use the prevailing ideology, show changes in emphasis, and comment consciously and unconsciously on events and society's reaction to them. It is the past speaking to the present about the present. As Thomas Schatz says, 'Hollywood movies tend to reflect' America's 'own beliefs and pre-occupations.'⁵

Historians, filmmakers and history films up to the 1960s

Until the debate on writing history began in the second half of the twentieth century, there are few examples of historians commenting on history films. Filmmakers, they felt, had little concern whether or not they bent, distorted or invented facts to create appealing stories.⁶ Even the storm of protest aroused by D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (*Birth*) in 1915 does not seem to have aroused them. The only comment by an historian is the one reportedly said by President Wilson that, "(i)t is like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."⁷ Wilson's comment, unknowingly, summed up the mood of popular consciousness: the protests were about representation – not about the facts. While later research would show that Griffith's facts, as well as his interpretation, were largely incorrect, his representation was 'in harmony with the historical wisdom of the day' and reflected the spirit of the age - white racial superiority.⁸

By 1915, historians from the north and the south had accepted the conclusions of James Ford Rhodes that though the South had been wrong to secede, the North had been far more reprehensible in forcing Reconstruction on the South.⁹ Other historians were more interested in the development of America. Frederick Jackson Turner proposed that the frontier had produced a new kind of American with a new and unique type of democracy;¹⁰ Charles Beard saw economic development as the crucial determinant of American history and saw the Civil War as 'essentially the struggle between two conflicting economies.' To Beard, slavery was merely an economic system.¹¹

Historians would also have noted the Supreme Court's decision in the 'Mutual' case (1915)¹² - in the same year as *Birth* – that movie companies were considered 'a business

pure and simple' and were therefore not entitled to protection under the First Amendment. As such, they could not be regarded as 'part of the press of the country or organs of public opinion.'¹³ With film classed as a 'business' providing entertainment, and subject to local censorship, any claim that it could be educational now disappeared. Historians, therefore, did not need to pay any attention to Hollywood's history films no matter how much they were claimed to be accurate. It was not until 1952, in the '*Miracle*' case, that the judgment was reversed.¹⁴

But Hollywood never abandoned the claim. It was an innovative way of looking at history. Griffith even proposed that film would replace written texts to teach history. 'In less than ten years,' he wrote in 1915, 'the children in the public schools will be taught practically everything from moving pictures. Certainly they will never be obliged to read history again....[they would just] press a button and actually see what happened. There will be no opinion expressed.....[they] will merely be present at the making of history.'¹⁵

Griffith saw film as a neutral, objective medium, which would present the facts of history. There would be no need for the historian to mediate. He saw an historical fact as the truth. What was written in the past had to be correct. He himself had carried out considerable research for *Birth*, had used veterans of the Civil War to advise him and had a 'memory' of that war through the anecdotal experiences told to him by his father.¹⁶ Thirty years later he wrote that, '(i)n filming '*Birth*', I gave to my best knowledge the proven facts and presented the known truth about the Reconstruction period in the American South. These facts are based on an overwhelming compilation of authentic evidence and testimony.'¹⁷ Yet the paradox was that half of the film that he considered to be the 'truth' was based on a novel, *The Clansman*, by Thomas Dixon - a Southern patriot and racist. The film industry did not take up his challenge to teach history this way although, in the 1920s, Yale University commissioned a series of historical films for teaching purposes.¹⁸

While filmmakers ignored Griffith's proposal, they never abandoned their efforts to make historical representation in history films as accurate and realistic as possible. This pressure came as much from the patrons of cinema as from the studios themselves. When audiences began pointing out incorrect details in films the studios responded by establishing research departments whose role was to make the films authentic and present an accurate image in every detail.¹⁹ But they rarely, if ever, used historians.²⁰ Besides, they paid the researchers

and therefore had total control of their product. An outside expert could present a very different and possibly challenging situation – they could publicly contest the facts, which might be commercially damaging. However while care was taken to get the ‘environment’ right the ‘historicity and accuracy’ of the narrative were ‘attractive as long as they remained selling points.’²¹ Getting the facts straight was just one aspect of the production process.²² The industry’s own Production Code laid down what could, and could not, be shown.²³ Furthermore the development of genre – a set of conventions in style, subject matter and values – provided a recognisable formula that served the interests of producers and audience.²⁴ Besides, the success of the early Civil War films and *Birth* in particular, showed Hollywood how much the public liked its history films. But, to historians, the fact that film production was essentially a commercial enterprise could only confirm their view that history films had nothing to add to an understanding of the past.

However, there is one example of an historian suggesting to Hollywood that historians might have a beneficial role in the production of history films. In 1935 Louis Gottschalk wrote to the head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios suggesting that ‘if the cinema art is going to draw its subjects so generously from history, it owes it to its patrons and to its own high ideals to achieve a greater accuracy. No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticise and revise it.’²⁵ There was no reply and Hollywood continued to produce history films full of the ‘inaccuracies’ that Gottschalk had wanted to correct. Other historians appeared either not interested or remained silent. Robert Rosenstone has commented recently that it is impossible to make films ‘absolutely accurate, absolutely true’ to the past and, if so, they would be ‘dull both as film and history.’²⁶

The challenge to traditional methodology

From the 1960s, postmodernism opened up the debate on the interpretation of history by challenging the traditional model - the primacy of fact and the historian’s objectivity. Its critique, that truth is not absolute, timeless or eternal but relative to the needs of the author, if applied to written history, could lead to a fundamental reappraisal of the way the historian presented the past and of his role in the process.

Postmodernism was attractive to some historians who had begun to look at history films as

historical texts. Hayden White compared the processes of writing history with the processes of film production:

Every written history is a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolisation and qualification exactly like those used in the production of a filmed representation. It is only the medium that differs, not the way in which the messages are produced.²⁷

Taking this approach, the history film had equal validity as a 'vision' of the past to that of a text written by an historian and therefore opened up the range of possible interpretations. Film historians, such as Robert Rosenstone and Robert Toplin, who support this view, consider that the role of the history film is not to attempt to present an exact image of what had happened but to give a sufficient representation of the events. The history film, they say, can give the 'look' and 'feel' of history, which would resonate with the audience and have meaning for the present day.²⁸

However this left postmodernists open to the charge that they had no standards to judge what did or did not happen or the quality of one text against another. And if everything in the past is a recreation by the present it cuts us off from a past that not only tells us who we are, but gives meaning and support to our daily lives. Whilst some postmodernists like Rosenstone continue to champion experimental films,²⁹ others, like Toplin, distinguish between 'true' and 'false' invention. They separate those films that give a sufficiently symbolic representation of the past, which, they feel, can override the scruples of those historians who condemn films if any detail does not exactly fit the historical record - the 'accuracy police'³⁰ - from those that are so totally against the historical record as to take the film 'out of history.'³¹

As postmodernism challenged the writing of history from the outside, younger 'New Left' historians challenged history's traditional methodology from within.³² These historians came from a more left-wing background and began to look at history from the point of view of ordinary people than that of the power elites. In this respect they were more in tune with Hollywood, which provided entertainment for the masses and produced films that reflected everyday experiences. They were also more open to a multi-disciplinary approach, which embraced methodologies from the social sciences and were encouraged by the developing areas of feminism, semiotics and black studies.³³ As a generation brought up with film as an integral part of popular culture they were more aware of the

potential of film as a commentary on society. With postmodernism gaining respect some historians saw it as providing intellectual support for the use of history films in giving valid representations of the past. Nevertheless, as the debate over history films developed, many of these younger historians were forced by the post-structuralist attack on objectivity to defend their profession in the 1980s.³⁴ As Eric Foner comments, a word is worth a thousand pictures - there is more information in a book than in a film.³⁵

Perhaps a more important influence on historians in changing attitudes towards film was the emergence of cheap and accessible video recording and playback technology in the 1980s. Before then historians had not needed to consider images as more than an adjunct, examples to enliven the written text. History was the written past and they were the gatekeepers. Pierre Sorlin suggests that apart from film being an expensive form of research and having to work in a different medium entirely - images rather than words - historians had really dismissed history films as they reduced their monopoly over source material.³⁶ This may have been one reason for their years of silence about the potential of history films. The videocassette brought another dimension into teaching with the development of specific teaching material, while commercial films became easily affordable and accessible.³⁷ With the new technology a film was now more like a book being able to be stopped, played back or held in a still image. With the ubiquity of television and the availability of small hand-held cameras a wide range of events – including those that might not be recorded in written form – were being captured on film by ‘ordinary’ people: history was increasingly becoming a visual record and more democratic. Historians had to move with the times. If they were going to use images from contemporary society why not use those from the filmmakers as well.

Many historians began to use the visual medium routinely in the classroom. Others became involved in the process of making films as advisers to film projects or as ‘talking heads’ in documentaries – as for example in Ken Burns’s *Civil War* (1990). From the 1990s, sessions on history films at conferences and reviews of history films in academic journals have become routine.³⁸ Cultural historians have begun talking about a post-literate age as the use of film in the classroom edged a little closer to Griffith’s vision of 1915.

Historians, history films and filmmakers at the end of the twentieth century

By the late 1970s film studies in America had become a significant part of higher education and has continued to expand as an area of academic interest.³⁹ In a key word search on the internet using the words 'Hollywood', 'history' and 'film,' 83% of catalogue entries at the University of California, Los Angeles, are dated 1980 and later. A similar search at two United Kingdom university libraries - Greenwich and University College, London - obtained comparable results of 87% and 96% respectively. These have been increasing each year.⁴⁰

Although a number of significant academic studies began to appear in the 1970s,⁴¹ film studies was 'convulsed by debates on theoretical issues' – on methodologies and interpretations – until the mid-1980s and this delayed the debate on the value and place of history films.⁴² Formal recognition was given, however, when the *American Historical Review* (AHR) used its December 1988 edition as a forum to debate the issues. Since then the AHR and the *Journal of American History* have included regular sections on history films while the American Historical Association and the Organisation of American Historians have instituted an award for the best history film of the year. There are now regular conferences sponsored by academic organisations devoted to film and history while a positive interest by historians was demonstrated by the publication of *Past Imperfect* in 1995.⁴³

Past Imperfect gave sixty-one prominent historians, journalists and other academics an opportunity to choose and review nearly one hundred historical films that touched on their area of expertise. The editorial by Mark Carnes was encouraging. Hollywood history, he said, 'filled irritating gaps.... polished dulling ambiguities' and 'sparkled in its lack of moral ambiguity and tedious complexity.' Movies inspired and entertained and often taught important truths about the human condition. Some films had even become historical documents saying more about the era in which they were made than about the historical representation. Movies, he concluded, had a unique capacity for stimulating a dialogue about the past and *Past Imperfect* was a reply to that dialogue.⁴⁴ Historians were at last taking Hollywood seriously.

A feature of the book is a debate between the historian Eric Foner and the filmmaker John Sayles on their different approaches to history. This debate could have been a meeting of minds as Foner is a left-wing historian and Sayles is interested in social issues.⁴⁵ Foner, who has been a consultant on historical docudramas, expressed his continuing reservations about the way filmmakers use history. He related how he was asked to write a statement on the film *Glory* (1989) which could be used to publicise the film. However, the studio rejected his conclusion that 'it was accurate in a general way but there were too many historical inaccuracies.' Foner then expressed his concerns about the way 'truth' is altered in film for dramatic purpose - especially when so many people learn history from the movies. He concluded that there had to be a legitimate interpretation of the evidence using standards of historical truth and presentation. John Sayles researches his films but does not use historians, as that would mean taking their point of view. What is important for him is to be true to the spirit of the story. Filmmakers need to mediate and interpret the data using invention and simplification to make it an acceptable product for the audience. The movie industry has no responsibility to get the story right - it is about entertainment and profit. However history films gain legitimacy if audiences know that they are based on something that really happened.⁴⁶

Foner's reservations supported Carne's assertion that Hollywood films are no 'substitute for history' and can be misleading, as Hollywood's claim to make historically 'accurate' and 'truthful' films is accepted by many whose 'only history' is what they see in those films. Most of the contributors echoed this and picked over each film to expose the differences between 'historical fact and celluloid fiction.'⁴⁷ Some reviewers did make reference to the present day and James McPherson's review of *Glory* demonstrated that historical film could teach history. It was unfortunate, however, that the title of the book implied that, while Hollywood could only make imperfect representations of history, historians could get to the truth of a perfect and knowable past. The films also appeared in historically chronological order. Had they appeared in order of their date of production an assessment could have been made as to how, and if, Hollywood history films had changed their approach in representing the past. Historians can point out the limitations of film, yet to continue to oppose 'fact' and 'fiction,' as demonstrated in *Past Imperfect*, fails significantly to advance the debate about the appropriate place of history films in the discipline.

How have sympathetic film historians responded? Some like John O'Connor have suggested that specific analysis of history films should be driven by the nature of historical inquiry and suggests that filmmakers should make history films, which allow for alternative explanations and complex motivations.⁴⁸ Natalie Davis sees history film as a valuable and innovative historical vision as long as the differences between film and the professional historian is acknowledged. Film, she says, must be 'honest' in its representation – both in content and in technique.⁴⁹ Rosenstone, while supporting the experimental film, cannot see Hollywood making anything other than mainstream films – where history is shown as a 'linear story' with a 'moral message' and there is hope in the future.⁵⁰ Toplin attempted to find a middle ground between those who see history film as manipulating and fabricating the past and those who see these films as 'metaphorical statements, experiments in artistic imagination.' His own experience in participating in the production of films led him to propose that historians could profit from an understanding of the whole process of filmmaking and perhaps participate in it. He found that despite trying to portray the past responsibly – 'rendering the truth about the past' – there were too many holes in the historical record and therefore he was forced to invent.⁵¹ Even Rosenstone, who takes the most postmodernist view, agrees that the filmmakers use of invention must be 'apposite.'⁵² To be taken seriously, he says, the history film must not violate the overall data and meanings of what we already know of the past.⁵³

The debate is not resolvable. In 1998 Robert Rosenstone saw that progress in terms of how the *AHR* approached history was still limited by the 'Dragnet' approach – 'the facts, just the facts.'⁵⁴ If filmmakers were given the opportunity to present history 'chaos is bound to result' as there is no means of knowing 'the truth of what is on the screen.'⁵⁵ Sumiko Higashi pointed out that in 1997 the editor of the *AHR* stated that the journal would only accept film reviews from academics who are historians and not from those academics whose main scholarship was in film studies.⁵⁶ This indicates a continuing degree of exclusiveness by historians as to the relative worth of different academic disciplines, a reluctance to accept an interdisciplinary approach to the past and a defence of the historian's traditional position as sole guardian and gatekeeper to the past.

Mark Carnes says that history films 'are entertaining, they stimulate thought, and they may draw people into further consideration of the subject.'⁵⁷ That is certainly an advance but the book he edited pointed to a more traditional view. History films certainly need to

overcome the more extreme examples of invention and should be sufficiently robust in their interpretation – symbolically true – to withstand the criticism of not being scrupulously true to historical fact. However, while this debate continues few historians have looked at history films as representing the history of its time of production. This approach can give additional insight into the social, political and cultural history of America.

History films are about the present

Concentrating on ‘facts,’ showing how history films distort history, is not necessarily the best or only way to understand history films.⁵⁸ Much of the early debate, around the place of history films adding to the understanding of the past, has centred on convincing historians that the filmmakers use of invention, compression and the other techniques of genre do not always invalidate their representation of the past. Film historians therefore concentrated on establishing that history films are legitimate texts in their own right and that they aided that understanding by offering different insights to those of historians. Toplin adds to the argument by distinguishing between those history films where ‘distortions serve the purpose of communicating broader truths’ and those of gross ‘fictional excess and over-simplification.’⁵⁹

An alternative approach begins by accepting that history films are primarily about the present.⁶⁰ Filmmakers, says Leger Grindon, have followed a long tradition of grappling with the present by writing about the past.⁶¹ Rosenstone calls this the ‘explicit approach,’ which can be applied to any film, and argues that it does not talk about the historical issues. That is correct to an extent, but some historical issues continue into the present and are reassessed by historians in the present. However to get round the accuracy debate Rosenstone supports an ‘experimental approach’ where film challenges by its construction and narrative ‘what we mean by the word *history*.’⁶² This may stimulate, as postmodernists claim, a ‘different way of thinking about the past’ and help to ‘re-vision’ history, but it cannot address the basic criticism of even sympathetic historians such as Eric Foner.⁶³

Films are important sources of information about society as films ‘speak either implicitly or explicitly to the concerns and preoccupations of their moment of production.’⁶⁴

Therefore historians can, with over a century of film available, use them to chronicle changes in society's attitude to particular issues or to past events over time. This approach is more sensitive in picking up cultural change rather than taking a single film or a group of films on unrelated subjects over a short period. An example of this can be seen in how Hollywood represented African Americans in the films *Birth*, *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Glory*.

History films also provide a safe environment to examine the issues of the day since putting on period costumes shields the audience from confronting issues directly.⁶⁵ The film *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) set in the 1920s was, according to David Newman one of its creators, 'about what is going on now.' The two 'anti-establishment, rebellious and independent' young criminals were challenging authority and the social conditions and developing an alternative life-style similar to the students, civil rights activists and those seeking a counter-culture in the late 1960s.⁶⁶ The same can be said of Civil War films, which presented an image of the America of the present by exploring the process of reconciliation, the formation of national identity and race relations in the nineteenth century. Who were included as Americans, and who were not, at what time the process of inclusion began, or was stopped and restarted, can be identified and related to what was happening in society at the time of production.

Hollywood has a significant role as a mediator and presenter of cultural values. It is not just a reflector of themes and issues but an active participant in the political arena. It does it by stealth, 'creating an illusion that what happens on the screen is a neutral recording of objective events' rather than promoting a particular ideology.⁶⁷ Traditional Hollywood supported the status quo and steered clear of any ideology that challenged the existing order unless it seemed that its own best interest were served by producing a more liberal film.⁶⁸ The way Hollywood responded to the political and social pressures, and to its own financial crises during this period, confirms the influence of the present in Hollywood films.

Some film historians have taken this approach, particularly with westerns, which have become synonymous with America's political, cultural and psychological development.⁶⁹ Michael Coyne, in *The Crowded Prairie* (1997), looks at how the Hollywood western has been a 'potent means of articulating and promoting' the development of national identity.⁷⁰

He uses selected films to illustrate how the western ‘remained popular by being thematically and stylistically responsive to the nation’s ever-changing culture’ setting the films against the context of their production.⁷¹ Similarly, Civil War films can be used to assist our understanding of America as they have an almost continuous production history and deal with issues that continue to be debated.

This thesis concentrates on Hollywood’s representation of the Civil War in the middle of the twentieth century, not about Hollywood producing period features, which are set in the middle of the nineteenth century. Film historians of the post-World War II period emphasise the Cold War as the most important factor in determining the relationship between Hollywood and society. But accenting just the Cold War is an inadequate model to explain how Hollywood altered its representation of the Civil War as the focus is generally on the 1945-55 decade, just as the Civil Rights Movement begins to have a significant impact. Those who look in some depth at Civil War films, see the films in a broader social context in their analysis but still miss significant connections.⁷² Even African American film historians barely mention the Civil Rights Movement, as they are more concerned with representation and image than context.⁷³ There also appears to be no discussion on why Hollywood’s attitude to the centennial celebrations of the Civil War was so different to that of the semi-centennial; or why Hollywood changed its attitude towards African American representation in Civil War movies; or why Civil War films were popular at some times and not at others.

What is a Civil War film?

There is one outstanding methodological issue that remains and that is the definition of what constitutes a Civil War film. Over the years Hollywood’s focus on the Civil War has changed from films that were almost exclusively set during the Civil War period to those that were located only partly in the Civil War or mainly, if not exclusively, after the Civil War. This may be why some film historians do not give a definition while others talk about ‘the Civil War era,’ which encompasses the Ante Bellum and the Reconstruction periods.⁷⁴ It was essential therefore to establish criteria as to which films should be included and which should be excluded.

The outstanding and unresolved issues of the Civil War were race, civil rights and national

identity and these were taken as the key criteria if the narrative was not directly set during the war. To be included, therefore, a film had to take place wholly or partly during the Civil War; or either before or after the Civil War period but having a direct relationship to the war through the characters, issues and narrative; or addressed issues that were directly related to the Civil War and its outcome - even if it was at some distance in time. A film was excluded if it was set at the same time but did not address the issues, was not made by Hollywood, e.g. British films and 'spaghetti westerns,' or was a 'made-for-television' film. (See Appendices 5-7 for Civil War Film Exhibition from 1908.)

Film historians have tended to concentrate on the few well-known Civil War films but it is the presentation of the issues in the many less well-known films that is just as, possibly more, significant. In his preface to *Movie-Made America* Robert Sklar said that he had 'to go beyond the handful of major directors and the few dozen classic films' to understand the role of motion pictures in the twentieth century.⁷⁵ In the same way it is essential to look at the whole range of Civil War films, many, of which, may have been popular at the time, in order to examine changes in popular consciousness.

- ¹ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 5.
- ² Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1983).
- ³ For example see the comments of the contributors in Mark Carnes, (ed.), *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).
- ⁴ 'A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles' in Carnes, (ed.), *Past Imperfect*, 11-28.
- ⁵ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 58.
- ⁶ Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 200.
- ⁷ Raymond A. Cook, *Thomas Dixon* (New York: Twayne, 1974), 115.
- ⁸ Peter C. Rollins, *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 2.
- ⁹ James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, 8 Volumes (New York: MacMillan, 1892-1906).
- ¹⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', paper given to the American Historical Association in 1893.
- ¹¹ Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret their Civil War* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 238-39.
- ¹² The Mutual Film Corporation had filed a case against the states of Ohio and Kansas for permitting their films to be censored. Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies, Revised and Updated* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994, first published 1975), 127.
- ¹³ Thomas Cripps, *Hollywood's High Noon: Moviemaking and Society Before Television* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 74; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 127-28.
- ¹⁴ *Burstyn v. Wilson*, 1952.
- ¹⁵ Article in *The Editor*, 1915, quoted in Robert Lang, (ed.), *The Birth of a Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 4.
- ¹⁶ Griffith used and quoted from Woodrow Wilson's *A History of the American People*, Vol. 5, *Reunion and Nationalisation* (New York, 1901), 49-60 as quoted in Michael Rogin, 'The Sword Becomes a Flashing Vision,' in Lang (ed.) *The Birth of a Nation*, 253.
- ¹⁷ Letter to *Sight and Sound*, 1947, quoted in Lang, (ed.), *The Birth of a Nation*, 3.
- ¹⁸ Yale University in association with Pathe produced a series of films in the early 1920s under the title *Authorised History: Chronicles of America* based on books in the Yale library. Only events up to the Civil War were to be filmed as it was felt that later events were too close and therefore too delicate to be considered. Roberta Pearson 'A White Man's Country,' seminar at University College London, 9 November, 2000.
- ¹⁹ George F. Custen, 'Making History' in Marcia Landy, (ed.), *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 70.
- ²⁰ Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films* (New York, 1964) quoted in Thomas Cripps, 'Film: The Historians' Dangerous Friend,' *Film and History*, 5 (1975), 6.

- ²¹ George F. Custen, 'Hollywood and the Research Department,' in Alan Rosenthal, (ed.), *Why Docudrama?* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: South Illinois University Press, 1999), 134 – 146.
- ²² Custen, 'Hollywood and the Research Department,' 137-38. However basic factual errors crept in which went against Hollywood's insistence on the validity of their research. For example in *Five Guns West* (1955) one of the men released from prison to carry out the mission had been put there in 1867, whilst the co-producer of *The Horse Soldiers* (1959) said that it was 'to be released on the next 4th July (1959) during the centennial.' *Citizen News*, 26 November, 1958.
- ²³ The Motion Picture Production Code was adopted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers in February 1930, and by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America in March 1930. It came fully into effect in 1934 and was amended several times until it was replaced by a rating system in 1968. The code established in general and in particular terms what could and what could not be shown, uttered or be the subject of a picture.
- ²⁴ Louis Gianneth, *Understanding Movies, 9th Edition* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), 362; Phillip L. Gianos, *Politics and Politicians in American Film* (London: Praeger, 1999), 4-7.
- ²⁵ Letter to Samuel Marx, 18 April, 1935, Gottschalk Papers, 1: 6, quoted in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream, The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, Published 1988), 194.
- ²⁶ Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 77.
- ²⁷ Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty,' *American Historical Review*, 93 (1988), 1193-99.
- ²⁸ Toplin, *Reel History*, 47-50, 59; Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 59,78.
- ²⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Reconstruction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- ³⁰ Term used on H-FILM in 1998 in a discussion on judging history films.
- ³¹ Toplin discusses 'good' film history – as in *Shadowlands* (1993), *Glory* (1989) and *Titanic* (1997) – as compared to 'bad' film history – as in *Amistad* (1997), *Mississippi Burning* (1998) and *The Hurricane* (1999) - in *Reel History*, 58-89.
- ³² This was a loose term for a group 'united by their "conviction of America's depravity."' Only some were connected to the New Left students' movement. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 417-8.
- ³³ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 23.
- ³⁴ David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 74.
- ³⁵ Carnes, (ed.), *Past Imperfect*, 12.
- ³⁶ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 4-5.
- ³⁷ The film industry saw the potential in this new market and began to make new films available on video – and now on DVD - but has been recording older films, including the silent movies, onto video and DVD using new techniques to remaster the existing copies.
- ³⁸ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 47.
- ³⁹ By 1977 over one thousand colleges were offering film-related courses. Melvyn Stokes, 'The Rise of Film History' in Melvyn Stokes, (ed.), *The State of U.S. History* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 269.
- ⁴⁰ Survey carried out in May 2004 on the internet.

- ⁴¹ For example Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Film*, New Third Edition (Oxford: Roundhouse, 1994, first published 1973); Sklar, *Movie-made America*; Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976); Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- ⁴² Stokes, 'The Rise of Film History,' 271-2.
- ⁴³ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 2. *Past Imperfect* was published for the Society of American Historians.
- ⁴⁴ Carnes, (ed.), *Past Imperfect*, 9-10.
- ⁴⁵ John Sayles makes films like *Matewan* (1987) – about a mining strike in the 1920s in West Virginia. He has his own production company and raises the finances he needs for each film.
- ⁴⁶ 'A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles' in Carnes, (ed.), *Past Imperfect*, 11-28.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Howells, review of *Past Imperfect* in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 28 June, 1996.
- ⁴⁸ John E. O'Connor, 'History in Images/ Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past,' *American Historical Review*, 93 (1988), 1200-9.
- ⁴⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 9-10.
- ⁵⁰ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 55-6, 77-8.
- ⁵¹ Toplin, *Reel History*, 158, 200.
- ⁵² Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 79.
- ⁵³ Robert A. Rosenstone, 'The Historical film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age' in Marcia Landy, (ed.), *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 66.
- ⁵⁴ This quotation is from the 1950s television police series *Dragnet* (1951-59) and said by Sergeant Joe Friday when he investigates a crime. Robert A. Rosenstone, 16 April 1999, 'Reflections on Reflections on history in images/history in words', *Screening the Past*. Available from: <http://latrobe.edu.au/screeningthe-past/firstrelease/fr0499/rrfr6c.htm> (accessed 10 July, 2003).
- ⁵⁵ Rosenstone, *Reflections*.
- ⁵⁶ Sumiko Higashi, 'Rethinking Film as American History,' *Rethinking History*, 2 (1998), 87-101.
- ⁵⁷ Tim Cornwell, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 26 January, 1996, 16-17.
- ⁵⁸ Michael R. Pitts, *Hollywood and American History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1984).
- ⁵⁹ Toplin, *Reel History*, 203.
- ⁶⁰ Sorlin, *The Film in History*, ix; Peter C. Rollins, (ed.), *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1983), 1-2; Robert A. Rosenstone, 'History in Images/ History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film,' *American Historical Review*, 93 (1988), 1173-85; David Herlihy, 'Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Film and History,' *American Historical Review*, 93 (1988), 1186-92.
- ⁶¹ Leger Grindon, *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1.
- ⁶² Rosenstone: 'Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age,' 51-4.

⁶³ Rosenstone, 'The Historical Film,' 58; 'A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles,' in Carnes, (ed.), *Past Imperfect*, 11-28.

⁶⁴ Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, *American History: The Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 2.

⁶⁵ Stanley Kubrick comments that setting a film in the past 'removes the environmental blinkers....and gives....a deeper and more objective perspective.' Quoted in Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, 24.

⁶⁶ Toplin, *Reel History*, 42.

⁶⁷ Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), quoted in McCrisken and Pepper, *American History*, 8.

⁶⁸ Ernest Giglio, *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film and Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 10 - 11.

⁶⁹ Philip French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); Jeanine Basinger, *American Cinema: One Hundred Years of Filmmaking* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991); Jenni Calder, *There Must be a Lone Ranger Somewhere: The Myth and Reality of the Wild West* (London: Sphere Books, 1976); John H. Lenihan, *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in Western Film* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Philip R. Loy, *Westerns and American Culture, 1930-1955* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2001).

⁷⁰ Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), ix.

⁷¹ Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie*, 86.

⁷² For example: Coyne, in *The Crowded Prairie*, notes contemporary social problems and gives some context; Lenihan, *Showdown* includes the Cold War and race but not the Civil Rights Movement; David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) looks at the 'Vietnam' western; E. D. C. Campbell, *The Celluloid South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981) gives context and includes the Civil Rights Movement but does not examine its impact above the general political outline; J.T. Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, revised 1986, first published 1978) identifies the change in America's representation of the South but includes very few Civil War films after 1945 and more historical than political and social context; David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) briefly outlines the Civil Rights Movement milestones and white reaction in the 1950/1960s.

⁷³ Where race is the main concern the accent is on stereotyping and the influence of individual actors as in Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) although he does use the current political background; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*; Vincent F. Rocchio, *Reel Racism: Confronting Hollywood's Construction of African-American Culture* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2000).

⁷⁴ Some authors, like Chadwick in *The Reel Civil War* (2001), include the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* films or films about the early life of Lincoln. Kenneth Cameron, in *America on Film* (1997), excludes all films that do not have a real person and some version of a real and specific event. On this basis he only includes three Civil War films from the 1950s, one of which, about John Brown, ends in 1859. Yet he omits two other films that meet his criteria - *Quantrill's Raiders* (1958) and *The Horse Soldiers* (1959).

⁷⁵ Sklar, *Movie-made America*, ix.