**Historical Film Critique and Comparison**

**What is it?** The real circumstances behind a dramatization based on fact are often more complicated than can be portrayed in a 90-minute or even a 3-hour film. However, the only exposure most people may have to an important historical event probably comes through a TV show or movie, not through reading historical accounts from multiple perspectives. It is therefore important to be able to engage critically with dramatizations of history.

**Parameters:** You are going to compare and contrast the film version of an event to the actual events on which it is based. You will need to differentiate elements based on factual accounts from elements based on interpretation. In addition you will need to judge how much alteration to the historical narrative is justified in order to produce a good film or TV show, as opposed to what need not have been altered. You will need to watch a film, and then select appropriate historical readings that present the same event. You will need to write a 3-4 page essay that compares and contrasts the film and the historical readings. A bibliography, or list of resources used, needs to accompany the essay, citing both the film and the readings you consulted. The bibliography needs to be formatted according to Chicago style.

**Sample reading:** This book contains the kind of critique you are being asked to create.

Boggs, Johnny D. *Jesse James and the Movies*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011. (On reserve in library. Ask for it at the Circulation Desk).

**Instructions:** Choose from the list of films provided. All the films are available on DVD in the library at the Circulation Desk, if you do not have any other access to the film, such as Netflix. View the film at least once, but try to watch it two or three times if possible. Make a basic outline of the historical setting of the film, using the following questions:

* when does the action take place?
* What dates are referenced within the story
* How much time passes between each scene?
* Make a list of the main characters, and divide them into those that have a historical basis, and those that were invented by the dramatist for purposes of narrative.

After viewing the film, find scholarly articles that discuss, critique, evaluate or assess the dramatization. Use a specifically historical database that you will find listed on <http://libguides.lmu.edu/history> and consult a librarian if you are not sure how to use the database. In addition, find one book about the events or general historical period portrayed in the movie (it does not have to critique the movie itself). Use the Framework for Evaluation below to assess your sources. Scholarly authority is the minimum requirement, but your sources must also be relevant, accurate, and so forth.

Your 3-4 page paper should briefly describe the film, and then summarize the critiques of it, making special note of whether there is consensus or disagreement about how the film handled the historical facts on which it was based. Your reader should become more informed about the film’s relationship to our historical knowledge about these events or people.

**Films that may be chosen for this assignment**:

Braveheart. Directed by Mel Gibson. 1995. Hollywood, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006. DVD.

Apollo 13. Directed by Ron Howard. 1995. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.

Windtalkers. Directed by John Woo. 2002. Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006. DVD.

Sid and Nancy. Directed by Alex Cox. 1986. Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2000.

1911 Revolution. Directed by Jackie Chan and Zhang Li. 2011. Well Go USA Entertainment, 2012.

**Framework for Evaluation:** You must use the RADAR (relevance, authority, date, accuracy, and rationale) framework to address the following evaluative points in your sources:  
  
*Relevance*: How does this source relate to your research question? What does this source add to general knowledge on your topic? What is the intended audience level of this source, and is it appropriate for your topic?

*Authority:* or qualifications of the author (e.g., John Smith, a Russian history professor at USC, based his research on recently discovered documents). Is this work cited by other works writing on the same topic?  
  
*Date:* Is the information obsolete? Has new information superseded the conclusions made in this source?

*Accuracy:* Are there statements that disagree with your other sources? Was this source reviewed or edited? Are the author’s claims supported by evidence/references?

*Rationale:* Is there a bias in relation to your topic (e.g., “However, Smith’s case is somewhat weakened by an anti-German bias”)? Are alternative points-of-view acknowledged?

**Resources:** You may wish to consult any of the following resources for additional help with this assignment:

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|  | **Research Help** | * Library Information Desk- 1st Floor of Library (open 24/5) * 24/7 Ask A Librarian Chat: <http://library.lmu.edu/gethelp/> |
|  | **Find Books, Articles, etc.** | * Library Research Guides: <http://libguides.lmu.edu/libguides> |
|  | **Tutoring (help with citations and editing)** | * Academic Resource Center: <http://academics.lmu.edu/arc/> |
|  | **MLA Citation Guidelines** | * Citation Styles Libguide: <http://libguides.lmu.edu/citations> * *MLA Handbook*: Information Desk REF LB2369 .G53 2009 |

**Rubric for Evaluation of Historical Film Critique:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Low** | **Medium** | **High** |
| **Quantity of sources** | Less than 2 total sources | 2-4 total sources | 4-6 or more total sources |
| **Variety of material types** | Is missing more than 2 required source types (2 books, 3 articles, 1internet, and 1 tertiary) | Is missing 1-2 required source types (2 books, 3 articles, 1 internet, and 1 tertiary) | Includes all of the required source types (2 books, 3 articles, 1 internet, 1 tertiary) |
| **Accuracy of classifying type of source** | Most sources incorrectly identified as primary or secondary; and scholarly or popular (Less than 60% correctly identified) | Some sources incorrectly identified as primary or secondary; and scholarly or popular (60%-89% correctly identified) | Almost all sources correctly identified as primary or secondary; and scholarly or popular (90% or more correctly identified) |
| **Inclusion of authoritative and scholarly sources** | Does not include any scholarly source appropriate to the topic | Includes 1 scholarly source appropriate to the topic | Includes at least 2 scholarly sources appropriate to the topic |
| **Variety in points of view and time** | A single point of view provides the primary substance of the annotations. No comparisons are made across sources with different perspectives. Does not develop meaningful insights based upon a variety of perspectives or time periods (if appropriate) | At least two opposing viewpoints are represented. Comparisons are made across sources with two opposing perspectives. Develops some insights based on more than one perspective and time period (if appropriate) | Diverse points of view (more than 2) are represented. Sources represent a range of publication dates to show the spectrum of thought on a topic, as appropriate. Comparisons are made across sources with different perspectives. Develops meaningful insights based upon a variety of perspectives |
| **\*Currency (only if applicable to topic)** | The most up-to-date research has not been consulted- no sources published within the last 5 years | Retrieves 1 or 2 sources published within the last 5 years | Retrieves more than 2 sources published within the last 5 years |
| **Correct identification of bibliographic information in citations** | Citations have major errors in the identification of author, title, source, publisher, and date | Citations have minor errors in the identification of author, title, source, publisher, and date | Citations correctly identify author, title, source, publisher, and date |
| **Cite sources correctly using a suitable referencing style** | Annotations have major grammatical, spelling, formatting, or stylistic errors | Annotations have minor grammatical, spelling, formatting, or stylistic errors | Annotations are free of grammatical, spelling, formatting, or stylistic errors |
| **Audience level** | Incorrectly identifies audience or fails to address audience level for most sources | Correctly identifies audience some of the time, but not for all sources | Correctly identifies audience for all sources |
| **Authority of author** | Fails to correctly identify author credentials and author bias/intentions for most sources | Articulates inaccurate or incomplete author credentials and bias/intentions within the context of the research topic some of the time | Articulates author’s credentials and bias/intentions within the context of the research topic accurately for all sources |
| **Content/Main purpose of source** | Annotations are too short and summaries are vague or inaccurate. Does not address usefulness to research topic. Does not demonstrate higher level critical thinking | Annotations are appropriate in length, but summaries are not always unique to source. Does not always address usefulness to research topic. Tends towards summary rather than higher level critical thinking | Annotations are appropriate in length, and summaries are unique to the source and accurate. Addresses usefulness to research topic. Demonstrates sophisticated level of critical thinking |
| **Inclusion of 1 bad source for research topic** | Does not include 1 bad source | Includes 1 bad source, but inaccurately or incompletely explains why it should be excluded (criteria includes relevancy, accuracy, authority, currency, or bias) | Includes 1 bad source and accurately and completely explains why it should be excluded (criteria includes relevancy, accuracy, authority, currency, or bias) |