

Historical accuracy of the film gone with the wind



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The key to improving the future is being able to understand and learn from the past. If the past is not studied, the likelihood of repeating the same mistakes over and over again is extremely high. Repeating the same basic mistakes, with new variations, that people many years ago made does not progress into the future, but rather keeps bringing the past back.

For example, had the roaring twenties in the 1920's not occurred, people would not have learned of the dangers of buying much more than they could afford and just putting it on credit. After that economic boom, the Great Depression of the 1930's happened and as a whole, society changed for the future. People realized that they had to be more careful and conscientious of how and where they spent their money. Throughout the past, another lesson that has been learned can be seen through America's colonial rule and the difference in how Spain and France treated their colonist.

When the Spanish came and settled colonies, they used force to rule and completely disrupted the normal life of the Native Americans. On the other hand, the French were civil with Natives and allowed them to continue living how they had been, but just asked for help with fur trading. The outcome of this treatment was very beneficial for the French because when the Seven Years War, also known as the French and Indian War, broke out in 1756 because the French had their natives as allies. This helped them tremendously because the natives were more familiar with the land and had weapons and battle methods of their own. The records of both of these events were crucial in being able to learn from them. People recorded their version of what happened during both of these time periods by keeping journals, writing newspaper articles, and passing down events from word of

mouth. As technology progressed, people were able to start keeping track of historical events by making short films and eventually, movies. The movie *Gone With the Wind* produced by David O. Selznick in 1939 is a film that was used to capture a vital time period in the South.

The movie is fictional, but explores many topics that were historically accurate of what life was like for many different types of people who lived back then. The movie follows the story of Scarlett O'Hara, a young woman who lives on a beautiful plantation in Georgia, and her tangled love life with Mr. Ashley and Mr. Butler. Scarlett is seen as a scandalous character and sometimes comes across as unladylike. Soon after she is married to Charles Hamilton and he dies, the Civil War begins and Scarlett moves to Atlanta where she is met face to face with the men from her past. As the war progresses, resources in the city become more sparse and the Yankees have the upper hand in the war. Once Scarlett is able to escape back home to her town in Georgia she sees how much damage the war has caused and makes it her mission to rebuild the town back to its previous status. Many complications arise, but Scarlett persists and eventually successfully restores Tara, but yet again has several major setbacks. While *Gone with the Wind* is a classic example of the past being glorified, it brings to light some of the serious truths of the past, such as slavery, the female role in society, and the Civil War.

The topic of slavery is not one that has been swept under the rug. Students begin learning about the harsh treatment of certain peoples at a young age and as they grow older are exposed to many of the misconceptions of slavery. The film is set in the South, which leads to a skewed point of view on <https://assignbuster.com/historical-accuracy-of-the-film-gone-with-the-wind/>

the topic of slavery. The movie depicted the slave who lived in the house, Mammy, as a woman who is a part of the family. She was shown as happy, able to discipline Scarlett, and seemed as if she was a regular worker. Sadly, this was a very accurate representation of how many people who lived then felt about owning slaves. This depiction of slavery further adds to the fact that many southerners did not see a problem with slavery, and even if they believed it to be morally wrong, they still went along with the bandwagon and owned slaves to do their work for them. President Jackson was a culprit of this; as much as he supposedly disliked slavery he still owned his fair share (Kagan and Hyslop 23). The movie also had a sign in the beginning of it that read Anyone disturbing the peace on this plantation will be prosecuted. (Gone with the Wind Selznick). In today's times, a sign like this would be very rare and seem extreme, however back in the time of slavery it was common and no one had a second thought upon reading something to that nature. If a slave were to be caught revolting or doing anything that was not approved by their master, they would typically be brutally beaten or in some cases even killed.

An example of this is illustrated in the event where nineteen slaves overthrew a boat headed for the Bahamas; the slaves killed several people and demanded the ship be sailed to Nassau (Horton and Horton 119). When word got back to the American government of what their slaves had done, they were furious. The American government wanted the slaves to be transported back to America immediately for trial. However, due to revolutionaries in the Bahamas, this group of slaves was set free and not forced to return back to where they were wrongfully treated. Although this

group got lucky, one can only infer what would have happened to them if they had been released back into the American government's hands. Unfortunately, this is the situation all too many slaves had to face. Another example of escaped slaves can be seen in a letter written to the State Directors of the Federal Writers Project. In this letter, Henry G. Alberg, the author, explicitly states that there were advertisements for fugitive slaves. This letter is an essential clue into how people of color used to be treated because now, in more modern times, while walking down the street there would never be a flyer claiming a reward for a person who has run away from their master.

In Charleston in 1720, a group of slaves led a violent revolt. They tried to flee to Georgia, but were found and eventually the whole group of them were executed. Another famous example of slaves rebelling is the Stono Rebellion. This rebellion, also known as Cato's Conspiracy, was in 1739 in near Charleston, South Carolina. A group of slaves robbed a store and began their journey. As they ventured through states, many people died and their group that began as twenty had grown to near one hundred. Following this rebellion, many of the whites in the South had a growing fear that another uprising would taken place, so they placed even stricter laws on their slaves. These laws tried to prevent those who were enslaved from accumulating into groups, growing food for themselves, and made a new ratio for blacks to whites on plantations. All these new laws were in hopes to prevent a future revolt. In *Gone With the Wind*, slaves were portrayed in the way that Southerners wanted the rest of the world to see them as, even though it may

not have been completely accurate. *Gone with the Wind* also sheds light onto a female's role in society during the 1800s.

The film depicted how women were portrayed and showed many of the struggles that they endured. Firstly, as seen through many characters, such as Scarlett, marriage was a big deal. Due to the fact that women did not have much of their own social status, they relied heavily on their husbands to be successful and wealthy. Many women were stay at home mothers during this time period, so marrying well was a must (Gender & The Civil War). When it was time for a female to get married, she had to make sure that her husband would be able to provide for not only her, but also for their future children. A woman's family played a significant role in choosing her spouse. Her father would need to approve of her fiancé and his family. In Scarlett's case, her parents were selfless to her and did anything they were able to ensure her happiness. Her father cared about her more than anything, as did her mother although her mother was an almost impossible role model, due to her strong will and determination compared to her spirited daughter, for her to grow up to be like. When it was time for Scarlett to marry, Gerald and Ellen supervised her choice and gave their input, but ultimately let her decide whom she wanted to spend her life with. This would have very uncommon in this time period. In the film, women are also seen doing what they can to make themselves appear as feminine as they can. This can be seen when Scarlett was preparing to go to the party in one of the beginning scenes (*Gone with the Wind* Selznick).

Mammy, the house slave, brought up a giant platter of food and tells her to begin eating. Scarlett stuffed herself then, in the privacy of her own home,
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so that when she was out in public, surrounded by all the people of importance in her life, she will be able to eat very little and still be satisfied. This was a common practice back in the day. Women were constantly watched and judged based on their appearance. They had to be very conscious of how they presented themselves. In a time where the female body was very critiqued, women were even more self-aware of their bodies than they are today. In order to combat this insecurity, women would be very careful about what they ate in front of other people, especially men. Women would also tend to wear elegant dresses that were fitted weeks before an event, so they had to be confident that their attire would still fit properly. In the movie, there is also an accurate representation of how women helped out on the plantation. While these women were wealthy thanks to their husbands' fortunes, they also played a role in the overseeing of slaves. In the movie *Ellen*, Gerald's wife and Scarlett's mom, played a vital role in this (Gone with the Wind Selznick). She would be the figure out what the next days work would be, mainly for the house slave Mammy. Back in the 1860s, the time period the movie was set in, as much as men wanted to be able to handle the plantations themselves they did often need assistance from their wives since running a whole system of slaves was time consuming and challenging.

Another accuracy from the movie relation to a woman's role in society is the idea that much of the time women stayed at home with their children while their husbands went off to work. In the movie, this is seen through the husbands and male figures, such as Rhett, going out to fight in the war. Scarlett and other females stayed at home to hold down the plantations and

stay with children. This is somewhat similar to the idea of republican motherhood that was present throughout the Revolutionary War that took place almost one hundred years before the Civil War. Republican motherhood was the philosophy that mothers would stay at home and raise up the next generation. In *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett stayed behind with her sister-in-law, Melanie, through the midst of the war in Atlanta while she is pregnant and gives birth to her child. While Scarlett was not the child's mother, it still showed the ideal that the child's father would leave to go to fight, while the mother and other prominent female figure in its life stayed behind to ensure he or she would be properly raised. While the movie depicted many of the hardships that females were faced with in the nineteenth century, it also portrayed many of views and events of the Civil War.

The Civil War took was caused mainly by the dispute over slavery in the Northern and Southern states. The broke out on April 12, 1961 and revolutionized American society. Many of America's citizens at this time had opposing views of the war and the ideas surrounding it; secession and slavery. Many plantation owners in the South were in favor of the war because they had a dire need to own slaves since the South's economy was mainly based off of cash crops that were grown, tended, and picked by slaves. In the movie, Rhett Butler and many of the other men were the representation of the draft. The draft forced men eighteen and older to go fight in the war. Only men with money could purchase exemptions (Kagan and Hyslop 246). Exemptions cost up to \$300, about as much as the average worker made in an entire year, and men who purchased these were often

seen by others as traitors (Kagan and Hyslop 246). In this aspect, the movie was correct in sending all of the eligible men into the war because even if having a substitute go in for them was an option, they did not want others to think down upon them for not being courageous enough to protect their side of the nation.

The movie also portrayed the economic differences between the South and the North properly. The South was the cotton kingdom, but did not have much more. The North was far more industrialized, which gave them the advantage of having better weapons and road ways (Kagan and Hyslop 24). In *Gone with the Wind*, shortly after the war began the Southern's came to realize that the North had far more money than them, which would lead to their defeat. One of the gentlemen in the movie, Mr. Butler, stood up to his friends by pointing out the fact that the South did not have any cannon factories and by saying, the Yankees are better equipped than we. They've got factories, shipyards, coal mines, and a fleet to bottle up our harbors and starve us to death. All we've got is cotton, and slaves, and arrogance. (*Gone with the Wind* Selznick). At this point in the movie, all his fellow men are upset with him for speaking poorly of the South, but once they go to war they realize he was unfortunately correct.