

# The roman empire in american cinema essay

[History](#), [Empires](#)



American film has always portrayed numerous faces of society and of various generations. Historical films were made by famous filmmakers to reenact such important accounts that happened in a particular era in our times past. In addition to that, films were also produced to portray a particular character that has an infamous story behind and such portrayal were made as exactly as possible.

Most of the films produced also reflect the view of the filmmakers about a particular person, event, or any aspect of the film. Such reflection can be seen either on the film plot, character appearances, or even on the dialogues used in the films made.

The Roman Empire has played a major role in the vital part of the United States government and public affairs. It is also a known fact that many people view the history of the Roman regime as that of exactly opposite to the role America wants to portray in the eyes of other nations.

The Roman kingdom was associated with many negative attributes that was also revealed in many films produced by American film industries. Most of the American films produced that has a touch of Roman culture were mostly associated with squandering, corruption and slavery. They even analogize Roman rule to Hitler's regime which was very obvious to have an extremely bad reputation. Such viewpoint further sees the Roman Empire as the old version of fascism or totalitarian rule, which are very common for countries today and during the World War II. Such cruelty was associated with false claims that Rome is offering peace among its people and any resistance is being dealt with brutal force and unjust military power. Such scenario was focused by the movies produced in America, showing these characteristics of

Roman domain over its lands and territories. Military Cruelty and Religious Discrimination Many American themes portrayed Roman regime to have eliminated any form of resistance against their rule. They delivered a clear message to the film viewers that Roman Empire leaves no choice for those who tried to oppose their statute as a nation.

Cruelty and merciless approaches were vividly portrayed by many films pertaining to Roman's strategy to control their empire. One particular film that was produced is the film entitled Spartacus. In a specific scenario, a Roman general spoke words to a slave about Rome and its characteristics. The general said to the slave that he has no option but to obey and love Rome or face dreadful end for his life. With that dialogue, the film showed its view as Rome as a dictatorial form of governing its people. Another account for the film was when the Roman general was later found out to be a sexually pervert official, presenting a morally bankrupt Roman society. Another film entitled " The Greatest Story ever told" also showed the dictatorship of Rome over its citizen. The officers even mentioned that people should not even think about resisting Roman authority to continue to enjoy peace, which in reality is slavery.

(Winkler, 2001) Another film was made showing the capital of Rome as the hub of iniquity and corruption. In the film Ben-Hur, the main character of the story mentioned Rome as the one responsible for the death of his friend, and that it was the evil Rome who killed his friend (Winkler, 2001). With this messages, the film obviously viewed Rome as that of an oppressor and a cold-blood killer. This completely opposed the principles of American

people which is for freedom and equality among people. With regards to the aspect of religion, American movies also pictured Rome as an oppressor of religious freedom. The film showed the iron hand of Rome in the persecution of Christians during that particular era. Various ways were dealt with those who were captured as a member of the Christian community.

As a result, Roman government was clearly viewed as anti-Christianity and a supporter of pagan religion. Roman Government and Fascism Motion pictures were made that showed the internal problems that continually plagued the Roman kingdom which eventually caused the gradual fall of the empire. A film entitled Quo Vadis depicted a love story about a Roman officer and a Christian woman. However, it was also included in this story the incompetent ruler of Roman which was Emperor Nero who was accused of burning the entire palace while laughing. He was also remembered for his cruelty against Christians during his reign as emperor of Rome. Also in the film, Nero was regarded as a divine being, and was highly regarded being the highest officer during that time.

There was one scenario in the film when Nero was seen by many as the Hitler of Germany when he started to persecute Christians while justifying his actions as a way to protect Rome and uphold justice in his regime. Many parts of the film can be associated the acts of Roman government as those that was made by the Nazi government during Hitler's time. A particular act of Nero when he ordered burning of books of Petronius was the same acts made by the Nazis during the war in the 1940's.

In addition to that, since the Romans look like the Nazis in the world war, their victims, the ancient Jews and Christians resemble the modern Jews during Hitler's time. In the film, some of Nero's words and declaration can somehow be compared as a replica with what Adolf Hitler mentioned like his intentions to lead the entire world under his rule. Filmmakers

**Influence** One of the major factors that can be associated with the subject matter is the background of the filmmakers who were mainly responsible for the total ideology of the film. A popular director named William Wyler was a refugee and had a first hand experience during the World War II and had an active participation in the anti-Nazi movement (Winkler, 2001). He also had a relative who were imprisoned during the oppression by the Germans during his time. He was exposed greatly on the injustices that happened during that time and, as a result, made films that made the Roman Empire's action as that of the Nazi people.

This was evident in the films that he directed the movie Ben-Hur, having many similarities with the actions he incorporated in the film as that the Nazi ruled during the 1940 era. He also made significant improvements on the plot of the films he made, and more dramatic dialogue lines that catches more attention from the film enthusiasts.

Another person who made great influences on the American film in portraying the Roman Empire is Gore Vidal who was also very careful in the details when directed films particularly on the historical side of the film. Worked as a writer for Wyler, he contributed much to the remake of the Ben-Hur film and did precision in the totality of the film (Winkler, 2001). Because of his exposure in the World War

II, he correlated some of the lines used in the film as those that were implied by the Nazi during their reign.

One particular example is when the character spoke to Ben-Hur on his resistance against the Roman rule, obviously the same when the Nazi then also acted whenever resistance is being dealt. Such reflections and similarities followed a clear idea that condemned the entire Roman authority as the Nazi existence was also strongly denounced. Another dialogue in the film that further supported that claim was when the main character mentioned Rome as evil and had caused great insult for God. On the contrary, there is a film that did not focus on the cruelty of Rome but on the grandeur of the city and its structures. Director Anthony Mann directed the movie but was totally overwhelmed by the image produced by the other personalities, making Rome as the ancient Nazi people.

With all that was stated focusing on the perception of the American films on the Roman Empire, it is clearly presented that American cinema viewed the reign of the Roman kingdom then as cruel and very immoral. It was even interchanged with the brutal rule of the Nazi government, which many people had a glimpse of that particular piece of history. In an over-all viewpoint, American movies portrayed the tyranny and unjust persecution of the Roman government to its victims and more weight was given on the negative side of the Roman Empire than the beauty of the expanse of the kingdom. In addition to that, sexual perversion among Roman officers was also given emphasis in some of the movies made, clearly showing the moral bankruptcy of the once great empire. Such portrayal is also supported by the

written chronicles about the Roman Empire, from its climb to power up to its gradual decline and eventual fall of the kingdom. All of this was paralleled with the movies and other important accounts, making it well grounded with the facts. Works Cited Winkler, M.

(2001). *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 50-76