

Essay on films and history; american wars

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



Introduction

Films are an effective way in which the history of the people can be presented. While historical events happen spontaneously, the film making process is a carefully planned exercise in which effort is expended by the film makers in portraying their characters in a way that makes the most impact on its viewers. Effective movie making process with an aim at preserving history is possible, therefore, by the inclusion of social ideals in the movie plot whilst they might have been absent in the actual chronology of the historical events. Such moral virtues, such an adherence to personal effort in striving for success and democracy when present in a character, in American film for instance, makes the character and the events easily identifiable to the audience. However, while attempting to appeal to the audience, some movies aimed at preserving history deviate from the original historical plot of the events they are based. Despite their deviations, majority of such films maintain the spirit of history in them, and in the least, initiate dialogue in the events that inspire them, thus preserving their memory, though indirectly. This paper seeks to establish the fidelity of three movies to their historical adaptation, and the extent of their digression where present. Further, the analysis seeks to unearth the intentions of the film makers in their depictions of various characters and scenarios in relation to their historical benchmark. The inspiration harnessed in making this analysis draws from the movies 'Dances with wolves (Indian wars) 1990', 'The Tuskegee Airmen (World War II) 1995', and 'Rough Riders (Spanish-American War) 1997'.

Each movie is a descent adaptation to the historical events it attempts at

representing. The movie that inspires attention is 'The Tuskegee Airmen'. The aspect that inspires in this movie is the ability of individuals to overcome all odds and rise to the highest echelons in the society. The success enjoyed by the Tuskegee black aviators is inspiring. This movie displeases in that the makers failed to accommodate the possibility of human fallibility, and extolled the aviators to disproportionate levels of invincibility and heroism, unwittingly sidelining another exceptional contributor to the aviators' success in the process (McKissack, pg199). The movie dance with wolves is a pleasing movie in the way it shows the possible amiable relation possible in instances between the Caucasian conquerors and the Native American tribesmen, as opposed to popular depictions of the violent relations between the two parties. The possibility of the lead character 'dance with wolves' to live amongst the local American tribe of Sioux, winning their trust, learning their language and marrying one of their daughters is an indication of the possible good in people when good intentions override the lust for personal gain. The movie slightly disappoints by giving in to stereotypes. The Pawnee tribe for instance is portrayed in a stereotypical manner as savages devoid of anything but destruction. This slight negates the general spirit of reconciliation that the movie pursues by failing to indicate the Pawnee as equal participants in mutual conflict, rather as the savage tribe seeking destruction. Finally, the movie, 'the rough riders' is inspiring by the spirit of a man to inspire success in his companions in spite of difficulty. The story of Theodore Roosevelt is inspiring in a way that he motivates the troops to surge into battle, always ready to fill in positions of leadership and inspiring success while in those positions (Gerstle, pg95). In the battle of Spain, thus

spirit in Roosevelt is revealed by the movie where he instigates the surge in line formation that leads to the taking of the ' Kettle Hill'. The diversity of the men gathered for this infantry is impressive and their ability to work together as soldiers in war, without prior combat experience is admirable. The movie, however, is weak in its depiction of the war sequences. It exaggerates some basic historical facts without which the movie would still be as effective. For instance, through careful observation, Teddy Roosevelt is seen to shoot four people while, in reality, he shot one Spaniard as unequivocally stated in his autobiography.

The comparison between the historical contexts of each movie and its running sequence reveals the intention of the film makers in their making. The movie Tuskegee Airmen for instance, in my opinion, is an attempt at representing the Tuskegee trained black aviators in the world war as victors, over comers and pioneers in the aviation by black men more than it sought at representing accurate historical accounts. The history of the US military required that black men would not fly alongside their white counterparts. The segregation and racialism present in those times meant that the black men who wished to join the air force had to will their way, as it was not paved for them. These struggles are depicted in the movie with the growth of the aviators chronologically represented. The emphasis is on the struggle they faced as black learners in comparison to the success they achieved at the completion of the service in the World War II. While the message intended by the movie is noble, the depiction of accurate historical truths is overlooked in presenting the opinion of overwhelming victory against difficulty for the aviators. For instance, the information presented in the closing credits that

The Tuskegee Airmen never lost a bomber they were escorting is historically incorrect as there are at least twenty-five reports by The Tuskegee Airmen themselves of having witnessed friendly bombers going down under their escort. The oversight of such relevant facts to the exploits of The Tuskegee Airmen indicates that the makers of the movie sought to preserve the victories of the men as the enduring theme to the movie. The heroic depiction utilized shuns the realistic depiction that would have showed them in victories and losses as men who, despite their best efforts, were fallible like all human beings.

In contrast, the movie 'dances with wolves', shows the lead character, John Dunbar in a genuine quest at understanding the cultures and ways of his adopted tribesmen, the Lakota (Castillo, par 2). The character development is a depiction of a true event in which a soldier lived amongst the Native American People of Comanche and became on their tribesmen. The American government sought him out in the year 1864, leading to the massacre of the Cheyenne people a lieutenant colonel George A. Custer. While the movie does not recreate the events as they happened in the movie, the only details that change are tribe and the dates with the tribe for instance being Lakota in the movie, instead of Comanche. The fidelity the movie makers try to adopt in the making of this movie aims at presenting as accurate a depiction of the lives of the Native American Tribes men lives as possible, by assuming roles in their lives and playing them out, even to the point of utilizing their language in the movie.

The message that the movie maker in the movie 'the rough riders' attempt at passing through is one of personal and collective achievements through

the spirit of nationalism, striving for the national ideal at the expense of personal preservation. The message is clear in the way the fighters are depicted in the movie. The action of recruiting the fighters from among the civilian populations is an indication on the will of the general American populace in defending their nation in place of their individual safety. The dedication of the character ' Theodore Roosevelt' played by Tom Berenger indicates the power of sheer courage and a little insanity on the part of Theodore to inspire success. This story bonds well with the average American viewer with its familiar theme of victory. I agree with what all the three movies are trying to communicate, albeit with some reservations. The movie " The Tuskegee Airmen' would for avoidance of antagonizing opinion toned down its portrayals of the heroics of the Airmen, tempering it instead with the contributions of other races to the general victory enjoyed by the United states and the allies in general (Moye, par 5). The movie ' The rough riders' would have adopted an approach that incorporates the historical importance of the war it represents. It dwells overly on the personal development the soldiers face both as a group and as individual by participating in war together. Roosevelt for instance becomes a better man by his virtue of leading men in battle, while the development of the delinquent Nash is shown through phases of unwillingness to join the effort, wounding, and his eventual triumph as among the brave heroes who see out the war. The movie would have made increased impact by placing it in its historical context, by showing for instance, how it affected Theodore's chances at being president.

Movies whose plots are adapted from historical for filming make a decent

attempt at showing the actual historical events happening in the time they were made, but each to a varying level of success. All the movies chosen for analysis strived for fidelity to their historical backgrounds, but as is with movies, the commercial aspect guiding their production demands that they met high appeal levels aimed at garnering wide viewership and thus improved revenues. The movie *Tuskegee Army* would have achieved a higher adherence to the historical facts guiding its conception by including information where the soldier faced losses in actual execution of their duties rather in the strife for the right to fly scenes alone. The omission of losses apparent in historic examination of the movie deprives it of the historical correctness that it otherwise strived. Similarly, the movie 'The rough riders' moves away from its historical obligation by showing the overhyped and exaggerated successes of the lead actor for instance Roosevelt, by showing him kill more fighters in the movie than is recorded in his autobiography. Further, the movie does not show the meeting between the rough riders and the buffalo soldiers in the Kettle Hill as is with the historically accurate version. The movie, in conclusion, shows an extra scene where the rough riders engaged combat, in San Juan (Saldívar, par7). While the rough riders went to San Juan, the fighting was over by the time they arrived at the place. The movie 'Dances with wolves' shows the historical inaccuracies of the tribe it uses in depicting the character, 'dances with wolves'. While the actual placing of the character historically is in the tribesmen of Comanche, the movie is shown to take place among the Lakota. The identity of some of the historical figures in the movie is flawed. 'Kicking bird' who is depicted,

as a medicine-man was another chief in a southern tribe called Kiowa (Rickey, par9).

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