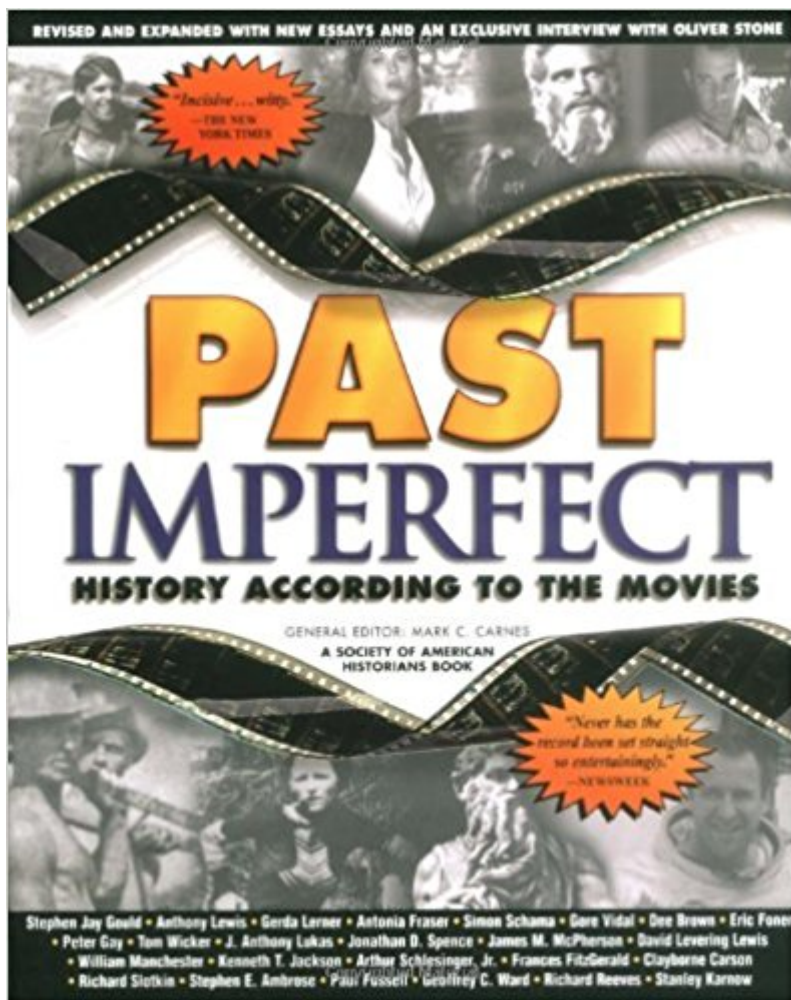


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# Past Imperfect: History According To The Movies (Henry Holt Reference Book)



## Synopsis

In this widely-acclaimed volume, some of our greatest historians address the facts and fiction as seen in Hollywood, as often epic recreations of historical events.

Distinguished historians such as Stephen Ambrose, Antonia Fraser, James McPherson, Gerda Lerner, Dee Brown, Frances FitzGerald, David Levering Lewis, and Simon Schama explore the relationship between film and the historical record. Offering hundreds of movie stills, archival photographs, maps, and other illustrations, along with sidebars on related historical events, *Past Imperfect* sheds new light on the uses of history in popular culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In our increasingly visual culture, a growing amount of what we learn about history comes from the movies. This unusual and cornucopian book draws on the knowledge of 60 experts who examine the historical accuracy of a splendid array of classic movies such as *Julius Caesar*, *Aguirre the Wrath of God*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Gallipoli*, and *Gandhi*. They reveal what each movie has done right and wrong in portraying the complex threads of the stories as known to the world's most qualified scholars. Highly Recommended. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Perhaps this summer's boomlet of historical movies and costume dramas have sparked interest, for

this is only one of several recent books by historians examining films set in the past. Editor Carnes (Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America, LJ 8/89) persuaded 60 historical writers, including such popular figures as Gore Vidal, William Manchester, Antonia Frasier, James McPherson, and Frances FitzGerald, to write an original piece on an historical film. The authors gleefully skewer, pick apart, praise, and censure film classics such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Spartacus*, *Jurassic Park*, *Patton*, etc. There is, not surprisingly, considerable nitpicking over historical details, but the writers seem to share a common fondness for the movies. Indeed, several confess that their interest in history was first awakened by a film they saw as a child. Film buffs will thoroughly enjoy. Highly recommended for large public libraries and subject collections. ?Marianne Cawley, Enoch Pratt Free Lib., Baltimore Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Great condition, great price, great content - completely satisfied.

I received exactly what I was expecting. Thanks for making my purchase a success.

If you're a film fan and a history buff, like I am, you'll definitely enjoy this book. Most of the articles are written by mainstream historians, and they are generally well done. Two misfires, however are Stanley Karnow's review of *JFK*, and Bob Woodward's review of *NIXON*. Karnow knows nothing about the JFK assassination, and instead focuses on misleading the reader, assuring us that Kennedy would have done the same as LBJ did in Vietnam. Woodward is a poor choice to review Oliver Stone's *NIXON*, because he props up the official story, and was himself involved in it under fairly suspicious circumstances (as described in the book *SILENT COUP*).

*Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* is based on an inspiring idea: select eminent historians and writers and ask each to write an essay discussing the historicity of a particular film. And it's a very impressive gathering of writers indeed, including Dee Brown, Eric Foner, Stephen Jay Gould, Antonia Fraser, Paul Fussell, Michael Grant, Stanley Karnow, Peter Gay, Frances Fitzgerald, James M. McPherson, Gore Vidal, Simon Schama, Tom Wicker, and others. Michael Grant comments on the 1953 version of *Julius Caesar*, Antonia Fraser on *Anne of the Thousand Days*, James McPherson on *Glory*, Dee Brown on *Fort Apache*, Stanley Karnow on *JFK*, and so forth. The essays are, not surprisingly, well-written and enlightening but written on a popular rather than on an academic level. After all, *Past Imperfect* was intended to be entertaining as well as

informative. Some of the films chosen are the usual suspects for historical analysis such as *Gone With the Wind*, the *Ten Commandments*, *Birth of a Nation*, *Grapes of Wrath*, and *Apocalypse Now* (the latter with a particularly incisive essay from Frances Fitzgerald). But there are some surprises: *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*; *Black Robe*; the *Scarlet Empress*; *Matewan*; the *Human Condition*; and the *Long Walk Home*. There's even a piece by Gore Vidal on Preston Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*. If you've already read George MacDonald Fraser's *The Hollywood History of the World*, you might wonder how the two books compare. Fraser's book offers more and better illustrations and covers far more films. *Past Imperfect* provides greater depth and analysis so if you're interested in history and film, the two titles complement each other. *Past Imperfect* saves its best essay for last: Simon Schama's "interview" with Napoleon in which the former French emperor and Schama discuss Abel Gance's 1927 epic 'Napoleon.' This is as fine a piece of "historical" writing as you're ever likely to see. A truly fun book!

In this title, over sixty historians contribute essays critically examining nearly 100 historical films. Some of the essays cover more than one film on a subject, such as an essay on two films about Lincoln, two films about Jean Laffite. etc. While a number of the essays clearly point out which aspects of historical events or people were altered by Hollywood to make a 'better' movie so as to increase ticket sales, some of the essays are written as if the historians were writing a journal article, leaving you to wonder what he or she found incorrect about the movie besides some esoteric, historical theory. A common error the historians pointed out is Hollywood's disinterest in keeping the timing of events in their proper order. For example, I was aware that in the movie "The Charge of the Light Brigade" the screenwriters made the purpose of the charge to appear to be an attempt to kill a Muslim leader who had butchered British prisoners during the Indian Sepoy Mutiny, when the Mutiny didn't even happen until a few years after the "Charge" took place. In some cases you wonder if the historian did their homework. For example, a side-bar for the movie *Glory*, a film on the famous 54th Massachusetts during the American Civil War, the historian includes a side-bar about Afro-Americans receiving less pay than white troops. The historian states that they were paid \$13 per month but had to give back \$3 to pay for uniforms. However, this was true of all Union soldiers, white and black. In the case of the Afro-American units, they were paid \$10 per month, and still had to give \$3 back for uniforms. The reasoning was that Afro-American units would not be used for active campaigning, which ended up being incorrect. Fortunately, Congress eventually corrected this and most Afro-American units received back pay. This makes you wonder what else an historian might incorrectly identify as an error. However, the book does not state that the side-bar

was added by the historian, and it might be the editor's contribution. But surely, the historian had an opportunity to review the final draft. As such, if you are really interested in history AND films, this is an interesting book to read. If your interest is less deep, you might be disappointed with the book, as even I was in a number of the essays.

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