



A History of the U.S. in 20 Movies: an All-Movie History Course (Volume 1)

M. W. Jacobs

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A History of the U.S. in 20 Movies: an All-Movie History Course / Volume One the First Ten Movies provides an accurate, thorough overview of American history by explaining interesting movies based on American history, all of which are available on Netflix and/or Amazon. This is a fun history course packed into one book and twenty movies. This book will walk you through each movie using virtually every appropriate detail, providing historical context, explaining historical references, pointing out pertinent cinematic devices, and even occasionally tossing-in a tidbit of Hollywood history.

Over two hundred and fifty films are referenced in both volumes one and two (making this book also a resource for teachers).

Almost without noticing, you are going to absorb an accurate overview, an outline, a satellite photo image of the contours of the story of America. Like an introductory course, this book will help provide the indispensable foundation for more detailed knowledge in the future. Of course, the book can also be used piecemeal for brushing-up on a particular period in an entertaining way.


In essence, this is an illustrated lecture, using a variation of the technique used by PBS and the History Channel: reenactments intercut with expert talking heads. Except here, the movies are the reenactments and *A History of the U.S. in 20 Movies* is the expert talking head. The movies and this book entertain by emphasizing history as human drama, which is what we go to movies for and what movies go to history for. The dates, the statistics, the treaties, etc. are here in abundance, but they are presented in a way that enhances the narrative.

There is one movie per chapter and three sections in each chapter. The first section, "Before," prepares you by providing background and explaining the beginning, while avoiding spoilers. The second section, "After," explains the whole movie, completes the history, and generally adds whatever might be missing from the movie that is indispensable for the fullest understanding of the subject of the movie and/or the period in which it is set. The third section, "Recommendations," describes other relevant movies and documentaries that complement the one chosen, including the one or two other films that in some cases might just as well have been used in place of the one chosen. Those two hundred and fifty films have been honed to an indispensable core twenty. That is the least intimidating and the bare minimum that provides enough references for a thorough overview of U.S. history.

The standards for choosing a film were: 1) it had to have an historically important subject, and/or (2) at least be rich in references to its period, and (3) it had to be at least watchable. However, many of the films here are Emmy or Oscar winners and some are based on Pulitzer Prize winning books or plays. If the choice was between two or more films equal in usable historical references for the same period, the esthetically superior was chosen. Some of the films included in this book are historically significant themselves, such as *Little Big Man* (1970), and that will be explained as well.

This book required the rare combination of expertise in film history and production with exhaustive knowledge of American history. Author M. W. Jacobs wrote, directed, produced, and edited a low-budget feature film in the early Eighties (available on You Tube). In the late Eighties, he worked for George Lucas' special effects division, Industrial Light and Magic. After that, as a history teacher for nearly twenty years, he searched for the most effective way to teach the subject that polls perennially rank as students' least

favorite. A History of the U.S. in 20 Movies: an All-Movie History Course is the result of that search.

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