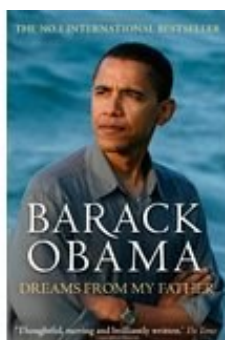


HISTORY BULLETIN

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More on the election next time. In the meantime, *Dreams from my father*, is Obama's autobiography written before he became President.

SLAVES ON SCREEN

The on-going row about opportunities for ethnic minority actors and directors has probably not escaped your notice. Many of the films which have starred black actors have, not surprisingly, been about slavery. How should historians treat these films? In fact the history of slavery on screen makes an interesting study in itself.

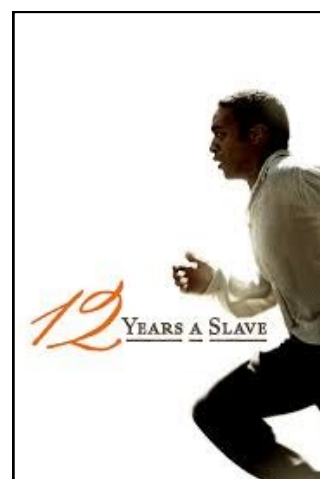
The earliest films depicting slaves used white actors in black make-up. In 1903 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflected racial stereotypes. The most famous film of the silent era dealing with slavery was *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), showing the KKK saving southern society after the Civil War. There were protests from the NAACP but the fact that the KKK benefitted from a surge in membership showed how influential film could be in the twentieth century. *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Song of the South* (1946, Disney) presented slavery as a gentle system where slaves were loyal to their owners who treated them like children. The success of the civil rights movement led to different

treatment of the subject. *Roots* (1977) aimed to tell a 'true' story. Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997) also aimed at authenticity and education. Free copies were offered to schools yet the film is full of historical inaccuracies. The film's reception also shows that any film about slavery becomes political. The film was accused of portraying African Americans in a brutish way because of its focus on their violent response to enslavement. The most famous recent example aiming at authenticity *12 Years a Slave* (2013) won three Oscars. Based on the autobiography of Solomon Northup, the film is influenced by his abolitionist agenda. As a result, it tells the story of an exceptional individual rather than giving a more representative depiction of slavery as experienced by most people. Is it possible to deliver a realistic and representative account of slavery?

Quentin Tarantino did not try to do so in *Django Unchained* (2013). He made his revenge-fantasy as entertaining (and violent) as possible without worrying about

the truth. However, the fundamental message—that slavery was a violent institution that slaves were willing to do almost anything to free themselves and their families from—has an important ring of truth.

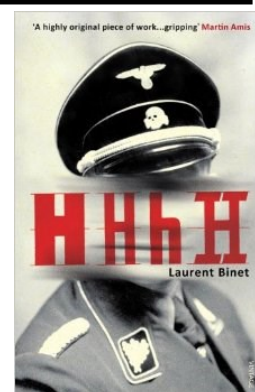
Writers, directors and producers who attempt to address slavery are entering a minefield, caught between the aim of realism and entertainment and unable to escape political controversy. Yet, the history of the twentieth century also tells us that film can be one of the most influential mediums for influencing attitudes. As the campaign Black Lives Matter shows, racism remains a key issue for society so the portray of slave experience on film is an important issue.



ANTHROPOID: THE KILLING OF HEYDRICH

The oddly titled book HHhH by Laurent Binet tackled fiction's relation to historical truth head on. Its subject matter, the successful plot to kill Heydrich, often referred to as Hitler's 'killer-in-chief', has been turned into a film, *Anthropoid*.

The film, shot in Prague, stars Jamie Dornan and Cillian Murphy as the Czech agents who assassinated Heydrich. It received mixed reviews but if you want to see Heydrich die a well-deserved agonizing death you cant go wrong.



Thinking of a competitive university? Get out of your comfort zone!

If you are thinking about applying to a competitive university, especially Oxford or Cambridge, you will strengthen your application by studying periods of history which are not part of your exam specification. Not only will this deal with the accusation that you only know about Fascists and Tudors, but it will open up a whole realm of language and terminology which will help you in entrance exams and your actual degree.

Moving out of your historical comfort zone is not easy. Early forays 'off piste' can be hard to understand and time consuming but persistence pays off and will ultimately make you a much more confident historian,

1066 and all that

Studying the Norman Conquest offers a real contrast to anything you will have studied in the Sixth Form. Not only was society very different but uncovering Norman history requires different skills from historians.

Marc Morris who is now at Oxford University, has written some excellent books. The most accessible is *Castle!*, which was written to accompany his fantastic, amusing short TV series of the same name. If you can track this down it is worth watching but for some reason it is now hard to find without Chinese subtitles. *The Norman Conquest* (2013) and *William I: England's Conqueror* are more serious; both are good.

If you want a bit of accompanying fiction try *Viking Fire* by Justin Hill about Harald Hardrada's ill-fated invasion or *The Harrowing* by James Aitchison about the harrying of the North in the aftermath of the Norman conquest. I can't claim to have read either but the 950th anniversary of Hastings is bringing forth a flurry of relevant books.

THE BRIEFING ROOM: RADIO 4

This little programme is easy to miss (Thursdays 8pm) — especially as so few people since to serious radio. However, it is available on the iplayer at your convenience and is well worth listening to if you want to link History and current affairs.

On 20th October the programme investigated the history of Keynesian economics and the role that government investment has played in economic management since the '30s. In a succinct summary the programme explained concepts clearly, discussed whether Keynesianism was 'left wing'. If you think this is all rather irrelevant then think about

why Theresa May has promised new trains, faster broadband and improved infrastructure. Critics accused her of adopting Labour Party politics but has she?

Previous programmes have looked at the Black Lives Matter campaign in the UK; the rise of illiberal democracies in Europe; the immigration crisis; grammar schools; Donald



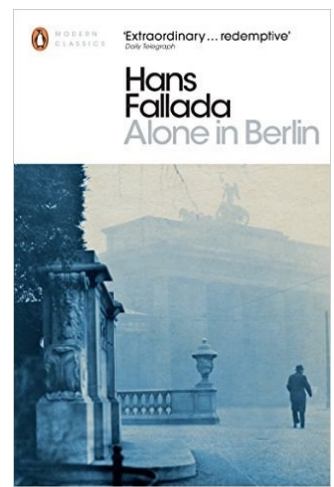
Trump's power base on the Right; the rise of anti-Semitism and the new IRA.

BOOKS AFTER BERLIN

For those who enjoyed the Berlin trip and want to follow up the experience with some reading here are some ideas. *Alone in Berlin* by Hans Fallada was first published in 1947. It is based on the true story of resistance to the Nazis by an ordinary couple but reads like a thriller.

Stasiland by Anna Funder

recounts the impact of East German repression on the lives of individuals living behind the Wall. *A woman in Berlin* is an anonymous account of the Russian invasion in 1945 which recounts the experience of mass rape from one woman's perspective.



PAUL NASH EXHIBITION: TATE BRITAIN

Nash is one of the most important British artists of the twentieth century. He was inspired by British landscape but the artworks he produced during World War One are among the most iconic images of the conflict. In the 1930s Nash worked in an increasingly abstract and surreal manner, often placing everyday objects into a landscape to give them a new identity and symbolism. During World War Two, alt-

though sick with the asthmatic condition that would kill him, he produced two series of anthropomorphic depictions of aircraft. These have perhaps become among the best known works from the period. The exhibition is on until March.

