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Whether they prefer blockbusters, historical dramas, or documentaries, people learn much of what they know about history from the movies. In American History Goes to the Movies, W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz shows how popular representations of historic events shape the way audiences understand the history of the United States, including American representations of race and gender, and stories of immigration, especially the familiar narrative of the American Dream.

Using films from many different genres, American History Goes to the Movies draws together movies that depict the Civil War, the Wild West, the assassination of JFK, and the events of 9/11, from The Birth of a Nation and Gone with the Wind to The Exorcist and United 93, to show how viewers use movies to make sense of the past, addressing not only how we render history for popular enjoyment, but also how Hollywood's renderings of America influence the way Americans see themselves and how they make sense of the world.