



Accomodatio et Transformatio: Spartacus, Slavery, and the Red Scare

Curriculum Unit 17.01.02
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Introduction

Primary source documents serve as the bedrock of all reliable social studies. They provide firsthand facts, descriptions, opinions, and accounts which illuminate the distant world of the past while allowing us to better understand the present. To many students, however, primary source documents are foreign, verbose, and tedious. Because language evolves over time, even historians sometimes struggle with interpreting outdated language and outdated societal mores. Especially when studying ancient historical subjects, such as the Roman Empire, students often struggle with rambling British-English translations and the convoluted word order of Latin syntax.

Adaptation, however, especially through the medium of film, oftentimes helps to “entice reluctant readers [students] to experience a work in a familiar, less intimidating format” and bring history alive. ¹ Once students are able to gain this level of comfort and familiarity with ancient historical documents, connections can then be drawn to other, more contemporary, aspects of history. For example, when viewing a film adaptation of primary-source Roman history, one can analyze both the upfront depiction of Roman history as well as the historical events which were occurring *while* the film was being conceptualized and created. In other words, were directors, screenwriters, and actors mirroring what was currently happening in their society through their cinematic adaptations of the ancient world? Could the political turmoil of the Roman Empire serve as an allegorical adaptation of, for example, the political chaos of American McCarthyism in the 1940’s and 1950’s? Or could the scourge of slavery in an ancient empire reflect the systematic oppression of an entire race within the post-WWII global “empire” of the United States?

The following curricular unit utilizes the story of Spartacus to explore those very questions.

Rationale

In 2015, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) updated their frameworks to present a new standard course progression in middle and high school social studies. According to this new progression, ninth grade students study the dawn of the Industrial age to the present in Modern World History, tenth grade students study United States History from the 1870s to the present, and eleventh and twelfth grade students study what it means to be an American citizen in a half-year Civics course. ² This suggested series of courses is followed by the majority of New Haven public high schools, including Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School.

Therefore, based on this new social studies framework, high school students no longer have the opportunity to learn about slavery in both ancient history and American history. Especially in an urban high school setting, this serves as a major disservice to the majority of students who wish to learn more about the history of their ancestors. Within New Haven public schools overall, African American students make up 42% and Hispanic students make up 41% of student enrollment. ³ Within Cooperative Arts and Humanities (Co-Op) High school more specifically, 48% of students are African Americans and 29% are Hispanic. ⁴ Although these students may learn some history of slavery in middle school, there is a certain level of detail and reality which simply cannot be comprehended by students between the ages of 11 and 13 years old.

At Co-Op High School, however, the History Department offers the half-year course *History Through Film*, often taken by juniors and seniors in the second half of the year following the half-year Civics course. Because this course does not follow specified requirements from the CSDE, teachers have much more autonomy to focus on unique and often neglected historical topics not typically covered by the required Modern World, US, and Civics courses. This course is the perfect opportunity for many social studies teachers within Co-Op to address the issues of slavery and resistance with a more mature crowd. As high school juniors and seniors, many students wish to learn the realities of their ancestral background within the United States, and therefore connect with the opportunity to view and discuss both the primary source historical details and film-based representations of the oftentimes personal topics of slavery and resistance.

In addition, between the years 2010 and 2015, the city of New Haven experienced the largest increase in English Learner (or EL) students in the state of Connecticut. ⁵ Based on the State of Connecticut Department of Education, EL students, “lack sufficient mastery of English to assure equal educational opportunity in the regular school program.” ⁶ While EL students often receive specialized support outside of the classroom, many still struggle with reading comprehension, especially on a historical level. Some teachers do attempt to incorporate EL teaching strategies into their lessons. However, many EL students resist teachers’ efforts to help, as they feel singled out in front of their peers. In addition, many teachers simply do not have enough time to devote proper attention and resources to properly addressing the needs of EL students.

By incorporating visual supports directly into lessons, teachers can discretely and efficiently support EL students while also teaching to the entire class. EL students and native-English-speaking students alike can therefore benefit from this opportunity to view visual adaptations of primary sources. Students can listen to the words/sentiments of the historical documents being spoken aloud, oftentimes in a much less complicated cadence as compared to its original Latin to English translation. In addition, students can absorb and analyze the body language of actors as well as how they interact with the scenery and environment of the film into order to better understand the meaning of a primary source. The inclusion of film into historical study

therefore serves as an excellent supplement to reading comprehension of primary source documents, especially within the New Haven Public School system.

Objectives

Through study in this curricular unit, students will be able to:

1. Identify primary versus secondary source documents.
2. Analyze the difference between primary and secondary source documents in terms of historical function, use, and reliability.
3. Read and interpret primary source documents pertaining to the ancient Roman world.
4. Interpret a film as a primary source account revealing historical information about the time period in which it was created.

Spartacus: History and Film

Before diving directly into the process of reading primary source documents and viewing the film *Spartacus*, it is necessary to provide students with some level of background information on the two. Entire full-year courses can easily be devoted to exploring the documentation behind slave wars in ancient Roman history, or simply exploring the adaptations which resulted from the actions of Spartacus in the Third Servile War. Because *History Through Film* is a half-year course, however, time must be taken into special consideration. The following information can be used as a quick-guide to the history behind both the man Spartacus and his adaptation into myth.

The Spartacus Controversy

In both the academic “worlds” of ancient historians and film historians, the name “Spartacus” evokes feelings of both respect and controversy.

To ancient historians, the slave uprising led by Spartacus in 73 BC is one of the most violent and most famous revolts in the known history of humankind. Despite this lofty distinction, however, we really don’t have a completely reliable, documented history of the events concerning Spartacus, his slave revolt, and the vicious punishment which followed. Our ignorance caused by the patchy collection of primary source documents which have survived the 2,090 years since the Third Servile War, this lack of reliable information is not aided by the film adaptations of this period. Over the years, the story of Spartacus has found itself twisted into frescoes, mosaics, marble sculptures, oral histories, and more recently films, television series, and even video games. This poses a dilemma to many historians: should a line be drawn between the actual man Spartacus, and the adapted hero Spartacus? And if so, where should this line be drawn?

To film historians, the 1960 film *Spartacus* represents both a cinematic masterpiece and a dark period of time for the film industry. The film won four academy awards, made millions of dollars, and birthed one of the most famous lines in film history: “I’m Spartacus!” Despite this illustrious résumé, however, this adaptation of ancient history reveals a great deal more about the time period in which it was actually made. The film represents the end of an oppressive era: the end of the Hollywood Blacklist and then end of a film industry governed by communist fear.

What We Do Know

In ancient Rome, the story of Spartacus was already pieced together by a number of history's greatest founding fathers, including Cicero, Sallust, Livy, Plutarch, Appian, Paternulus, Florus, Frontinus, Athenaeus, and Orosius. ⁷ The level of credibility with which each of these historians wrote can be (and often is) debated at length, but from these sources, one can begin to reconstruct a sketch of Spartacus the man.

The story of Spartacus's birth, childhood, and youth have all been lost to history. Even what we know of his ethnic origins and hometown are called into question by different interpretations of Greek translations. Sallust and Livy, however, both contemporaries of Spartacus, seemed to agree on a number of basic facts about his actions. Both men cite Spartacus as a "leader" of 74 gladiators who escaped from a gladiatorial school in Capua, gathered a mass of slaves as followers, and eventually "waged a major war against the Roman people." ⁸

The most detailed account we have of Spartacus's exact actions in this war come from Plutarch, a historian who wrote of Spartacus's actions nearly 180 years after the Third Servile War took place. While his writings should be taken with a grain of salt, they still provide a highly entertaining and informative glimpse into the strategies of both Spartacus and his foe Crassus. He describes Spartacus with an almost resigned sense of respect, maintaining from the beginning that the gladiators were "compelled to engage in gladiatorial combats, not for any crimes they had committed but because of the unjust behavior of their owners." ⁹ Spartacus and his fellow fighters used "kitchen knives and cooking skewers" to make their daring escape from gladiatorial bondage before defeating major Roman commanders and escaping across the Alps. ¹⁰

While Spartacus at that point wished for everyone to return to their homelands, his men wished to instead "pillage Italy far and wide." ¹¹ Plutarch then goes into detail about the cat and mouse chase between Roman general Crassus (who was chosen by the Senate to protect Rome) and Spartacus. In the end, after a series of elaborate strategic battles featuring dramatic deaths, cowardly retreats, and cartoon-esque traps, "Spartacus stood alone. Surrounded by a great many of the enemy, he was cut down while defending himself." ¹² Livy's *Brief Account of the End of the War in 71 BC* adds that Crassus "defeated Spartacus...along with sixty thousand of his men." ¹³

History's Adaptations

During the Age of Enlightenment (predominantly the 1700s), the story of Spartacus reemerged from the coffers of Roman history. To many Enlightenment philosophers who believed in liberty and a government based on social contract, Spartacus appeared to be their perfect poster child: a slave rising up alongside progressive brothers for the noble cause of achieving freedom from a corrupt government. By 1760, Spartacus even became the subject of an entire 5-act play by Bernard Saurin which opened at the Théâtre Français in Paris. Nine years later, Voltaire himself described the Third Servile War of Spartacus as "a just war, indeed the only just war in history." ¹⁴ It is easy to imagine the shouts of "Liberté! Égalité! Fraternité!" declared by French revolutionists in 1789 were partly inspired by Saurin and Voltaire's public analysis and adaptation of the story of Spartacus.

The following century, Spartacus would again be adopted by another radical political movement. In 1865, Karl Marx completed a personality quiz given to him by his daughter and listed Spartacus as his hero. ¹⁵ In a letter from Marx to Frederick Engels, Marx even describes Spartacus as "one of the best characters in the whole of ancient history" and "a genuine representative of the ancient proletariat." ¹⁶ In Russia, Lenin would carry on

this story of Spartacus to suit his communist agenda, stating that:

“History is full of the constant attempts of the oppressed classes to throw off oppression...Spartacus was one of the most outstanding heroes of one of the very greatest slave insurrections...For several years the seemingly omnipotent Roman empire, which rested entirely on slavery, experienced the shocks and blows of a widespread uprising of slaves who armed themselves and joined together to form a vast army under the leadership of Spartacus.”¹⁷

Lenin’s decision to bring up the details of a successful slave revolt at a time when Bolshevik revolutions were providing Lenin with the power to create and control the Soviet Union was clearly no coincidence. The history of Spartacus could easily be perverted to provide Marx, Lenin, and even Stalin with historical legitimacy for their shared communist beliefs.

However, the connections between Spartacus and communism did not end with Lenin.

Adaptations in Film and Media

In 1951, Howard Fast wrote *Spartacus*, a novel loosely based on a combination of historical fact and personal experience. Fast actually began to formulate his idea for the book while serving a three-month prison sentence in West Virginia. He had been convicted of being in contempt of Congress after refusing to provide the famously anti-communist House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) with a list of Americans who had donated money to helping Spanish refugees of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁸ Personally identifying with what he believed to be the historical motives of Spartacus, Fast wrote a book about an oppressed man who was willing to fight against a corrupt system of government in order to secure his rights to life, liberty, and happiness.

When Fast tried to publish his novel, however, he was denied by eight major book publishers due to his status as a blacklisted communist writer.¹⁹ This concept of a blacklist was not limited to the world of literature—in 1947, the HUAC began to investigate what they saw as evidence of Communists slipping propaganda into films being consumed by the American masses. After a series of hearings, ten “witnesses” and members of the film community, identified as the Hollywood Ten, were imprisoned after they refused to testify. In order to protect themselves from future allegations, executives in the film industry formed their own blacklist of nearly 500 actors, writers, producers, and directors who would be barred from any aspect of cinematography.

In Howard Fast’s dedication of *Spartacus*, he seemingly foretells the “troubled future” of a turbulent political era soon to come within the United States, stating:

“The heroes of this story cherished freedom and human dignity, and lived nobly and well. I wrote it so that those who read it... may take strength for our own troubled future and that they may struggle against oppression and wrong—so that the dream of Spartacus may come to be in our own time.”²⁰

The “oppression” of Communism by government officials only grew more fervent throughout the 1950’s, with suspected spies being executed, duck and cover cartoons hinting at feasible nuclear attacks, and McCarthy-ist

witch hunts presuming to be the law of the land. ²¹

It was in this very political climate that the 1960 film *Spartacus* was born. With only one viewing, this movie could simply be regarded as a secondary source based loosely on ancient history. However, by considering the writer as well as the time-period in which this movie was created, *Spartacus* serves as a primary peek into the time-period in which it was born.

The script, based on Fast's novel based on history, was written by Dalton Trumbo, despite his blacklisted classification as a member of the Hollywood Ten. In 1947, Trumbo refused to testify to the HUAC about his political beliefs in Communism. Because of this, Trumbo was forced to spend 11 months in jail. Along with nine other defiant directors and screenwriters, Trumbo was also henceforth barred from involvement in the Hollywood film industry in the hopes of shielding the American populace from subliminal, subversive communist ideals.

Despite this restriction, however, Trumbo continued to write screenplays using a pseudonym, even winning an Academy Award under a fake name. His reputation as a writer grew regardless of his inability to openly take credit for his work. Therefore, when Trumbo was asked to replace Howard Fast in writing the screenplay for *Spartacus*, he certainly grasped the gravitas of what he was about to attempt—the breaking of the blacklist. This film had the potential to be a major hit, and Kirk Douglas and Edward Lewis (producers of the film) both supported the idea of ignoring the blacklist and giving Trumbo his deserved credit.

If Trumbo was to successfully gain this recognition, he would have to create a film that both appealed to anti-communist ideals and made money for Universal Studios. For Trumbo, failure in meeting these standards was not an option—he stated, “I, for one, would never have been able to work again, and those who did not yet work openly would have even a slighter chance than I of making it.” ²² Much like the Spartacus of history, Trumbo was the individual, chosen by fate and driven by tenacity, to lead his “enslaved” Hollywood coworkers out of ideological, political, and social oppression.

Although many Hollywood insiders knew of Trumbo's involvement in the film, Universal Studios still barred Trumbo from entering the premises. ²³ He was forced to do most of the original writing and corrections blindly, unable to see the actors, costumes, or sets for himself. In many cases, Stanley Kubrick (director), Universal Studios executives, and Kirk Douglas (the actor who played Spartacus) took liberties in changing the script in the middle of filming itself. ²⁴ Despite these setbacks, Trumbo advocated for himself through a series of lengthy written reaction reports and clandestine forays into the studio.

Ultimately, Dalton Trumbo was given credit for the convoluted, dauntless process of writing *Spartacus*. The greatest moment of validation, however, occurred on Friday, February 4, 1961. Despite Trumbo's blacklisted communist status, and crowds of picketing conservatives, John F. Kennedy attended a public screening of the film *Spartacus*. ²⁵ The President of the United States thus placed the final nail in the coffin of the blacklist, modeling tolerance and forgiveness to the entirety of the American public. It seems only historically fitting that Kennedy, the man who ensured Martin Luther King's safe release from prison, bolstered the Civil Rights Movement, and declared America's destiny to reach the moon by the end of the decade, broke the binds of the blacklist while watching a film about Spartacus, a fellow historical pioneer of freedom and change.

Teaching Strategies and Classroom Activities

Day 1:

Rationale: In order for students to understand the historical and fictional story of Spartacus, they must first understand how to discern between primary and secondary sources.

Objective: Students will be able to distinguish primary from secondary sources.

Activity: First, the teacher will present a brief mini-lesson (15 minutes approximately) on the definitions of and differences between primary and secondary historical documents. Students should follow along by taking notes and asking questions.

Before class, the teacher should set up the classroom into multiple different stations (6-10 depending on classroom size and number of students) in preparation for a gallery-walk activity to take place after the mini-lesson. At each station, the teacher should provide an un-labeled example of a primary or secondary source. This could be made more engaging by including a combination of quotes, physical books, images/photographs, video clips (shown on a laptop/computer), and/or songs (shown on a laptop/computer). Working in groups, students should circulate the room, examine the sources, and work together to identify them as primary or secondary. Once completed, students should share their answers and discuss their rationale with the entire class.

Day 2:

Rationale: Co-Op High School is conveniently located in downtown New Haven, giving our students access to the Beinecke Library—“One of the world's largest libraries devoted entirely to rare books and manuscripts.”²⁶ Teachers will be able to engage visual and kinesthetic learners by bringing students to visit the library and experience primary source documents in-person.

Objective: Students will be able to evaluate the reliability and credibility of sources.

Activity: At least three weeks before Day 2 of the unit, the teacher should call/email the library to book a tour and reserve a classroom within the Beinecke.²⁷ On Day 2, the students and teacher will then walk over to the Beinecke Library (121 Wall Street, New Haven, CT). The students and teacher will take a Yale-led tour of the building to view some of their famous primary source documents in person. After completion of the tour, students and teacher should meet in a reserved classroom within the library to debrief the experience.²⁸ First, to begin the discussion, the teacher should encourage students to share their interpretations, reactions, and general feedback from the experience. Once students become involved in the conversation, the teacher should begin to steer students towards discussing the role of reliability and bias in interpreting historical documents. Teachers may introduce the topic into the discussion by using the following questions:

What are some of the benefits associated with utilizing primary source documents to interpret history?

What are some of the challenges associated with relying on primary source documents to interpret history?

How might a writer's personal beliefs, background, religion, ethnicity, political views, etc. change their perception of history? How might this affect a primary source?

Day 3:

Rationale: Now that students should be able to discern the differences between primary and secondary sources as well as assess their credibility, they are ready to begin exploring the historical background behind the story of Spartacus.

Objective: Students will be able to analyze the ancient historical documents chronicling the life of Spartacus.

Activity: First, the teacher will present a brief mini-lesson (15 minutes approximately) providing a background on ancient Roman life and the importance of slavery within the empire. Students should follow along by taking notes and asking questions.

Students should then be broken into small groups and each provided with a different historical document about the life of Spartacus. Excerpts may come from Plutarch, Appian, Sallust, Livy, Cicero, Paterculus, Florus, Frontinus, Athenaeus, and Orosius. ²⁹ This activity lends itself to differentiation, as some documents are quite lengthy and challenging (Plutarch, Appian), while others are much more brief and straightforward (Paterculus and Frontinus). Within groups, students should read their assigned document together and complete a SOAP Chart based on their interpretations. They may also be permitted to refer to the notes they took earlier in the class, as well as smart phones if necessary, to gain a better understanding of the author of their assigned document. After completing the SOAP chart, students should be prepared to briefly present their documents and interpretations to the rest of the class. See below for example:

S peaker: Who is writing this? How might his background affect the piece?	O ccasion: Context, current events, date, time period...	A udience: Who are the readers? How does the author target them?	P urpose: Why was this written? What is the author's thesis/main point?
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Before the end of class, students should be provided a brief section of Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus* to read for homework. This may include the book's dedication and Parts I-III, which hint at the book's communist undertones, introduce the role of slavery, and provide some foreshadowing for the end of the movie.

Day 4-6:

Rationale: Students have analyzed the recorded ancient historical sources concerning Spartacus, as well as read a small section of Howard Fast's novel (upon which the movie *Spartacus* was based). They are now ready to actually begin watching the movie as a secondary source. Because the movie is 180 minutes long, and class periods at Co-Op last 80 minutes, two full classes and one partial class must be allocated to viewing the film. An anticipated 20-30 additional minutes should be added to the 180 minutes as a precaution, as students sometimes ask for a movie to be paused/rewound, and it occasionally takes a class a few minutes to settle down before beginning each class. In addition, it is suggested that teachers turn the English subtitles on while watching the movie for students who may struggle with auditory learning.

Objective: Students will be able to analyze the 1960 film *Spartacus* as a secondary source.

Activity: Before beginning the film, the teacher should pass out a list of discussion questions based on the film. These questions will be considered and debated during a class discussion on Day 7. As students view the 1960 film *Spartacus* in its entirety, they should jot down thoughts, examples, and evidence on the discussion questions list to be used during the future discussion. The following questions/quotes are included as a suggestion for teachers, but may be expanded/adapted based on personal preference:

1. What might the imagery in the film's title sequence (pieces of sculptures and ultimately a cracking male bust) symbolize? Why might the filmmakers have chosen to begin with such imagery? Revisit this question again at the end of the film.
2. Consider the character Batiatus, the owner of the gladiatorial school. How does his character reflect the human condition? Is he a "good guy" or a "bad guy"? How are his actions marked by conflict? Is he "upper class" or is he a "slave"?
3. What does Spartacus mean when he says: "I'd rather be here, a free man among brothers, facing a long march and a hard fight, than the richest citizen in Rome, fat with food he didn't work for, and surrounded by slaves." Do you agree with Spartacus? Why?
4. Observe the costumes worn throughout the film. Describe the colors/textures/materials of clothing worn by the senators and upper-class Romans versus the gladiators and slaves.
5. Dalton Trumbo wrote the screenplay for the movie *Spartacus*. His wife once described him, saying: "He recognized the evil in everyone, including himself." Is this reflected in the film? If so, how?
6. Consider the character Draba. What was he wearing when he first met Spartacus? What might this symbolize? Describe the gladiatorial battle between Draba and Spartacus. How do they interact with each other before the fight? Who loses the fight? Who dies? What does the end of the fight foreshadow? What happens to Draba's body after the fight, and what might this symbolize?

On Day 6, students will have extra time once the movie has ended to reflect on the movie as a whole and add more information to their discussion question sheets. They should be allowed to discuss any lingering questions with classmates/the teacher if needed. Students should also be asked to create at least one discussion question of their own on a topic they'd like to explore in the next class.

Day 7:

Rationale: Having watched the film and been given time in class and at home to reflect on and digest what they had seen, the students should be ready to discuss the work together as a class. Before the discussion, students should be made aware that they will be graded on their involvement in the activity. This discussion could be structured in the "fishbowl debate" format, or it could be more organic and spontaneous, depending on the mix of students/personalities within the class.

Objective: Students will be able to discuss and debate the film *Spartacus* as a secondary source, synthesizing what they learned from primary sources with what they perceived while watching the film.

Activity: Before class, the teacher should set up the desks in either a circular "fishbowl" configuration, or in a manner so that the students will be facing each other. Students should bring their discussion question lists with them and take them out at the beginning of class. Depending on class dynamic, the teacher may introduce different discussion questions and assign students to sit in the middle of the "fishbowl," or allow students to carry the conversation themselves. Students should also be encouraged to bring up their own discussion questions which they should have created at the end of Day 6.

Day 8-10:

Rationale: Students should now be ready to consider the film adaptation of *Spartacus* as having a very different function—serving as a primary source itself. As students in this "History Through Film" class would have already learned about American political and social turmoil of the 1950's-60's in United States History during their Sophomore year, the historical background should already be familiar to them. A recap at the beginning of the class in the form of notes or a brief presentation will help students to recall what they already

learned. However, it will be the job of the students to make the connections between assigned movie scenes and the historical background. By first modeling with the example of the film's opening lines describing Rome as "stricken with a disease called human slavery", students should then be able to analyze the scene of Spartacus and Draba's gladiatorial fight, and the "I am Spartacus!" scene themselves.

Objective: Students will be able to describe the political/social turmoil which afflicted the United States throughout the 1950's and 1960's.

Activity: First, the teacher should present a brief historical background on the 1950's and 1960's in the United States. This could easily be done through a mini-lesson at the beginning of class, and could be supplemented by the historical information found throughout the lesson plan. In addition, the YouTube channel *CrashCourse* has an excellent, succinct series of videos which could be used in conjunction with a mini lesson as an engaging summation, especially for more visual/auditory learners who tend to drift off while taking notes or listening to lectures. ³⁰ Specifically, the videos " *Civil Rights and the 1950s: Crash Course US* ", " *The Cold War: Crash Course US* ", and " *The 1960s in America: Crash Course US* " could be used in portions or in their entirety, with subtitles *on* to ensure that students are able to follow along with the rapid delivery of information. ³¹

After the completion of the lesson, students should be divided into two groups: Political and Social. Each group should be provided with at least one laptop. The teacher should then model expectations of the class by providing an analysis of the film's opening lines:

"In the last century before the birth of the new faith called Christianity... the Roman Republic stood at the very center of the civilized world. "Of all things fairest," sang the poet, "first among cities and home of the gods is golden Rome." Yet, even at the zenith of her pride and power, the Republic lay fatally stricken with a disease called human slavery. The age of the dictator was at hand, waiting in the shadows for the event to bring it forth. In that same century, in the conquered Greek province of Thrace, an illiterate slave woman added to her master's wealth by giving birth to a son whom she named Spartacus. A proud, rebellious son who was sold to living death in the mines of Libya before his thirteenth birthday. There, under whip and chain and sun, he lived out his youth and his young manhood dreaming the death of slavery two thousand years before it finally would die."

The teacher should both replay the film clip for the students and provide a paper copy of the quote. After allowing the students a few moments to digest the quote, the teacher should then point out the status of civil rights in the United States in 1960, as well as mention the commonly-shared concept of the United States serving as a "global superpower" following WWII. With this in mind, the teacher should begin to illuminate the possible parallels between Rome in 100 BC and the United States in 1960. The teacher may ask questions such as:

Were both Rome and the USA great empires at the "zenith of...pride and power" which were "stricken with a disease called human slavery"?

Were the actions of Spartacus in the film in any way both reminiscent and foretelling of what would happen during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States? Consider the words and actions of leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King?

Why might a director/screenwriter start their film with such an allusion? How do you think this quote/allusion might have affected viewers in 1960?

The narrator states that Spartacus “lived out his youth and his young manhood dreaming the death of slavery two thousand years before it finally would die.” However, was slavery actually dead in 1960? How should we define slavery? Does slavery still exist today?

Depending on time restrictions/classroom dynamic, the teacher may have students answer these questions out loud as a large group, or brainstorm them in their small group and share out.

After modeling expectations, students in each group should first re-watch an assigned movie scene: the “Social” group should re-watch the scene in which Draba and Spartacus engage in forced gladiatorial combat, and the “Political” group should re-watch the scene in which the slaves refuse to betray Spartacus by revealing his identity to Crassus and instead shout “I am Spartacus!”

Each group should then be provided with a list of questions to answer together based on their assigned scene. Students should also be expected to consult with credible internet sources to successfully answer some of their questions. If preferred, the teacher may also present each group with printed primary source articles to provide further background information on topics such as Dalton Trumbo/ the Hollywood 10/ Kirk Douglas (for the Political group) or the Civil Rights Movement/ race relations/ actor and athlete Woody Strode (for the Social group). While students are discussing/answering presented questions in their assigned groups, they should also be made aware that they should prepare to discuss their answers to the *last question* (how does this scene serve as a primary source...) out loud with the other group. The following examples of questions, both quantitative and qualitative/hypothetical, may be modified based on teacher preference:

Social:

What is the outcome of the gladiatorial fight between Draba and Spartacus?

Why does Draba attack Crassus rather than Spartacus? What might Crassus represent?

If there is no historical basis for the character of Draba, why might the filmmakers have invented the character?

Why might the filmmakers have chosen to end the fight as they did?

Why might the filmmakers have specifically hired Woody Strode for the role of Draba?

How does this scene serve as a primary source in understanding the social turmoil of the United States during the 1950's-1960?

Political:

Why does Crassus require the slaves to identify Spartacus in order to gain freedom?

How does Spartacus react to this demand?

How do the other slaves react to this demand?

Why do all of the slaves declare “I am Spartacus!”? Why were they unwilling to identify Spartacus? What

might this collective resistance compare to during the Red Scare in the 1950's?

Why might the screenwriter Dalton Trumbo have included this scene? How does it compare to his experiences as one of the Hollywood 10?

How does this scene serve as a primary source in understanding the political turmoil of the United States during the 1950's-1960?

After students have been given sufficient time to answer all of the questions, the groups should present an abbreviated presentation of their findings aloud to the other group. The groups should specifically focus on how the film clip can be used as a primary source. This could include a brief discussion on the personal experiences of Woody Strode and Dalton Trumbo.

Day 11-13:

Rationale: Days 11-13 serve as the culmination to the unit on Spartacus. Students have thus far distinguished primary from secondary source, scrutinized credibility, and considered a film for both what it reveals as a primary and secondary source in history. Therefore, students should at this point have the proper skills and experience to analyze a film as both a primary and secondary source for themselves.

Objective: Students will be able to synthesize what was learned throughout the unit to individually interpret a film as a primary and secondary source document.

Activity: Working either alone or with a single partner, students should either choose or be assigned a historically-based film to analyze and present to the whole class as a unit assessment. Because I plan to base the entirety of my History Through Film class on the topic of slavery, the following list of movies is based on that theme. However, based on personal preference and course direction, this list could be easily modified to include films from any era or topic of history:

Birth of a Nation , 1915

Gone with the Wind , 1939

The Ten Commandments , 1956

The Searchers , 1956

Return of the Jedi , 1983

Glory , 1989

Malcolm X , 1992

Amistad , 1997

The Prince of Egypt , 1998

Bicentennial Man , 1999

Django Unchained , 2012

12 Years a Slave , 2013

Selma , 2014

The Birth of a Nation , 2016

Students should be given two full class periods to research their movie and the time period in which it was created, view the movie, and create a visual aid for their presentations. It is expected that some of the work for the presentations must be done at home.

Presentations should include both an oral and visual component. Students should be prepared to describe aloud the film they chose, as well as both the time period it depicted and the time period in which it was created. Because Co-Op is a performing and creative arts high school, I plan to allow students to interpret the visual aspect of the presentation organically and leave the decision of media up to student preference—posters, performances, art pieces, PowerPoints, etc. However, I will include the following expectations that presentations must include:

-A defining scene in the film (no more than eight minutes) to analyze and show to the class

-A brief historical overview of the time period depicted, as well as how historically successful the film was in depicting the time period

-A brief historical overview of the time period in which the film was created, as well as an analysis of how the film serves as a primary source in understanding this time period

-An answer to the questions: Who were the slaves in this film? To whom/what were they slaves?

-Two discussion questions to ask the class during/after the presentation

On Day 13, students should be prepared to present their projects to the entire class, as well as listen and respond to the presentations of their classmates.

As a variation to this schedule for the final project, teachers may instead schedule films for the rest of the semester to show in their entirety during class, and assign specific groups of students to present on each film. With this variation, the unit on Spartacus would serve as the initial unit to model and scaffold historical and film analysis. The analysis of all following units and films would then be more student-driven, as students would have more time to work on their projects, and presentations would be spread evenly throughout the duration of the semester. For example:

Unit 2: *The Ten Commandments* and *The Prince of Egypt* —Students A, B, C present

Unit 3: *Glory* —Students D, E, F present

Implementing District Standards

According to “The New Haven Public Schools Social Studies Curriculum Overview,” the primary mission of the NHPS Social Studies curriculum is to “support the development of active, informed and responsible citizens.”

³² To accomplish this, teachers must help students to make the following logical connections:

“Past, present, and future—between historical and contemporary events and issues.

Global—between regions, environments, and cultures around the world. Personal—between the curriculum and students' personal interests, concerns, and career aspirations.

Interdisciplinary—between various content areas.” ³³

This curriculum unit specifically guides students to make those connections by exploring the concept of slavery across temporal and global boundaries. While first working as a whole class, this unit scaffolds and guides students to make connections between Spartacus and the Red Scare while considering interdisciplinary content areas of social studies and visual arts (film). However, within the final project, students are encouraged to apply what they have learned from the curriculum unit to make personal connections with their final film/history analysis by integrating their own art-related interests into the visual presentation.

Annotated Bibliography Resources for Teachers

Augoustakis, Antony and Cyrino, Monica S., ed. *Starz Spartacus: Reimagining an Icon on Screen* . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

While this curriculum unit focuses solely on the 1960 film version of *Spartacus* , other on-screen adaptations Spartacus’s history do exist. This book analyzes the 2010-2013 Starz television series *Spartacus* through essays. If a teacher has extra time at the end of the unit, or wishes to adapt the unit to analyze more than one on-screen depiction of Spartacus, this book could be used as a guide. Chapter 2 “From Kubrick’s Political Icon to Television Sex Symbol” by Nuno Simões Rodrigues helps to provide a clear segue between film and television, as well as an overview of the many adaptations Spartacus has undergone throughout history.

Cornelius, Michael G., ed. *Of Muscles and Men: Essays on the Sword & Sandal Film* . . Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011.

Though often referenced, this collection of essays does not solely focus on Spartacus. The essays in this book focus mainly on how gender and masculinity are defined and portrayed by “sword and sandal” films, such as *Spartacus* . This book could provide background for some really interesting conversations about the way films adapt history in depicting machismo, violence, muscles, and heteronormativity.

Cornelius, Michael G., ed. *Spartacus in the Television Arena* . Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015.

While this curriculum unit focuses solely on the 1960 film version of *Spartacus* , other on-screen adaptations Spartacus’s history do exist. This book analyzes the 2010-2013 Starz television series *Spartacus* . If a teacher has extra time at the end of the unit, or wishes to adapt the unit to analyze more than one on-screen depiction of Spartacus, this book could be used as a guide.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* . Toronto: Random House Canada, 2000.

Chapter 2, “Resistance and Survival: *Spartacus* ” provides excellent analysis of the different ways, both historically accurate and inaccurate, slaves are portrayed throughout the 1960 film *Spartacus* .

Stothard, Peter. *On the Spartacus Road* . London: Harper Press, 2010.

This book is included more for teacher enjoyment than instruction. This book is a true story, following the author’s actual journey across Italy while battling cancer. The book melds the ancient history of Spartacus with personal experiences. It does, however, help the reader to better understand the physical landscape of Rome, and the journey taken by slaves during the Servile War.

Theodorakopoulos, Elena. *Ancient Rome at the Cinema: Story and Spectacle in Hollywood and Rome* . Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2010.

This book contains a number of essays on different Roman history-based films, such as *Ben-Hur* and *Gladiator* . These could be useful for other film units. However, chapter 3 specifically focuses on *Spartacus* and the “politics of story-telling.” This chapter provides great analysis of the film itself, including an examination of script, actors, background/landscape, and its classification as an “epic” or “spectacle”.

Trow, M.J.. *Spartacus: The Myth and the Man* . Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2006.

I would highly suggest teachers read specifically chapters one and eleven within this book. Both chapters provide helpful analysis concerning the legends and realities of the historical Spartacus, while also connecting back to the film.

Winkler, Martin M., ed. *Spartacus: Film and History* . Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

This collection of essays provided some of the most useful information on the production of the film and its historical relationship to the time-period in which it was created. Chapter 1, by Duncan Cooper clearly explains the behind-the-scenes production of the film, focusing on Trumbo, Kubrick, and their differing opinions. Chapter 9, by Martin M. Winkler, does an excellent job in relating the events and characters of the film to the real-world events and leaders of the 1950’s and 60’s.

A Reading List for Students

Douglas, Kirk. *I Am Spartacus!: Making a Film, Breaking the Blacklist* . New York: Open Road, 2012.

Chapters or selections of this book could be read by students on Days 8-10 to provide a firsthand, primary source account of the social and political implications of *Spartacus* . Kirk Douglas, the actor who played Spartacus, writes honestly in accessible language about the political drama behind the making of the film.

Fast, Howard. *Spartacus* . Armonk: North Castle Books, 1996.

Selections of this book should be assigned for homework at the end of Day 3. Alternatively, depending on time constraints and student engagement, the teacher could also choose to read some of the book aloud to the class or ask students to “popcorn” read. As noted above, I suggest focusing on the book’s dedication and Parts I-III, which hint at the book’s communist undertones, introduce the role of slavery, and provide some foreshadowing for the end of the film.

Schiavone, Aldo. *Spartacus*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

This book uses historical facts to tell the story of Spartacus in an accessible narrative style. Sections could easily be read by students as a way of providing background information on the life and actions of Spartacus, the historical figure.

Shaw, Brent D, ed. *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* . Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

The introduction offers a very easily-understood background on slavery and the slave wars in Italy and Sicily, a discussion of the "man and myth" behind Spartacus, as well as an informative guide to reading/interpreting ancient historical sources. The second half of the book contains a curated collection of primary source documents concerning slavery in the ancient world as well as the Spartacus Wars. These should be used during the Activity portion of Day 3's lesson.

Strode, Woody and Young, Sam. *Goal Dust: The Warm and Candid Memoirs of a Pioneer Black Athlete and Actor* . Lanham: Madison Books, 1990.

Chapters or selections of this book could be read by students on Days 8-10 to provide a firsthand, primary source account of the social and political implications of *Spartacus* . Woody Strode, the actor who played Draba, describes some of the hardships experienced by a "black athlete and actor" in the 1950's and 60's. His personal account helps students to understand the social turmoil of racial inequality in America during the early-mid 20th century.

Endnotes

1. Quote by Professor Dudley Andrew.
2. <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/board/ssframeworks.pdf>
3. <http://www.nhps.net/nhpsdemographics>
4. Based on demographics from the 2015-2016 school year found at:
<http://co-opartsandhumanities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Coop-HS-Profile-2015-16-v9-28-15.pdf>
5. The most recent publicly available data on EL students in the state of Connecticut is from the years 2014-2015. Within the years of 2010-2015, New Haven gained 610 EL students. This data can be accessed at: http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/evalresearch/el_databulletin_aug2015.pdf
6. Ibid.
7. Trow, *Spartacus: The Myth and the Man*, p. 218.
8. Quote from Sallust, The Spartacus War. Primary source documents by Sallust and Livy can be found on pages 145 and 149 of *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* translated and edited by Brent D. Shaw.
9. Plutarch, The Spartacus Slave War. Text can be found on pages 131-138 of *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* translated and edited by Brent D. Shaw.
10. Ibid., page 130-133.
11. Ibid., page 133.
12. Ibid., page 136.
13. Livy, *A Brief Account of the End of the War in 71 BC* . Text can be found on page 150 of *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* translated and edited by Brent D. Shaw.
14. Ibid., p. 219.
15. Shaw, Brent D., *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* , page 14.

16. Ibid., 15.
17. Ibid., 16.
18. Information comes from a New York Times interview with Howard Fast from July 9, 2000. Full interview can be found here:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/09/nyregion/q-a-howard-fast-an-author-turns-his-pen-on-his-hometown-greenwich.html>
19. Fast, Howard. *Spartacus* , page viii. The original 1951 version of the book did not come with the Introduction, written by Fast in 1996.
20. Ibid.
21. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953 after being found guilty of espionage.
22. Cooper, Duncan, "Who Killed the Legend of Spartacus?" in *Spartacus: Film and History* , page 22.
23. Cooper, Duncan, "Who Killed the Legend of Spartacus?" in *Spartacus: Film and History* , page 24.
24. Ibid.
25. Winkler, Martin M., "The Holy Cause of Freedom" in *Spartacus: Film and History* , page 188.
26. <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>
27. <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/programs-events/teaching-beinecke>
28. If no classrooms are available for reservation, the students and teacher could easily sit outside the library in the courtyard, or across the street in the Sterling courtyard, for the debrief.
29. All documents and relevant passages can be easily found in *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* by Brent D. Shaw. See Bibliography for more information.
30. All videos can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/crashcourse>
31. *Civil Rights and the 1950s: Crash Course US*: <https://youtu.be/S64zRnnn4Po>; *The Cold War: Crash Course US* : <https://youtu.be/9C72ISMFD0>; *The 1960s in America: Crash Course US* : <https://youtu.be/lkXFb1sMa38>
32. Sandra Cates-Clark, NHPS Social Studies Curriculum:
http://www.nhps.net/sites/default/files/Social_Studies_Curriculum_Overview_.pdf
33. Ibid.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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