Piracy have steered the maritime economy over the years and became an important topic for study. As piracy and modern view of piracy has evolved over the years, the purpose of the film festival is to observe how popular culture have been knitted into society’s image of piracy and to educate the audience on the misrepresentations and actual historical facts in modern piratical films. Therefore, a suitable theme for the film festival would be “Piracy Through Time: Attack from Popular Culture” as the film festival will include 3 films from different era to observe the changes as popular culture is carved into piracy. Hence, for this film festival, I would like to nominate a total of 3 films to be screened; they are “Captain Kidd”, “Treasure Island” and “Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl”.

“Captain Kidd” is a 1945 film that follows the life of a real-life pirate “William Kidd” and the events are set in the late 1600s which is a period recognised by many scholars as the golden age of piracy where piratical activities are at its pinnacle. One of the main reasons for nominating this film is the accuracy of the film with respect to the history of piracy, with minimal popular cultural influence. It introduces “privateering” to the audience which is an interesting topic as it challenges the modern consensus that piracy is illegal and despised. “A General History of Pyrates” is a book written by an author who goes by the name “Captain Charles Johnson” and is regarded as a reliable source by many as its contents were in sync with many other sources. From Captain Johnson’s account, piracy was not always illegal and despised; in fact, privateers were legalised and hired by the crown in the 1600s to undermine the Spanish power. Privateers are an instrumental segment in the history of pirates as they fuelled the rise of piracy in the golden age of piracy.

Despite the film’s low budget and the plot being fictional, I opine that the film did a tremendous job in accurately portraying the life of a privateer in that era as many of the events in the film remain factual and accurate, allowing the audience to experience a glimpse of what a pirate’s life is like in that period. Charles Laughton also portrayed Captain Kidd fairly accurately as a sly and overambitious pirate, which is an excellent choice for the protagonist of a film as Captain William’s real-life account is very interesting by itself; from a successful privateer to a failed pirate-hunter in addition to the buried treasure. Hence, albeit the lack of action in the film, the partially accurate film together with the excellent choice of pirate (Captain Kidd), is an ideal film for audience to indulge in the life of a privateer and to learn about the historical events during that era.

The next film “Treasure Island” is a 1950 fictional film set in the 1765 which is the period after the golden age of piracy. From this film, one can notice that popular culture begins to blend into piracy and society’s image of piracy starts to slip off from actual historical accounts. The film fuelled many popular stereotypes of pirates that we know today, such as the one-leggedness, the parrot, and the pirate language. Robert Newton did a tremendous job in playing the infamous “Captain Long John Silver” in the film, especially in the accent and the language he used. His “arrrr” and his behaviours such as the eye-rolling added more sparks to the character. In addition, the character is well developed as he transformed from a charismatic fatherly figure to a cunning and meticulous mutineer. The twists and turns in the story plot also kept the audience engaged as it kept the audience wondering whether the scheming Captain Silver’s feelings for the fatherless boy “Jim Hawkins” are real or he is just making use of him.

The film serves as a gangway between piracy and popular culture as it can capture the audience’s interest with its unique flares and romanticised plot. Comparing “Captain Kidd” and “Treasure Island”, the differences are very evident, from the language to the appearance of pirates. However, as much as "Treasure Island” success is predominantly due to the added and adapted piratical culture to suit the general audience of that era, there is a need to distinguish the misrepresentations to avoid misinformation. Nevertheless, "Treasure Island” is an influential piece of art so successful that it later inspired many other pirate-related films such as “Pirates of the Caribbean” and eventually became the modern iconography of pirates.

The last piece of film “Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl” is a successful film that was released in 2003. From this film, the audience can observe the manifestation of many popular cultures and the stereotypes seen in “Treasure Island”. One example is when “Elizabth” and “Jack Sparrow” walked the plank, however in reality, there were very few accounts of pirates walking the plank. There are also many misrepresentations in the film such as the size of the pirate ships. According to a national geographic article written by Maria Lara Martinez, a historian and researcher at the University of Alcala, pirates in that era preferred fast and manoeuvrable crafts and hence, often used sloops of about “40 feet long with one or two sets of oars, and armed with up to ten cannons”. This contrasts with the pirate ships shown in the films and in the other sequels of the film, where pirate ships such as the black pearl are huge vessels with multiples masts. Besides, according to Martinez, ships of that size are not even supposed to be able to move that fast as depicted in the film. However, all these exaggerated and animated aspects of the film kept me hooked to the films and despite the inaccuracies of the film, some aspects of the film remained factual. An example is the featuring of female pirates such as “Elizabeth Swann” which contrary to popular beliefs did existed.

Despite the inaccuracies of the film, some aspects of the film remained factual. An example is the featuring of female pirates such as “Elizabeth Swann” which contrary to popular beliefs did existed. Nonetheless, this film fits into the theme of the film festival as it shows the effects of how popular culture have altered historical facts in order to adapt to societal demands. Comparing “Pirates of the Caribbean” with “Captain Kidd”, there are clear differences as “Pirates of the Caribbean” is much more exciting yet less believable as compared to “Captain Kidd”.

From these 3 films, we see the change in society’s representation of piracy as it navigated through the course of history into modern society; from “Captain Kidd” film where the film remained the most accurate and untainted of the 3 films, to “Treasure Island” where many of the stereotypes begins to manifest and finally to “Pirates of the Caribbean” where popular culture seemingly took control of the entire film and almost completely deviated from historical accuracies. Even though the adaptations to popular culture are inevitable, it is of great interests and paramount importance to educate the public on the misrepresentations and the historical adaptations of piracy in order to preserve the original piratical cultures and traditions and prevent false information from being passed down.