

Cool hand luke movie critique: courage and self-respect



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Cool Hand Luke directed by the reputable Stuart Rosenberg and nominated for four Oscars is a tragic tale of an ordinary individual rising up the courage to oppose the establishment, thus becoming a hero. Cool Hand Luke weaves a rich tapestry of the prison life on both sides of the establishment and the injustices of the system. In short Cool Hand Luke is a movie that focuses on the struggles of a single courageous man and his quest for freedom. After being incarcerated for a petty crime and sent to a chain-gang jail, Lucas Jackson (Paul Newman) has risen up the ranks of the establishment and become the prisoners' idol as well as the guard's enemy. Jackson's contrasting relationship with the guards and the prisoners is an important aspect to the plot, as is his desire to escape.

Luke's initial break-out is incited by the news of his mother's death. Although he is caught, his determination to escape is only slightly dampened, so he merely breaks out once again and fails. Thus, the guards begin to wage a campaign to finally break Luke's spirit once and for all, by putting him to work and nearly torturing him to death. Luke finally concedes and begs for mercy. After this episode Luke's fellow prisoners turn their backs on him upon realizing that he is just human after all, not the invincible hero that they had made him out to be.

Luke is broken, but is not yet ready to give up, as he escapes one last time. Luke runs away and escapes into an old church, launching into a soliloquy asking God for guidance. God's answer comes in the form of desertion as the police encircle the church. Luke realizes that he's a goner no matter what, so he approaches a window and shouts the famous line " what we have here is

a failure to communicate. ” In return for his final act of defiance he gets a fatal shot in the throat.

Remaining defiant to the end is an expected characteristic of Luke’s courageous nature. Paul Newman’s charismatic performance as Luke is truly the heart of the film, performed with subtlety and all smiles. Our protagonist, Luke is a character who is a true anti-hero at heart never wanting to be anyone’s role model. Unfortunately fate thrusts him into that position in which he becomes the prison idol, even though all he wanted to do was to live on his own terms. Paul Newman portrays Luke as a very believable character. Unlike the other prisoners, Luke refuses to conform to the rules of the system.

It is his stubbornness and courage to never give up that eventually leads to his downfall. However, once the veil is lifted from Luke’s character we see him or what he truly is, a desperate and deadened man no longer willing to do what it takes to satisfy his other inmates. Luke’s death in the end leaves you with a bitter taste in your mouth; it seems to send the message that if the unbeatable Luke can’t break the system no one can. Nonetheless fighting against something you don’t believe in even in the face of defeat is a true example of courage. This film was set in one of the southern states of America in 1940’s, the setting adds to the overall ambiance of the movie because everyone is so isolated from the rest of society. The jail house is a society in its own right because within the jail there exists a social hierarchy much like one you would find in the other major cities.

The prisoners labour in the fields all day, cutting grass and tarring the roads. The prisoners never wield a weapon more dangerous than a dull blade to cut the grass while all the guards hold guns and rifles. Despite this Luke courageously fights against the establishment be it with his words or his actions, never giving up. Stuart Rosenberg shows us the courage of man that just never gives up, through the plot, characters and setting.

Some may see this movie as a pessimistic film to its core. Pessimistic about the existence of justice, freedom and independence. In the end Luke dies for his ambitions, and Luke's story being told as legend can, at best be seen as a hollow victory. Ultimately Cool Hand Luke is a film about how far a man's courage can push the system and what happens when the system pushes back.