

Examining the extent of film censorship media essay



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Introduction.

The theory of Utilitarianism fits nicely with the objective of film censorship, as the theory is often described by the phrase “ the greatest good for the greatest number of people” this being the main aim of all censorship organizations worldwide.

Since the early days of film, when the Cinematograph Act was first established in the U. K and the Hays code of film classification in the U. S, the debate of censorship in the world of film has grown and grown. In Britain especially, due to the strict nature of The British Board of Film (BBFC), renowned for it’s almost prudish regulations and it’s promise since 1913, that no film shall pass if not clean and wholesome (All seeming a little Gandolph the Grey) . A remarkable statement given that during the second world war the BBFC relaxed their censorship laws to enable the airing of Anti-Nazi films such as ‘ Pastor Hall’ and ‘ Love on the Dole’ both of which would

not of been passed previously, also when you take into account some of the graphic nature of films we watch today, compared to the standard of acceptance in the early days of cinema, we can see a much more laid back approach to censorship. As a whole the western world of films organizations have managed to protect the public and animals interest for many years, even if some people think its not always required or necessary at times, these main key censorship issues cover:

1. Sexual Violence
2. Emphasis on the process of violence and sadism
3. ill treatment of animals
4. Details of criminal technique
5. Blasphemous images or dialogue.
6. Glamorisation of weapons that are both particularly dangerous and not already well-know in Britain.

All of which cause a great difference of opinion in its own individual way.

Sexual Violence

From a feminist point of view the extent of censorship in film can never be too excessive, especially when it comes to the sexual images depicted in some films. The anti-porn argument is that pornography differs from other censorship requirements, stating that it has special overwhelming powers that urges its viewers to replicate what they see on the screen. This maybe

an interesting and accurate observation due to human nature's natural instinct to replicate that is hard wired into our DNA. These urges to copy what we see on the screen however could differ from person to person depending on the individual's personal desire, for instance a person with a passion for martial arts and fighting could respond with the same special powerful urges gained from watching an action packed film, just like a film with compelling music can alter the viewer's mood depending on the type of music played.

Violence

Terrorism in recent decades holds a key place in the minds of all those responsible for creating the next big film, because any act of terrorism that occurs in the real world like the World Trade Centre tragedy, must be carefully censored. This type of censorship is not indefinite though as eventually films depicting the terrorist act as its main topic will still make it to the big screen at some point.

To mention but a few films in particular that highlight such an incident would be the films 'United 93' or 'World Trade Centre' both of which were released five years after the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centres in New York. Although a documentary film (Fahrenheit 911) based on this event was released just three years after the horrific attacks.

A more recent example of the continuing debate of censorship takes us to the China Film Group, who according to the (Guardian) tried to order that the blockbuster film The Avatar be banned from Chinese cinemas due to the

films central characters (the Na'vi) resembling that of the vulnerable in china being forced out their homes by predatory property developers. This obviously did not come to fruition as the film smashed the Chinese box office record, which just shows us that the censorship suggested, was not a case of utilitarianism as the censor would have only been good for a relatively small number of people, as opposed to the millions who obviously enjoyed the viewing pleasure. The spectrum as to how a film is perceived has two ends, at one we have the people who deem films and media as a hypnotic drug for its passive viewers, at the other end are those with an anti-censorship perspective, that we as individuals can decipher for ourselves what texts are works of fiction or art, the results of an individuals actions after viewing a film is that individuals psychological problem.

The Harry potter series of books and films by J. K. Rowling have sparked many debates on the censorship laws, some educational figures from schools objected to the films being released due to it's reference to the occult, which could lead the young viewers to develop an unhealthy interest in the subject of occultism , although the Harry potter series caused less problems in schools when released in 1997 in book format. Which illustrates how peoples opinions on censorship can change dramatically if it dos not meet their own requirements.

Animal Cruelty

Today it is unthinkable to express such animal cruelty of which Michael Cimino expressed while making the film Heavenly gate, from allegedly blowing up a horse with dynamite to killing chickens and wounding horses just to use their blood on his actors. However cruelty to animals in film in <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-extent-of-film-censorship-media-essay/>

some countries today still pass censorship rulings, In the south Korean film The Isle some amphibious creatures were mutilated, even more grotesquely in the Italian film Cannibal Holocaust they used and killed turtles and Monkeys in such a horrific manner it would be distasteful to repeat. Animal rights communities online is a forum set up with the sole purpose of warning those sensitive to the abuse of animals, of any films they have seen that contain the use of animal cruelty.

Blasphemy

One of the most controversial films viewed by some of containing Blasphemous Dialogue and Imagery is that of The Exorcist, although all of the hype surrounding the film's curse on production made it a must see film (with a don't look at that road side accident scenario), The Exorcist dominated the media around the world, notably for it's religious battle of good and bad or God v Satan. Censors around the world took a bold leap of faith in not tampering with film, some differing in the overall rating, deciding the extent required for it's audience ranged from the MPAA's Uncut R which allowed minors accompanied by an adult, to the UK's X rating which allowed over 18's only and for many years the BBFC prevented the release of the film on Video.

With the advent of the internet, Censorship organizations such as that in the USA and the United Kingdom, have an almost futile task of keeping all films that they ban from airing in cinemas and DVD from being viewed, for example a film titled ' The Profit' was banned by the majority of film censorship organizations in 2001, preventing further distribution of the film completely, due to the Church of Scientology taking out an injunction against <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-extent-of-film-censorship-media-essay/>

the film with the courts finding the film to be a parody of Scientology.

However in 2008 the film was distributed on a peer to peer file sharing website as well as the ever popular You-tube.

Glamorization Of Weapons & Criminal Techniques

It is often thought that the cool characters portrayed in glamorous films, carrying shiny weapons, has a very glorifying effect on its viewer young and old. The film censors run a very thin line with this subject as many appropriately rate a film based on it's visual violence but they also have to take into account the psychological effect of glamorization, to some extent this could simply be a beautiful women holding a beautiful weapon , but not necessarily using that weapon in a violent manner.

More importantly if a censor feels that the film has content that could give its viewer a new technique of method of successful criminal activity, it must decide if the technique itself would have a serious consequence out in the real world that could lead to an increase in the particular offence.

Conclusion

The extent of censorship required varies from person to person with such a drastic difference, that what some find acceptable and normal, others find obscene and offensive. Therefore the censorship is determined by these organizations that as a whole, decide what is acceptable to certain age levels.

The most important thing we must remember when deciding if the censorship of a certain film we have watched or are going to watch is

appropriate or necessary, is if it was implemented for the greater good for the greatest number of people. In my opinion the largest majority of the many films I have had the pleasure of watching have had adequate censorship certification, which tells me that the films that are banned, are done so for a good reason.