

Live free or die:  
adapting "harrison  
bergeron" to the film  
'2081'



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Throughout human history, people have been much more influenced by individuals that can bring the situation down to a more human and relatable level. Whether it be in politics or on a daily basis, those who can relate with whom they wish to influence are much more prosperous and successful. Chandler Tuttle was attempting to convey this with his short film 2081, an adaptation to the famous short story “ Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, a tale of the impracticality of true equality. Both mediums of storytelling took a much different approach to the same situation. Although the settings were the same, the two opposing stories described a much different protagonist. The Harrison created by Kurt Vonnegut was “ clanking, clownish, and huge,” with a comically large height, extreme strength, and the unnatural ability to fly. However, in 2081 he is presented in a much more realistic manner, with average height and increased strength, but no crazy superhuman abilities. Chandler Tuttle also presents a much more humanized character with understandable emotions and desires. Because of all this, Harrison Bergeron is a much more relatable character in the short film 2081.

One of the distinct differences between the two mediums is how the characters behave and the abilities they possess. Kurt Vonnegut took a much more comical approach to how Harrison looked, whom he described to wear a “ red rubber ball for a nose.” In an attempt to make Harrison look more ugly, the Handicapper General “ kept his eyebrows shaved off, and covered his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random.” These handicaps seemed much more humorous than the handicaps presented in the film, which makes it seem like Harrison shouldn’t be taken as seriously. The 2081 approach to the handicaps takes a much more subtle approach by

not having any handicaps that interfere with his beauty, but rather deal with his extraordinary strength. Although they both possess this great strength, “Harrison Bergeron” takes it to such an inhuman level it would be impossible for the people on the television and those in the theater to relate with. While Harrison in 2081 can only tear off his handicaps and throw them across the room, his unrealistic counterpart can laughably “snatch two musicians from their chairs, [and] wave them like batons” in the short story. This detail from Vonnegut regarding his strength is further evidence that he is attempting to convey something much different than the relatable, inspirational version from Chandler Tuttle. Furthermore, in “Harrison Bergeron” the author completely disregards physics when “neutralizing gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long time.” Compared to the superhuman figure created by Kurt Vonnegut, 2081 brings forth a simple protagonist with human abilities and goals.

Not only do the two protagonists differ in their appearance and strengths, but the Harrison in 2081 has goals that are much easier to relate with. First, Tuttle presented Harrison with an impressive opening speech discussing the horrors he faced when dealing with Handicapper General. Despite the fact that “for the last six years, [he] had been held prisoner by the state—sentenced, without trial, to torture without end,” Harrison survived and now has a cause to fight for. By explaining Harrison in this way Tuttle was able to convey a character much different than the comical brutish version in the short story. Humans love it when the underdog wins and Tuttle captured this by showing how the “extraordinary, it seems, was simply out of [HG’s]

reach.” The film presented much more relatable goals such as stopping injustice and dying for freedom, whereas Harrison in the story wanted to become an almighty emperor. The words “ I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!” aren’t as inspirational as “ Let us shine a light so, at last, all the world can see!” The result of who connected with the crowd was clear when in 2081 the audience was shocked and horrified at his death, but largely unmoved in “ Harrison Bergeron.”

In conclusion, despite the original goals of their rightful creators, 2081 was much more successful at creating a likable, relatable character. While Kurt Vonnegut portrays a character that even he didn’t take seriously, Tuttle shows a more humanized character with hopes and dreams. The audience is obviously much more willing to listen to him when he isn’t claiming to be an all powerful ruler, but instead someone who just wants to make a change. All the details provided by Tuttle make Harrison much more relatable in the film and quite possibly “ the greatest man you have never known.”