

The manchurian candidate



Films have always been an outlet for a confused society; with themes of politics, religion, relationship and illness movies are the way the modern world deals with its hardships and examines its own motives and actions. “The Manchurian Candidate” is one of the more controversial films in this eye-opening genre, with political themes running strong throughout in such a way as to seemingly point fingers and make strongly opinionated remarks about our current political situation.

The 2004 film was remade from an earlier 1962 version, which before taking that format was actually a novel written by Richard Condon in 1959. Its political premise was originally based on the Cold War; the book and the original film shied away from the usual opinion that it was Communists who were solely misguided and instead portrayed a world where Communists, Capitalists and everybody in between was faulted ideologically. The people in Condon’s book existed within a conspiratorial net that saw brainwashed operatives of the Communist Party seeking to take office and exploit their position for monetary gains (Gianos 1998).

The 2004 version, by contrast, has been quite clearly adapted for the age of the War on Terror, with Communists replaced by the new perceived enemy, corporate giants, in this case “Manchurian Global”. It becomes clear as the movie progresses that the main characters have been brainwashed by Manchurian Global to protect and grow the interests of the corporation.

One character, under the direct influence of his power hungry mother, seeks election into office, while the other is representative of an entire section of the military in supporting his campaign. This latter character, Marco,

becomes suspicious of his own actions concerning the vice-presidential candidate, Shaw, when he realizes that he and every other military officer who served with him is using the exact same words to describe their support of the man; basically that he is a wonderful man and an excellent soldier who will make the best vice-president.

Marco believes he is suffering from a mental illness, and seeks help from the military doctors who are pledged to offer comprehensive care following service in the army. They seem willing to help until Marco finally refuses the pills they keep giving him. He claims they don't work and that he wants something different, however the doctors won't do anything for him - in fact they are very concerned about his refusal to accept their treatment. In the end, Marco pieces together the entire story that he has forgotten: while serving together in the army, he and his companions, including Shaw, were brainwashed by Manchurian Global to support the candidacy of Shaw while Shaw himself was groomed to take the vice-presidency.

Through the brainwashing, the corporation expected to gain high level contracts and a huge amount of money and power. It falls to Marco to expose the plot and explain it to Shaw before he gives the company and all the people connected to the plot exactly what they want. It is a story of corruption in government and the overall will of those in powerful places to exploit whoever is necessary to stay on top and bring in the cash.

The reverberations of this film in current American politics is very strong and very controversial. Political controversy in film is of course not a new thing; Brian Nerve explains that Hollywood has been a refuge for the suspicious

world since its earliest days, and that movies like “ The Manchurian Candidate” are not the product of unsound minds but of a lack of transparency throughout the political world (Nerve 1992).

This movie in particular has been built upon that ever-present facet of the American public: the conspiracy theory. Whether it’s a Presidential assassination or a corporate cover-up, Americans want to know every detail and whether or not there are real conspiracies of this magnitude actually occurring is difficult to tell when questions constantly go unanswered and the imagination takes over. More than anything, Manchurian Global has a startling likeness to American corporations like Halliburton, who have in recent years been harshly chided for their role in global inequality and exploitation in the name of money.

The people in league with Manchurian Global are portrayed as basically heartless, inhuman and scandalous; these elements of scandal can always be found in political films according to Gillespie and Lerner (2000). The producers were well aware of the parallels they were drawing between their characters and the members of America’s present government, and the audience was generally predisposed to believe the worst of its government before seeing such a shocking story of manipulation played out for them onscreen. They wonder if they are being brainwashed to accept a fabricated reality, or if they are simply not seeing the whole picture.

In its entirety, “ The Manchurian Candidate” has questioned the accuracy of media portrayals of events in such a way as the American public truly wanted to see - however the movie was so undeniably outrageous in its plot

details that instead of reinforcing the idea that the government is hiding something from the public all it really did was make the audience question their current beliefs concerning conspiracy.

Few people are prepared to believe blatant military brainwashing, and this is the major weak point in the film. "The Manchurian Candidate" is a movie that sets itself far apart from mainstream entertainment in its political aspects and ideas. It has drawn an audience mostly intent on getting angry at the state of government and politics, though unfortunately in the end it falls short. Instead of solidifying current thought patterns or expanding on them, the film merely sparks doubt in the minds of those most willing to believe its plot. All in all, "The Manchurian Candidate" is quite unworthy of the hype.

Works Cited

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