

One ancient greek story - the real truth

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Introduction

From Shakespeare to Aeschylus and Aristophanes, there have been many films that have been adapted from plays. Chi-Raq directed by Spike Lee was made to be a modern adaptation of Aristophanes play Lysistrata. Using rap and hip-hop, the film addresses important social issues, like Gang and gun violence plaguing the city of Chicago. In Lysistrata, the protagonist is desperate to end the bloodshed between Athens and Sparta. In Chi-Raq, she is desperate to end the senseless violence killing innocent lives every day. Spike Lee's Chi-Raq is a satire in no way meant to make fun of gun violence, but to help raise awareness in a political and artistic way. In my paper, I will discuss Spike Lees Chi-Raq based on Aristophanes' Lysistrata and how he made this Greek Comedy attractive to a modern-day audience.

Aristophanes & Spike Lee

Lysistrata By Aristophanes

Lysistrata is a comedy written in 411 B. C. by the Greek playwright Aristophanes. The play starts with Lysistrata on the quiet streets of Athens. Lysistrata is frustrated with the unfair treatment of women in Athens and the on-going Peloponnesian war, a war that has been going on for over twenty years. Lysistrata calls for a gathering with the women of Greece to discuss her plans to end the war. When the women appear, Lysistrata begins by informing them that they as women, have power over their men and they will use that power to end the war and bring peace to Athens. She tells them that the only way to end the war is to take over the Acropolis. Her plan would be for the older women to seize control of it. No access to the Acropolis means the men no longer have access to funding the War. And to ensure a

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peace negotiation is made, she also orders the women to abstain from sex from their partners. Hence, sending the older women to the Acropolis since they are no longer sexually active. Of course, many of the women disagree with this method because not only does withholding from sex affect the men, but it would also affect the married and sexually active women. The women also enjoy sex, but Lysistrata informs them that denying the men access to their bodies would weaken them into submission. After being persuaded, the women agree that this is something they must do if they want peace and bring their men back home. They oblige and take an oath "...I'll never lie and stare up at the ceiling, nor like a lion on all fours go kneeling. If I keep faith, then bounteous cups be mine. If not, to nauseous water change this wine..."

he plan for the younger women is on. The older women will invade the Acropolis and the younger women will deny the men sex until the war is over.

Chi-Raq directed by Spike Lee

Chi-Raq is a film produced and directed by Spike Lee, that aims to bring awareness to the gang and gun violence in the United States. The film name " Chi-Raq" is a combination of Chicago and Iraq. The name stems from Chicago's reputation of being a violent city in recent years and has often been compared to combat zones in Iraq. The film starts with the number of murders to deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Chicago from the early 2000s to present day showing that Chicago's murders are higher than both Iraq and Afghanistan combined. Using the plot from Aristophanes' Lysistrata, Spike Lee uses Chicago's south side to tell the story of Lysistrata, the girlfriend of Spartan Gang leader Chi-Raq, whose mission is to end the violence in the

city. After rival gang leader of the Trojans ' Cyclops' come for revenge in a string of attacks against her and Chi-Raq, Lysistrata must hide out at her neighbor Miss Helen home. When gunshots erupt on the streets, Miss Helen and Lysistrata begin to discuss how the city has changed throughout the years. Miss Helen longs for the days when the Chicago streets were safe enough for the children to play on, while Lysistrata has only known Chicago as a War Zone. When their discussion of how to end the violence in the city, Lysistrata is not convinced that the men will ever surrender their guns or give up their gang life. Enter Leymah Gwobee, a peace activist responsible for leading a women's peace movement that helped bring an end to the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003. When Lysistrata comes to the realization that she and the women around the city can control the men by withholding from sex, she calls for the women of Chicago to come together for a meeting. When the women assemble, Lysistrata goes on to tell them that enough is enough. There can't be any more dead children on the streets of Chicago. That the violence must end and the way to do it is to ' Lock it up.' The Spartan and Trojan women are hesitant at first, but they realize that this could be the way to peace. They make an oath to abstain from sex until the men put their guns down. Sound familiar?

Comparisons

Character vs. Character

Whilst reading Lysistrata, it is never mentioned that she is married. She just wanted the war to end and get the men back home. Lysistrata wants to strike, but she can't do it alone. She needs the help of all the women in Greece. She is a strong and independent woman; she knows what she wants

and how to get it. She is the leader of the strike and not only does she have power over the men, but she can get the women to do almost anything she wants. An example: getting Myrrhine to Seduce her husband and convincing the women to keep on with the strike despite them wanting to give in. In Chi-Raq, we learn more about Lysistrata and her upbringing. Her mother could not raise her so she was raised in and out of group homes until she came of age. She ended up on the streets and now runs with the Spartan Gang. I felt like this Lysistrata was a little selfish and ignorant, especially when confronted by Miss Helen. She did not want to listen to Miss Helen when she tells her about the violence Chi-Raq has caused and she really does not seem to care or know of a way to stop him. The irony is she feels safe with Chi-Raq even though he is nothing but trouble. In Lysistrata, the protagonist uses her followers to do the work of seducing their men. In Chi-Raq, Lysistrata comes together with the Trojan Gang leaders partner, Indigo, to come up with the solution. This is when you really see Lysistrata's character change. She is stronger, she is motivated to make a change to better her community. Although she still loves and misses Chi-Raq in the end, she does not depend on him as much. She created a sisterhood of strong women that share the same goal, to end the violence.

Theme

Although the film and the play are similar, they have different ways of telling the story. In Aristophanes' Lysistrata, Lysistrata speaks of how the Peloponnesian war has affected the women. The streets are empty, the men are gone, older women stayed single because the men were out at war, but the main focus of the play is Lysistrata's sex strike and its power over the

men. They kept it light and funny to entertain the audience. For instance, the women dousing the men with water to keep them away, the women come up with excuses to give up on the strike, and when Kinesias was desperate to be with Myrrhine and she continuously made excuses not to have sex with him.

In *Chi-Raq*, we see how the violence between the Trojans and the Spartans terrorize the neighborhood. Take for instance the scene involving Jennifer Hudson's character Irene. Irene appears at the scene of a crime only to realize that the body lying on the street is that of her 7-year-old daughter, Patti who was hit by a stray bullet. She begins to question the crowd surrounding her daughter's body, but the bystanders know better than to snitch, especially with how unforgiving gangs are. Angry and upset that no one spoke up, she warns them that if the gangs could kill an innocent child, this will be them or someone in their family next. Later on, we see Irene on her hands and knees scrubbing the blood of her daughter off the streets. These are dark and real events written into the film. Violence like this happens every day in America. It is obvious that Lee meant to make this film darker and more political than the comedy in *Lysistrata*. The film is a satire, the comedic element is not used to make fun of the murders, but to shed light on a very real problem people deal with today. In an interview, Lee address the criticism he had received: ' There are very humorous moments in the trailer. Now some people are getting it twisted and thinking this is comedy, *Chi-Raq* is not a comedy, *Chi-Raq* is a satire, and there's a difference between humor and comedy... In no way shape or form are we making light of the lives that have been murdered with this senseless

violence There's an old statement, I gotta laugh to keep from crying. Well, I think that's apropos with Chi-Raq."

Rhyme and Chorus " In the year 411BC. That's before Jesus, all! The Greek Aristophanes penned a play satirizing his day. And in the style of his time, ' Stophanes made that s**t rhyme. Transplanted today we retain his verse to show our love for the universe."-Dolomedes When Samuel L. Jackson's character said this line at the beginning of the film, I was expecting that his character Dolomedes was going to be the only one speaking in verse. A majority of the characters spoke in rhyme and it was an appealing trait to the film. I do not remember seeing another film that did this and it was an interesting take on a Greek comedy. But after a while, the rhyming did get annoying. The only time there was a break from it was in the Church scene with Father Mike. Without it, that scene did better because it is such a serious topic that the rhymes could have unintentionally taken from emotional scene. But the second time around seeing the film, the rhyming did seem a bit unnecessary. Had it been just Dolomedes, the only person that ever addresses the audience, speaking in verse then it would have been enough and the audience would have understood what Lee's intentions were making the film a little more bearable for the audience. " But what irked me the most is that the characters spoke in rhyme... It was cute the first 5 minutes but by minute 30, when one sentence ended with.

The Ending

The final 24 minutes of the film is different from the play. Towards the end of the play, Kinesias has been seduced by his wife, Myrrhine and left aroused. Kinesias and the chorus of old men sit around complaining about how

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sexually frustrated they all are when a Spartan man enters with an erection. Kinesias and the men find out that the sex strike is happening all over Greece. The men agree to come together to figure out a way to end the strike to solve their... Problems. When the Spartan and Athenian men come together, they plead with Lysistrata to end the strike so they can go back to having sex. Lysistrata knows she has them where she wants them, they are all aroused and ready to settle. When the chorus leader confronts Lysistrata to end the madness, Lysistrata invites the Goddess Reconciliation, a naked woman she brought to tease the men into submission. Lysistrata then goes on to scold the men for once being allies and now fighting over nothing. The men agree, and of course, it has all to do with the beautiful naked woman standing right in front of them. It just goes to show how much power the women's sexuality had over the men the entire time. The men then go on to use Reconciliation's body as a map to distribute territories. They agree, the strike ends, the men go back to their women. The chorus of old women and men sing, and dance and the younger men get to have sex again. The film's ending was a little different. The Mayor in the film was seduced and left hanging by his wife. The men of both gangs were left lusting over the women except for Chi-Raq who found a woman. This is when you find out more about Chi-Raq and his troubled upbringing, his dad died, his mom could not find work, so he had to go to gang banging to make money. In the meantime, Lysistrata and the women take over the Illinois National Guard Armory and refused to surrender to the men's request to give it up. Chi-Raq comes to the Armory with a proposition, the first one to give in to a sex match loses, but this was all a plan set up by Lysistrata to have Chi-Raq and Cyclops in the same room. Cyclops wants to end the hate between them, he basically

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tells him he would rather having his wife in his life than Chi-Raq be dead. The scene then goes to a conference with the Mayor of Chicago announcing of the Peace Accord, an agreement from companies ensuring that " every person in the hoods of America is guaranteed a job." As well as other forms of help for South Side Chicago. For Lysistrata, this is the justice the people in her city deserve. The signing of the Peace accord from Lysistrata, Cyclops and Chi-Raq would ensure that the war between them is over. Lysistrata gives a speech that the families of the victims of gun violence deserve justice and Chi-Raq is hesitant to sign. In the end, Chi-Raq confesses that missed his intended target and killed Patti. As he is being pulled away in handcuffs, Chi-Raq tells the audience that its time to end the violence and quit protecting the gun.

Conclusion

This is the first time we see Chi-Raq give in and agree that this is all for nothing. Although, the film never offers a solution, it does open a conversation hopefully inspire action " The movie offered no answers to the problem it presents...its not a film's job to offer an answer...its to stimulate arguments and hook itself into the viewers imaginations...its a movie we need right now, whether you're willing to admit it or not."