

Politics and Children's Movies Don't Mix

One of the most annoying things to deal with in a movie theater is a fidgety child. About halfway through the latest animated sequel, a young child started kicking the back of my seat and whining, "Mommy, when's it gonna be done?" every five minutes. The mother ended up taking the child out of the theater early. Another \$30 wasted.

Unfortunately, I knew exactly why the movie couldn't hold the child's attention. While draped in the facade of a humorous kid's movie, the plot was driven by current political events that went way over the child's head.

You have to give the creative minds in Hollywood credit. Their job is harder than it looks. When considering children's entertainment, the industry knows it must appeal to parents as much as the children. They also know that parents look for programming that has some sort of educational and inspirational value. Since much of adult entertainment is fraught with political commentary, it's not a surprise that a partisan subtext may find its way into programming aimed at the 12 and under crowd. It's just disappointing.

Perhaps you are thinking, "But that's not true. Parents purchase educational media for their children all the time; why not a family film where the political agenda is only implied?" The answer to that is simple. Media materials purchased for the purpose of "training up a child" are marketed for the purpose to which they were intended. Whether it's Veggie Tales, Barney and Friends, Marlo Thomas' *Free to Be You and Me* or HBO's *The Truth About Alex*, advertising makes it clear; you know what you are getting.

When social commentary is injected into a movie, the mood

changes for everyone. For the child, the movie becomes unrelatable and boring. For the parent, it's even worse. They feel deceived or even betrayed. Imagine taking a child to a movie for pure entertainment and being blindsided by a political campaign. A group of strangers sitting in a boardroom has tried to grab the proverbial reins and steer their child for them. This is nothing short of an insult to parents, and it leaves a bad taste in their mouth for the next movie.

If a significant portion of the advertising is aimed at the parents, then shouldn't the studios give some thought to how their "other" target audience feels? Nobody likes being lectured. Even the relatively bipartisan eco-friendly message can elicit a "don't lecture me" cringe. Moreover, political evangelism always has a negative connotation. Whether it comes from adorable penguins begging us to save a dying planet, anthropomorphic cars against big oil corruption, or a Scottish princess who is anti-marriage, an embedded political message sucks the fun right out of a movie.

So if parents don't want Hollywood lecturing their children, but they do want entertainment that instills good values, well then, good gracious! What is an enormously wealthy, technologically superior, media super power to do? I told you their job was hard.

I think the answer lies in the difference between morality and politics. Whereas a person's morality based mindset has a "do vs. don't" attitude, the legally bound, civil rights concerned political mind sees mostly "don'ts." For example, the political worldview says.

- Don't try to stop teenager from having sex. It's impossible. Get educated, use condoms, and good luck.
- Don't have a baby until you are ready. Have an abortion if you're not.
- Don't trust big oil or other large corporations. They're

dishonest.

- Don't get married. It's out-dated and doesn't last.
- Don't pray in school.
- Don't force your beliefs on others.

This worldview gives the impression that the world is hopeless. Now look at the morally minded point of view.

- Do care for yourself by not being promiscuous. Your body and your heart have tremendous value.
- Do love all children. They are the future.
- Do be a person of integrity. It is an honor to have earned someone's trust.
- Do be loyal and care for your relationships. Cultivate your marriage. Learn to give to others rather than demanding that they meet all of your needs. This is love.
- Do pray. Praying never hurt anyone and it's comforting to know that someone is listening and they do care.
- Do have compassion for everyone, even those who are different from you.

Having a "Do" message in a movie is inspiring rather than convicting. It also gives the viewer the freedom to choose. It can mean the difference between a society that is hopeless and one that is hopeful. It can also mean the difference between a movie that's so-so and one that shatters the box office.

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