

Sorry Netflix, But You Don't Get to Lecture Americans on Moral Understanding

Rather than apologize for the scandal caused by the Netflix movie *Cuties*, the company's CEO, Ted Sarandos has dug in his heels, blaming American viewers rather than taking responsibility for the content.

As reported by *Deadline*, Sarandos said, "It's a little surprising in 2020 America that we're having a discussion about censoring storytelling. It's a film that is very misunderstood with some audiences, uniquely within the United States."

He continued, "The film speaks for itself. It's a very personal coming-of-age film. It's the director's story, and the film has obviously played very well at Sundance without any of this controversy and played in theaters throughout Europe without any of this controversy."

What a telling statement.

First, Sarandos is surprised that, "in 2020 America," there is outrage over the sexual exploitation of young girls.

Is this supposed to be something we graduate from? Should our concern for the well-being of children dissipate as the decades go by? Does the passing of years lessen our pain when we see young girls gyrating in grossly sexual dance moves? Is this something that should no longer bother enlightened Americans? Should sexual morality be consigned to the Stone Age?

Second, we did not misunderstand the movie. We get the fact that the movie speaks *against* the sexual exploitation of

children. But, as we have stated repeatedly, you do not sexually exploit children to convey the message that sexually exploiting children is wrong.

As I wrote on Sept. 18, “‘The Babylon Bee’ headline is satirical, but, based on the logic of Netflix, it might as well be true: ‘New Netflix Movie Actually Murders Puppies To Teach That Murdering Puppies Is Bad.’ Or, to move from satire to reality and create our own headline, ‘New Netflix Movie Actually Exploits Young Girls Sexually to Teach That Sexually Exploiting Young Girls Is Wrong.’”

Third, the fact that the movie played well at Sundance, which no one points to as a bastion of high moral standards, is totally immaterial. As Indie Wire noted (and I previously cited), “The Sundance Film Festival has been shocking audiences—and launching careers—for years.” An early Sundance winner was the 1989 movie “Sex, Lies and Videotape.”

So much for *Cuties* provoking no such controversy at Sundance. That would be like saying, “The Zombie Film Festival watched the latest episodes of *The Walking Dead*, and really enjoyed the shows. No one said a word about the violence and the gore.”

Third, it is instructive that Sarandos compared the reaction to *Cuties* in Europe to the reaction in the United States.

Thank God that we still have a conscience about these things. Thank God that we’re still disturbed by the thought of young girls being taught these dance moves, let alone filming them in front of an audience as well as being involved in other, inappropriate scenes.

For several decades now, total nudity has been on full and open display in different countries in Europe. This includes grocery and department stores, where porn magazines adorn some of the checkout racks.

As bad as things are here in America, and as much as we export porn worldwide, there is still a shred of public decency that we cling to.

I'm glad that our reaction to *Cuties* is different here than in Europe.

Interestingly, Sarandos didn't compare the reaction of American viewers to that of viewers in other countries where Netflix airs. I wonder what Muslim viewers think of the movie in countries like Jordan and Egypt? (Oh wait. Perhaps it's not airing there. After all, the movie takes a swipe at religious Muslims too.)

And how big a screening is the movie getting in the continent of Africa? How are the viewers enjoying it in countries like Cameroon and Sierra Leone? What kind of reception is it getting in Singapore and Hong Kong? And how about a more conservative European country like Hungary?

I don't have definitive answers to all of these questions, but I have some educated guesses. That's why Bloomberg announced on September 13, "Netflix Won't Cancel 'Cuties' at Home, But Might Have to Abroad."

As the article by Lucas Shaw explained, "Netflix has delayed the release of the movie in Turkey, and has yet to provide a new date.

"As Netflix has introduced its service to more than 190 countries, it has said people all over the world watch the same kinds of shows ... Governments in Singapore, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Vietnam and Germany have all asked Netflix to take programs down due to objectionable content."

It looks like Sarandos was quite selective in his comments, comparing the American response to *Cuties* to the response in Europe, as if Americans of all people worldwide have a problem with the content. The reality is that the movie could not even

air in some other parts of the world.

Either way, Sarandos actually paid us Americans an unintended compliment. We still know how to blush. That's a badge of honor we should proudly wear. {eoa}