



Hollywood as Shaper and Projector of American Values: *The Selective Mirror*¹

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Introduction: A Small City in California

Thesis of the Lectures

Hollywood has gained its strength and influence by reflecting popular values and popular motives of the American people. Its quasi-religious sentimentality as well as its pragmatic individualism are reflections of the history and culture of a pioneering and entrepreneurial people. Movies have let Americans see themselves the way they want to believe that they are. Hollywood's images are cleverly persuasive. They reflect human values while selectively shaping those values. People can identify with what they see in motion pictures while being subtly molded at the same time. The process is a social feedback system, assuring its popularity through fantasy and vicarious adventurism while maintaining its credibility through selective representations of easily accepted moral generalizations. Hollywood reflects American values selectively. Hollywood thus shapes and controls those values through selective reinforcement—for good or ill.

Which came first: the chicken or the egg? From the viewpoint of creation theology, the answer is the chicken. A developmental viewpoint might suggest the egg. Which came first: decadence or Hollywood? Thanks to the biblical account of the emergence of sin into human society, we can be sure that it is unfair to see Hollywood as the source of all things evil. Decadence is as old as human society. No one city, not even Sodom, can claim to be the cause.

A Christian assessment of Hollywood's influence on world culture is thus sure to be biased. Human creativity and imagination are evidences of the *imago dei*. The fact that motion picture technology emerged among the artifacts of nineteenth century American invention is a clue that the free human spirit can discover and imagine marvelous compositions that put together in new ways all the wonders of God's created universe. But the subsequent uses of such creative artifacts, as illustrated in the uses of Nobel's explosives, can work toward evil as easily as toward godliness.

If it were not for the twists of the Hollywood product, Christians would likely not be gathered here to consider this topic. But the evil is not Hollywood; far less is it all of America. Evil is real; it is a rudiment, not just a consequence. Given the tendencies of human progress, the influence of Hollywood has been neither unique nor conclusive.

But Hollywood is a generalization larger than life. Hollywood is a small city in California. It is a city like many other cities, once lodged at the edge and now surrounded by one of the world's megacities. The people who live in Hollywood work in automobile repair garages, they make pizza, they attend the sick, they preach on Sunday mornings, they wear the uniforms of policemen, bus drivers,

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street cleaners, nurses, and maids. They are a mixture, a cross-section of the complex urban societies of late twentieth century America. And they make movies. Lots of movies for every theater any place around the world and for the insatiable appetites of television viewers on seven continents. Thus Hollywood is different; it is not the only place of its kind, but historically its identity and its name are permanently intertwined with the emergence of mass communication through pictures-in-motion with coordinated-sound, whether on film or on magnetic tape. In a world that has gone crazy for entertainment, Hollywood is the capitol.

These four lectures provide a brief review of the emergence of Hollywood's products as a major influence on human thought worldwide. Hollywood's products both represent and influence the social morality of our times. The motive of the lectures is to raise the consciousness of Christians about the importance of judgment and choice. To seek to turn back the tide seems futile, but to seek the moral high ground has never been more important.

Lecture 1. Growing Up Pragmatic

"Nothing succeeds like success." This folk-saying lies at the heart of many decisions and judgments in America. The emphasis upon personal success and the importance of winning are put in place while the American child is very young. Not all sectors of the society accept this value, however. Among the minorities, and especially the ethnically "different" groups who are suffering the hardships of economic poverty, a deep cynicism centers on their observation that success is reserved for the successful classes. But even among these minorities the mindset tends to be pitched in the direction of the basic American assumption that success can be shared among distinct majorities of the population. Movies have institutionalized this value: success is the way importance and worth are measured. In no other form of widely disseminated literature is this value so consistently represented.

Success of the Individual

Americans respect success. The successful sports team is widely praised. But the society is more individualistic than it is team-oriented. The *individual* is especially respected. Whether in sports, politics, or the arts, the successful individual is the acknowledged hero. Every major sporting event for teams has a ceremonial recognition of the most valuable player.

The journalism of America turns on this point. The well-followed current events always feature the "story behind the story," a series of accounts of some otherwise obscure individual who is given extraordinary credit (or blame) for the larger event. Often the larger event will fade into obscurity long before the praise and attention to the "hero" calms down. Most Americans recognize the name Charles Lindbergh, but few can identify his claim to fame. (If Jimmie Stewart had not provided an entertaining portrayal of the Lindbergh flight across the Atlantic, perhaps even the Lindbergh name would be gone. In the United States, the teaching of American history in recent decades depends far more on the movies and their television counterpart than upon schools and schooling.)

Hollywood's "star system" reflects this emphasis on the individual. Marketing of films since the earliest days of the industry has been built on the popularity and proclaimed success of actors and actresses. Early in the development of the Hollywood tradition, Douglas Fairbanks, Jean Harlow, Charlie Chaplin, and John Barrymore became instant folk heroes. For no particularly meritorious accomplishments except their own behavior in front of cameras, their names became better known than those in business and government who were leading the country into new prominence among

the nations. In the early and tender years, the business leaders of Hollywood, film producers and financiers, were profoundly anxious that these stars upon whom the industry's survival seemed to depend should be perceived as moral and meritorious persons. The assumption was widely shared that Americans expected their public idols to be "good people." But after losing a few battles with public outrage, particularly the Fatty Arbuckle affair and a long string of ugly divorce cases, Hollywood discovered, as if by accident, that notoriety can be a good thing. The choice of box office over moral values became very clear.

Americans accept their editorial journalism, their art, their entertainment, and especially their sports with a sort of moral toleration. Even in the home, television is allowed to speak words and to show scenes that would be unacceptable in that home in "real life." People do care, yes, but they have come to accept media as somewhat apart from their own moral codes. Moral codes are private; media are public. Who watches out for public interests? From time to time various forms of control have been tried: community moral standards enforced by police, industry's own self-policing, and more recently, rating systems that are intended to warn the public of the level of moral toleration that a given production will demand.

Clearly, the motion picture industry is incompetent at setting and maintaining standards of decency and public responsibility. Even the exercise of "free speech" has lost its capacity to startle and shock. American film viewers have seen everything. Who cares? Michael Medved, a popular though severe critic of the motion picture arts, quotes producer David Puttnam:

What I find fascinating is that the colleagues in my industry whom I work with, many of whom are absolutely first-class people, don't want to get into this type of debate. They don't really want to acknowledge the awesome responsibilities that the medium brings. (Medved 1992, 23)

Simplicity of Characterization

In general, movies show characters which are two-dimensional and not too difficult to understand. The successful movie is the one that finds an easy story and tells it simply. Too much challenge is not often appreciated, except for the novelist "mystery story."

The scripts for the earliest movies were based upon the "old-time" melodrama, a stage play in which each of some three to eight characters played an easily identified moral stereotype or caricature. Small-town America in the middle and latter nineteenth century flocked to these productions of melodrama in order to "hiss the villain and cheer the hero." Simplicity and transparency were favorite literary values at that time. Even so, the early movies needed this sort of simplicity to overcome the handicap of soundlessness. The histrionics and exaggerations of simple motives and emotions were familiar to play-goers. Thus the resistance to newness was easily overcome and movies were soon accepted as the new way to experience a melodrama.

The Quest for Wealth

Pleasure and entertainment go hand-in-hand with wealth in the American society. The pleasant life is assumed to be assisted by various gadgets and pieces of equipment. Americans do not go to the seaside to swim, they must take along a whole carload of equipment, masks, snorkels, swim fins, towels, umbrellas, chairs, lotions, and to top it off a boat following along on a trailer—with a very powerful motor. Few Americans find true pleasure in a sailboat; too slow!

The presumption of the value of wealth has been at the center of Hollywood's value system. Even when the subject is poverty and hardship, the background always suggests that wealth is the way to a better life. Long before Hollywood, this characteristic in the American personality and social philosophy was described by the brilliant French observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, surely the most insightful of all the social critics of America:

There are, too, in any democracy men whose fortunes are on the increase but whose desires increase much more quickly than their wealth, so that their eyes devour the good things wealth will one day provide long before they can afford them. They are always on the lookout for shortcuts to these anticipated delights. These two elements always provide democracies with a crowd of citizens whose desires outrun their means and who will gladly agree to put up with an imperfect substitute rather than do without the object of their desire altogether. (de Tocqueville 1848/1969, 466)

The "shortcuts" to "anticipated delights" are represented in the American's willingness to accept a plastic fantasy. One day of the elegance of Disney's world is better than to miss out on the marvels of wealth simply because one is less than wealthy. Thus "Tinsel Town," a less-than-endearing term for Hollywood, manufactures dreams and visions far more easily than it does truth and inspiration.

The Curious Anomaly in a Pragmatic Industry

In Hollywood's obvious craving for a "lifestyle of the rich and famous" it would be natural to see all decisions being made in terms of market forces. If it sells, make it. If it will sell better, disregard ethics and morality. But that simple formula cannot explain a curious anomaly in the motion picture industry as it has become:

Recent history shows conclusively that whatever motivations pushed the motion picture business to its current obsessions, financial self-interest was not among them. How could an industry that radically changed its focus and thereby permanently sacrificed nearly two-thirds of its audience be described, in any serious sense, as 'following the money'? In presenting the bleak and bloody visions that trouble so many of our fellow citizens, the popular culture isn't responding to some primitive blood lust of the American people; it is, rather, following its own warped conceptions of artistic integrity, driven by some dark compulsion, beyond simple greed.

This means that the statistics for the last two years—and for the entire decade of the 1980s—show stunningly similar results, with a disproportionately large number of the relatively rare 'C' and 'PC' films performing well at the box office, while a far smaller percentage of the much more common 'R'-rated pictures emerge as major commercial winners. *Taken together, the numbers since 1980 show that a given 'C' or 'PC' film is nearly five times more likely to place among the year's box office leaders than an 'R' film.* (Medved 1992, 288)

What sort of values are at work here? Why does not the "love of money" explain the decision-making of the industry? Surely something is not yet clear. Somewhere in the murky depths of the industry, there are those who simply intend to tear down established values and, if possible, to disconnect America from its Christian roots.

The conflict between pragmatism and biblical theology is well known. What is less well understood is American Christianity's odd acceptance of this conflict as a matter of accommodation and allowable syncretism. Eager embrace of pragmatic values in the name and cause of a society which owes so much to its Pilgrim, Puritan, and free-church dissenter traditions is still a curiosity, especially in contemporary Evangelicalism.

Whatever the explanation, the anomaly is there; the willingness of Christian America to accept much of the Hollywood value system illustrates it. de Tocqueville saw its early manifestations:

I see around nothing but people bent publicly on proving, by word and deed, that what is useful is never wrong. Is there no chance of finding some who will make the public understand that what is right may be useful? (de Tocqueville 1848/1969, 527)

Lecture 2. Fascination with Frontiers

Many Americans are unclear who they are and where they have come from. What little is understood about the origins of individual Americans, geographically and socially, is often related to a frontier scenario. Americans like to think of themselves as breaking new ground. As an American accompanies a guest from “outside” around his community and points out the landmarks and sights, emphasis certainly will be given to the many things “that are new since we came here.” The contrast is consistently pointed out: how simple and less developed it was when our family first arrived (whether two or sixty-two years ago), and look at what it has become. Isn’t progress wonderful?

The Mythology of Self-Sufficiency

The mythology underneath this American peculiarity—the frontier spirit—is more than fascination with change, although it surely is that, too. What really attracts the attention of many Americans is the closeness of one’s connections to the *frontier days*. A folk-phrase is common: “In those days, men were men and women were women!” What this may mean other than the obvious is lost; but the statement is always spoken with a nostalgic feeling directed toward that period when good was good, bad was bad, and how people demonstrated their goodness was by taking command and taming the primitiveness of their surroundings.

The do-it-yourself habit of Americans is a by-product of the frontier. Providing for oneself by salvaging and reconstructing is still common. Many older Americans tend to save things and hope that they will become useful some day. Although the increasingly materialistic trend in the culture is heading in the direction of over-consumption, waste, and massive amounts of discarded obsolescence, the frontier spirit persists among many. Americans like to see themselves as self-sufficient individualists. Each person prefers to kill his own grizzly bear.

Hollywood has developed this mythology to a refined art. Virtually every dramatic movie in the first half of the twentieth century had some representation of the frontier as its theme or setting. Even in the earliest movies with color, the frontier’s dreariness was brightened up to give it respect and honor. For Judy Garland’s character, Dorothy, it was Oz; for John Wayne’s perennial “good guy” it was the raw and lawless western community where people lived as they pleased, regardless of others. This same cultural theme recurs in today’s movies, although usually represented with more subtlety.

Democracy as Frontier Individualism

Despite the difficulties that the French encountered in the early nineteenth century as they tried to make democracy work, democracy did take root in America. American democracy, with its ideals of liberty, freedom, representative government, and an extensive and well-defended Bill of Rights, has allowed us to create, invent, dissent, and to seek out our own purposes in life. This spirit of democracy and the reasonably stable government that it has engendered have provided a safe haven for individualism and social independence. But it has never answered de Tocqueville’s great question:

One must therefore expect that private interest will more than ever become the chief if not the only driving force behind all behavior. But we have yet to see how each man will interpret his private interest. (de Tocqueville 1848/1969, 527)

Taking Rights Seriously

One of the points at which “private interest” is challenged today in America is in reference to the right to life itself. (Is it necessary here to remind that the right to life has never been very consistently upheld in Hollywood?) The profound tension over the presumed “right” to deprive the unborn of life is too strong an issue for the films.

But another matter is coming into focus with Hollywood ambivalently on both sides of the controversy. For today’s American the growing anxiety is handguns on the streets. There is a real and present danger of being shot and killed by accident. Such lunacy has been engendered by the movies. All the fear notwithstanding, no truly adequately restrictive legislation is able to make its way through the governmental processes. The major problem is the vast political force of common people encouraged by massive industrial funding of their asserted right to be altogether free to buy, collect, and use guns of all sorts—ostensibly in the joint interests of sportsmanlike hunting of game animals and the constitutionally guaranteed “right to bear arms” in defense of self and state. The autonomy and unregulated condition of the motion picture industry seems to be both cause and effect of this streak of wildness and frontier spirit that lurks in the American psyche.

Seeking a Real Frontier

Despite its designation as “the dream factory,” Hollywood likes to claim that it “shows life as it is.” As the films of today become more and more bizarre, even my conservative neighbors still go to the movies regularly. “We once could identify ourselves with what was going on in the pictures, but now we have to be content with the realization that they are showing someone else. It doesn’t look like life as I know it, but it’s still useful to know *how the other half lives*.” Are they really sure that there is another half that lives this way? I doubt it. At least I must doubt that it is a balanced *half* who contrast that severely with the more ordinary and classical lifestyles that seem still to be rather apparent in substantial numbers.

But even if things have come to such an end already, does this mean that art—to include motion pictures among the art forms—must focus exclusively on the seamy and unpleasant half of things? Who will show what life *could* be? And Christians need to ask one further question: Who will show what life *should* be? Indeed, this is the burden of emphasis upon those who are committed to the way of life, Jesus Christ. He invites us not simply to accept things as they are but to join in the quest of the holy community to seek God’s ways and to discipline ourselves to a better way of life. Has Hollywood any interest in this quest? This frontier is worth the effort. And it is real.

The Phony Frontiersmen

Today the geographical frontiers are gone. Wasteland and wonderful mountains remain for the brave to continue exploring, but very few Americans make the daring moves into uncharted territories to engage in the contests of wit and wisdom so common just one hundred years ago. Americans today tend toward sedentary, observational, audience-like postures. They need to be entertained. Just recently, for example, the second-largest church in the nation made a crowd-pleasing change in terminology: no longer do they schedule religious “services,” now the term is religious performances. Perhaps in worship as in the movies, modern Americans are fulfilling the ultimate expression of de Tocqueville’s “equality”:

No power on earth can prevent increasing equality from turning men's minds to look for the useful or disposing each citizen to get wrapped up in himself. (de Tocqueville 1848/1969, 527)

The frontier lives. But we like to watch it as individuals, not to participate in it as communities.

Lecture 3. The Need for Enemies

Cowboys and Indians were the generalizations that defined the tension of many a movie story line. With only rare attention to historical evidence, Hollywood created the “good guys” and the “bad guys” around the resistance by those who had natural rights to use land as they had been doing in the face of frontiersmen who represented selfish change.

Deep in the American tradition and, in earlier times, deliberately taught to every child is the idea that everything good must cost someone something. The insidious part of this learning is that it is usually assumed that clever people make certain that it is not themselves, but others, who must pay the price.

The population of cowboys (frontiersmen, the *good guys*) in conflict with the population of Indians (those who are different, the *bad guys*) has long been the moral diet of children and adults in America. It is represented in all sorts of imagery, in clever little conflictive animals in children's cartoons and in elaborate dramas which strive for social truth by introducing as sub-heroes an Indian or two who will befriend the true hero, the frontiersman-cowboy.

Hollywood has augmented this rather abstract image of right and wrong, cowboy and Indian, in several ways. First it employed the older visual code from the tradition of melodrama: the good guys wear white hats, the bad guys were black hats. Soon the repertoire of cardboard characters included the stereotype of “cops” and “robbers.” Film scripts have always thrived on conflict, the more bloody the better.

Within the last twenty-five years Hollywood has led the charge toward confusing and often reversing the roles of “good guy” and “bad guy.” With real-life cases of police corruption and police brutality on the increase, it has become stylish to use motion pictures to raise the question: Who is right and who is wrong? More precisely, in this present relativistic era, filmmakers can selectively call upon either disdain or sympathy for *both* the “cops and the robbers.”

Negative Causes

Americans, especially those who think of themselves as having strong moral principles, are relatively easy to recruit to serve a cause. In contrast with many of the world's societies, Americans tend to be willing to become involved in issues and circumstances that affect the community. The unfortunate characteristic that usually comes along with this trait is the greater willingness to take a stand *against* than in support of something. In other words, if the cause is negative, it is easier for it to become popular.

Christians, especially, tend to become diverted away from the positive messages of the Gospel into all sorts of things to be *against*. Moving toward the negative cause with such ease makes a person vulnerable to moral confusion. No better illustration of this can be made than the current cases of angry shootings of doctors and counter-protesters which have become a predictable outcome of the largely Christian-led anti-abortion movement.

One Step Up from War

Hollywood thrived on war films. The heroism, sweet pain of comradely death, the excitement and risk-taking, the opportunities for individuals to discover their fantasy frontiers, it was all there. To the movies, as to the American people, ideological war seems worthwhile. But there must be a clearly defined enemy, and the enemy's ideology must be so different from ours that it can be dismissed from serious attention because it is so wrong. Filmgoers want to focus on the action of the war, not on the possibility that some other cause may have some degree of merit.

What will we do now that the Cold War is over? Once the Nazis were out of the way the Communists served well and for a good long while as the *real* enemy. What will Hollywood do next?

Very likely the answer is already in front of us. The surge of new movies dealing with racial tension and inter-ethnic violence is already here. And vicious cruelty is cranked up yet another notch.

Whether the issue is family strife, community uprisings, personal grudges, racial conflict, intolerance, or bigotry, Americans can cheer for the film-hero's willingness to be as cruel as seems to be necessary, to "dish it out," according to the folk idiom. This acceptance of the use of excessive force seems equally to relate to justice being cruelly over-served or to violent resistance to lawful authority. The American is rather flexible; the hero of the moment can do whatever he or she may choose to do. Clint Eastwood cynically appealed for audience approval of his violence with the phrase, "Make my day." Americans widely echoed his sentiment; even President Reagan found a way to snarl it on several public occasions.

Today's world is increasingly moving from the realities of a moral universe into the fantasies of the motion picture; vast populations are being saturated by television's repetitive re-exposures to Hollywood's products. Is it possible that humankind will completely lose the moral compass?

A Medium for the Frontier

The film medium does not provide an especially good vehicle for literature. Stories must be simplified or the films become unbearably long. Language must fit the character as played by a particular star whose stylistic ways carry from film to film. The literary value of a film, to state the problem too simply, is usually less elegant than ideal. In this respect and many others, the movie is a medium for the frontier. It tells (shows?) simple stories passably well. Its engagement of the eyes is a shortcut to the imagination. Films really don't need to be very good to receive substantial acceptance. Once again, de Tocqueville saw it coming:

A democratic audience listens in the theater but does not read plays. Most of the spectators are not looking for pleasures of the mind, but for lively emotions of the heart. They want to see a play, not to discover a fine work of literature, and provided the author writes his native tongue well enough to be understood, and his characters excite curiosity and arouse sympathy, the audience is satisfied. They ask no more of fiction, and go back immediately to real life. Style is therefore less necessary, for breaches of rules tend to pass unnoticed on the stage. (de Tocqueville 1848/1969, 492)

Lecture 4. Farewell to Roots

Americans, in general, are unsure who they are and from whence they have come. Especially among the immigrants from northern Europe and the British Isles, intermarriage had been more easily

accepted and in recent generations has become widespread. Thus the American “Anglo” is fractionally representative of Irish, German, British, French, and a dozen other cultural roots.

For the Asian it is somewhat different, although in Hawaii and California, the states earliest and most extensively populated by Asians, the various Asian groups generally intermarry more easily than elsewhere in the world. For the African, whether descended from the slaves of the southern colonies or more recently immigrated from the Caribbean, South America, and Africa, intermarriage with persons of European and Asian heritage is far less common. The distinct racial lines and well-known social consequences of the tensions that emerge are well known to the watching world.

When Alex Haley’s autobiographical book was presented as a “mini-series” on commercial television, it was an instant success. All sorts of Americans were eager to identify with this well-told story of the search for a family’s historic roots. The fact that these particular roots lay buried in West Africa only added to the charm of the story. It was as if Americans of all sorts were saying, “If even an African-American can figure out who he is and where he came from there is hope for all of us!” “Roots” touched a warm spot in many hearts and represented one of the few serious attempts to use motion pictures to illustrate the importance of racial reconciliation. (In this case the “super-movie” or very long series of episodes was used, a format which fits the home television far better than it fits the theater.)

Symbolic of two basic problems in America, the lack of historical identity and the stubborn black-white racial tension, “Roots” stands alone. The major follow-up has been a systematic attempt to discredit the person and scholarship of its author, Alex Haley. One must wonder if it will not be a long wait before another such constructive film production for television or for theater.

Perhaps Americans will make only minimal positive contributions to the inter-ethnic tensions in Bosnia, Somalia, Germany, or anywhere else in this desperate world until it is clearer who Americans are. They do not know. The world does not know. But until Americans learn the lesson they carry in their own genetic soup, they will continue to play the part of a presumptively kindly super-race. Hollywood could help with this much-needed re-education. But Hollywood likely won’t; there doesn’t seem to be much money in it.

But wait, is money alone what drives Hollywood? Surely there are those whose artistic careers in the film industry demonstrate that expression and creativity are also motives. None of these factors explain the persistent degradation that typifies so much of today’s Hollywood product. Could it be that unscrupulous people are actually committed to undermining the better qualities of human life? Searching for the demon behind it all has become a major pursuit. And as the film-going public has been taught to believe (especially through the racially motivated social commentaries, the wartime and the Cold-War era films) somewhere at the bottom of the problem lurks someone who is different. This sort of difference can be most easily explained and remembered as a matter of race.

The Jewish Factor

Several historians and social critics, most notably Neal Gabler (*An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*), have noted that Jewish immigrants, especially from Russia, played a dominant role in the development of the motion picture industry and Hollywood itself. In reference to the Golden Age, the 1930’s and 1940’s, this thesis seems easy to support. But as with most arguments from an ethnic stereotype, this “demon theory” simply does not hold true.

Michael Medved, America's most respected conservative film critic, has extended the investigation into "the Jewish factor." Medved argues the opposite of Gabler; Medved suggests that the Jewish domination up through the "Golden Age" helped to keep Judeo-Christian values more visible. In fact, across the last thirty years Jews have become progressively less influential in Hollywood. Thus, he concludes, it is hard to blame the "Kingdom of Their Own" for what Hollywood is today:

During Hollywood's so-called Golden Age, in the 1930's and early 1940's, Jewish influence was at its peak. At the time, seven of eight major studios were owned and operated by Jewish families.

The American people flocked every week to see a product created by Jewish immigrant moguls. That product, as Hollywood historian Neal Gabler put it, celebrated an America where fathers were strong, families stable, people attractive, resilient, resourceful and decent. When it came to religious themes, the movie industry offered a ton of films like 'The Sign of the Cross,' 'Boys' Town,' 'Going My Way,' 'The Song of Bernadette,' and 'It's a Wonderful Life,' all of them warmly respectful of the Christian faith. (Medved 1992, 316)

Medved's argument is extended into the present financial control of the American motion picture industry, which is now largely funded, managed, and controlled by multi-national corporations in which the old-line Hollywood personalities have only a minority voice:

Though Jews are still prominent in many areas in the Hollywood creative community, talk of Jewish 'domination' is increasingly ludicrous. For instance, of the fifteen Oscars handed out by the Motion Picture Academy for acting and directing since 1989, not one has gone to a Jewish performer or filmmaker. (Medved 1992, 317)

Today, in stark contrast to the 1940's, no clear-sighted or responsible observer could possibly view Hollywood as a Jewish empire. None of the major studios are Jewish family businesses in the way they once were: two have been purchased by enormous Japanese corporations (Columbia and Universal), one by Australian interest (Twentieth-Century Fox), and one (MGM) has been passed back and forth among a flamboyant Armenian-American entrepreneur, a cable TV king from Atlanta, and a shadowy Italian tycoon. The other studios have all been gobbled up by gigantic and decidedly non-Jewish conglomerates, including Gulf and Western (Paramount) and the notoriously WASPy Time, Inc. companies have seriously diluted 'Jewish influences.' As any viewer of 'Late Night with David Letterman' already knows, the huge General Electric Corporation now owns NBC, while ABC has been operated for some years by Capital Cities Communications, an upstate New York outfit originally co-funded by onetime CIA chief William Casey. (Medved 1992, 316-7)

The Real Demon: Godlessness

In agreement with Medved that the "Jewish factor" does not agree with the evidence, William F. Buckley wrote:

Medved's especially interesting point [is] that . . . the grip of the secularist, perversion-haunted, obscenity-obsessed culture, Hollywood is making R-rated movies almost for the hell of it, given that PG movies actually bring in, as a rule, more money. The obsession with sex, for instance, is more accurately a reflection of the iconoclasm of Hollywood's producers and directors than of Hollywood's consumers. (Buckley 1993 [March], "On the Right.")

Frank Capra, three-time Oscar-winning film director who abandoned his film career in protest against post-Golden Age cynicism and sensationalism, anticipated the cultural and moral disaster which Hollywood was becoming:

The winds of change blew through the dream factories of make-believe, tore at its crinoline tatters The hedonists, the homosexuals, the hemophiliac bleeding hearts, the God-haters, the quick-buck artists who substituted shock for talent, all cried: 'Shake 'em! Rattle 'em! God is dead. Long live Pleasure! Nudity? Yea! Wife-swapping? Yea! Liberate the world from prudery. Emancipate our films from morality!' There was dancing in the streets among the disciples of lewdness and violence. (Capra 1971, 486)

"Radical secularists" is the designation that Medved and Buckley use to describe those whose decisions are reflected in today's Hollywood-degraded standards and moral degradation. A major feature of Medved's conclusions about the ethnic data is the difficulty of identifying any logical motive whatsoever. Whatever or whoever is behind the fondness for violence, inhuman unpleasantness, and the fanatical attacks on worth and dignity seems to be motivated by something other than making money. In a money-crazy world, this seems incredible, but the evidence is strong.

Ending this series of lectures on a positive note would make things seem more hopeful. Perhaps a word from Frank Capra might help. Here Medved states the positive case:

No director in the history of motion pictures has been more attuned to that everyday heroism than the late—and much lamented—Frank Capra. In one statement of his artistic credo, the maker of 'It's A Wonderful Life,' 'Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,' 'It Happened One Night,' and so many other great films declared: 'Movies should be a positive expression that there is hope, love, mercy, justice, and charity. It is the [filmmaker's] responsibility to emphasize the positive qualities of humanity by showing the triumph of the individual over adversities.' (Medved 1992, 214)

If the filmmaking industry of the world—we are calling it Hollywood—continues its defiance of biblical values we will see no such cause for hope. With Medved, we must conclude that "faith in those positive qualities of humanity" is perhaps the most significant missing ingredient in today's popular culture.

Conclusion: A Rival Hypothesis

The separation between television and movies is minimal and continues to shrink. The industry is virtually all of one piece. In fact, the control of news media in the United States is also locked into the same set of conglomerate industrial giants. The most striking interlock of television and movies is in the vast rebroadcasting schedule. Every week almost every American can choose among a hundred or more "old" movies that are available for the cost of turning on the television. The sale of videotapes for home use is also a growing commercial trade around the world. Add to all of this the extensive international marketing networks of the film and video industry and the possibilities are immense. Somewhere in all of this, someone is going to make more money than imaginable. The worldwide appetite for passive entertainment grows rapidly as a by-product of industrialization and modernization.

Perhaps we have been searching in the wrong place for the cause of Hollywood's utter disregard for taste and public standards of decency. As already discussed, the short-term marketing of R-rated and NC-17 films, especially in America, is financially disappointing. If someone is trying to discover the lower edges of American tolerance it is a rather costly experiment. Perhaps there is a different motive: perhaps the motion picture industry—a worldwide conglomerate of competing units—has its eye on the much larger profits to be made from the worldwide video use of its movies.

This thesis fits the data. First, the worldwide mass market is manageable and controllable, perhaps even by the criminal networks. Second, the products are created in shocking disregard of certain *western* values. No one is quite sure, yet, what the rest of the world wants to see; so far they seem eager to look at anything. Global television will likely sell best if it does not overestimate the broad public taste. Perhaps this is the way the industry is thinking and placing its bets on the table. Michael Medved sums up the conservative resistance in the United States:

According to conservative [U.S.] congressman Henry Hyde, . . . America is already ‘involved in a *Kulturkampf*. . . a war between cultures and a war about the meaning of culture.’ Columnist (and erstwhile presidential candidate) Pat Buchanan, never noted for his gentle or understated rhetorical style, announced that ‘the arts crowd . . . is engaged in a cultural struggle to root out the old America of family, faith and flag, and re-create society in a pagan image.’ Dr. James C. Dobson, the popular Christian psychologist whose ‘Focus on the Family’ radio show airs on twelve hundred stations, concluded: ‘Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America. Two sides with vastly differing and incompatible worldviews are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society. Bloody battles are being fought on a thousand fronts, both inside and outside of government.’ (Medved 1992, 22-3)

America? A Civil War of Values? Very likely these observers are correct, as far as they go. But they are surely thinking too narrowly and ethnocentrically. The marketing campaign encompasses *the entire world*. The motive is to *make money*—lots of money. The instrumental technique is to *appeal to the lowest common denominator of human appetites*. The price is the ultimate rejection of God’s claims upon his creation.

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