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Setting a Children's Agenda

The cinema is one of the nation's greatest pastimes. It is something to take us out of the dregs of life, an escape for many, a leisurely thing to go to on a date, or a place that makes us look at ourselves. Film has the ability to touch people's hearts and minds, especially that of the youth.

Children are our future; the survival of the human race depends on them. In order to ensure our best possible future, it is only logical that we must provide the best possible resources for our children.

The US is one of the largest spenders on the cost of education per student, and the largest spender on healthcare per capita in the world. However, one thing we do not pay much attention to is the movies that our children watch. Sure the FCC and other censorship organizations put labels on movies based on the surface content. Parents restrict their children from watching "rated R" movies; parents do not however focus on the underlying or subliminal messages sometimes hidden in children's movies. How could they? The amount of time hiding and engraining these messages is immense.

After looking into this phenomena, what seems like a crazy conspiracy theory might actually have some merit towards it. This essay aims not at persuading people to believe in these political agendas, rather this is to bring light to a rather shady practice

in an industry most intimate to our children.

Dr. Seuss was a children's author who spliced his works with social and political messages. Children, unknowing of those hidden political agendas, were easy to accept Seuss's propaganda. Even if children did not entirely understand the politics of how the "Grinch stole Christmas," they were introduced to the idea of the over-commercialization of Christmas. In light of this, it is not entirely improbable to think that children's movies are not effective at persuading children to believe in certain things if not at least opening children up to be more accepting of a certain way of life or mindset.

Film is a powerful tool that can cause immense social change. Recently the documentary "A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness," by Pakistani filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, pushed the Pakistani prime minister to pass legislation that would end honor killings in Pakistan. So it isn't crazy to say that film can change the world.

Even if politics were not mentioned or intended, they might be interpreted in a certain way, and these messages should be made aware of, especially if the youth could perceive it those ways.

The creator also might just inherently be political by nature of whatever content they create. It is wise to be conscious about children's movies because they do indeed shape children's points of view, coined by Professor of English at Freestyle Academy, "movies are vessels of ideology."

Disney Pixar's "The Incredibles" is one of the strongest examples of this phenomenon of introducing a certain concept in a positive light to children. Certain

profound elitist agendas are covered in this movie. English professor at the University of Southern California, Judith Halberstam, describes it as “striving for recognition by the ‘marginalized’ superheroes to be ‘an Ayn Randian or scientologist notion of the special people who must resist social pressures to suppress their superpowers in order to fit in with the drab masses.’” “The Incredibles” starts off with a veteran superhero protagonist, Mr. Incredible, who saves a kitten from a tree. This act of heroism establishes him as the undeniable “good guy” that most children would root for.

However, not too later in the film, Mr. Incredible saves an average, civilian man who is trying to kill himself. The man projects that Mr. Incredible did not in fact save his life but rather “ruined his death.” A short news flash montage follows, containing sound bites and news articles saying superheroes should hide their special powers and how superpowers are no longer allowed. This victimizes the superheroes, and makes regular people seem rather ungrateful for obvious community service. Describe by this article, “Indeed, when the superheroes find unprecedented courage to contest the social norms of their society by working together, The Incredibles echoes familiar exceptionalist themes: the oppressive qualities of ‘the tyranny of the majority’ and the liberating elements of the ‘voluntary associations.’”

The most indicting part of the movie occurs when the main antagonist, a super villain by the name of “Syndrome” gives a monologue explaining his reason for villainy. Put into words by an article “A smart, yet disillusioned, inventor, bitter that his youthful efforts were rejected by Mr. Incredible. His master plan is to equalize the playing field by selling his inventions to give ordinary people super powers; in his words, ‘when

everyone's super, no one will be.” This gives the villain a Marxist theme, which is equally a villain to capitalism. An elitist tone is set from this notion that the person trying to equalize the masses, is in fact the villain of the movie.

One could easily say that this would apply to most if not all superhero movies in general, that the idea of a superhero is by nature intrinsic of elitism can easily be backed up. What separates the Incredibles from most other superhero movies is that the civilians and police, who represent the proletariat, were not only ungrateful for superheroes in the beginning, but also they were entirely helpless against the main villain. In most other forms of media related to super heroes, the citizens are not holding the superheroes back as much as they do in the Incredibles. The main character of the Incredibles even goes as far to say “It's psychotic! People keep coming up with new ways to celebrate mediocrity, but if someone is genuinely exceptional...”

According to *New York Times* writer A. O. Scott, “Some people have powers that others do not, and to deny them the right to exercise those powers, or the privileges that accompany them, is misguided, cruel and socially destructive.” It parallels social darwinist ideas that the masses are holding back the elite, as the citizens in the Incredibles were preventing superheroes from fighting crime. Many laissez faire capitalist ideas, if the people and police were to just let the superheroes be superheroes and do nothing to check their power then society would be better off, are presented by this movie, tying back to the “tyranny of the majority.” The movie in short, according to some critics, mirrors Randian ideals.

The Incredibles creates a major dissonance between the superhero and the

denizens, acting as a device to push the idea that hierarchies are not only okay, but are even encouraged. One could also claim that these politics are too complicated for children to comprehend. However, the idea that people should leave protecting the masses to those who are more powerful in charge, is put in a positive light and made to look favorable.

“The Incredibles and Ratatouille. These two movies not only are about the elite, but these movies celebrate elitism” (Facets of Equivocation). A general sense of elitism and hierarchy is established in *Ratatouille* when the movie ends with the main antagonist “But I realize, only now do I truly understand what he meant. Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere.”

The creator of these movies, Brad Bird, may not have even meant for his movies to have been taken that way. There is a definite chance that Bird could just have written it this way because he himself is a product of society. With American exceptionalism being so ingrained in the US, people may just as well inherently think or even write with these ideologies in their subconscious.

This is not however a rant against conservatism or capitalism. It is to shed light onto the subliminal messages set to push political agendas in children’s movies, which are just as well used in liberal media.

Tomorrowland was a Disney hit inspired by the classic ride at Disneyland, one of the most popular amusement parks in the country. The story is a solid golden fleece throughout the film, however it takes a turn into a cautionary tale at the very end, blatantly stating the lesson to be learned.

Finding Nemo encourages sea life preservation, Wall-e is obviously pro environmentalism and healthy living, Happy feet raises awareness of human encroachment on the environment, “In Australia, we’re very, very aware of the ozone hole,” director and co-writer George Miller told the Wall Street Journal, “and Antarctica is literally the canary in the coal mine for this stuff, so (the film) sort of had to go in that direction.” These liberal films are lot less subtle with their agendas as they are very much intentional. Conservatives need to generally be more careful about establishing their agendas in movies, Hollywood being a generally liberal environment.

The Lego Movie is an interesting case where there is a lack of politics while on the surface is loudly anti business. Many Conservatives have critiqued Lego Movie for being overtly anti-capitalist as its main antagonist “Lord Business” is a tyrannical CEO of the leading business in the movie “Octan.” Fox News has criticized him as an evil businessman, who puts capitalism in a rather unfavorable light to children. They claim all of this despite the most obvious fact; the Lego Movie is about one of the largest grossing children’s toys ever created. The fact that The Lego Group is the main commissioner of the movie, and that the film is inherently about a consumer product, denies the argument that the Lego movie is anti capitalist. Many proponents of the Lego Movie say that “Lord Business” is more the personification of rigid thinking and creativity, rather than anti business.

What can be made of this example is that as well as movies pushing agendas, conversely arguments about movies can also be made in order to push an agenda. To prevent the off baseness of certain arguments, one needs to step back to see the bigger

picture; in the Lego Movie's case the bigger picture is that is practically a giant commercial for a product. There was one rather interesting example of a movie that was allegedly anti corporation and big business, to understand this, one as well needs to step back and view the larger picture. In the case of Who Framed Roger Rabbit, one needs to observe the history of its subject.

Starting in 1901 and running until 1961 in L.A., there was a privately owned mass transit system called Pacific Electric, also known as the "Red Car system," that consisted of electric streetcars, interurban cars, and buses. By 1920 it was the largest transit system in the world and covered more that 125% of New York's subway system today. However, the Red Car came into decline. As stated by the LA Times, "There were many reasons for the decline of both the Red Cars and L.A.'s Yellow Car trolley system. But one has gotten much attention: a conspiracy to replace rail with buses and cars. This was the plot to the movie 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit.'" Later however, the rail system was "sold to American City Lines, a subsidiary of National City Lines, a Chicago-based company whose investors included General Motors and other big oil and rubber interests." What is even more indicting is that National City lines started to dissolve the electric city lines and replace it with diesel buses, which would also push consumers to purchase more automobiles and and gasoline for their own personal mode of transportation.

Hence, Who Framed Roger Rabbit is lamenting the story of the decline of an electric trolley system in favor of industry. It can be said that this movie, unlike Lego Movie, is more anti capitalist because of its portrayal of a freeway tycoon in a negative

light. The main villain in the movie is an evil industrialist who wants to demolish the protagonist's lively home city "Toontown," in order to make space to build a Freeway. This obviously parallels with the dissolving of the 'Redcar System' in LA for the replacement of gasoline cars and buses being promoted.

The assertions presented by these children's movies are powerful and if not directly conceivable, and are intrinsic with their motions to promote certain viewpoints and political agendas. Children, who are just beginning their cognitive journeys are just as susceptible if not more to the lessons that are inherent in the movies they watch when compared to the children's books they are read, like Dr. Suess.

It is counterintuitive to be paranoid of this however, the point is not to run away from the phenomena of political agendas as that would reduce a lot of access and enjoyment of entertainment. Would it be really worth it to avoid all of the movies that were described earlier, just because there are people who want others to believe certain things when watching their movies? What is truly important is to be plainly cognisant of these messages to not be as susceptible of them. The government does not outlaw foods with a lot of sugar, but it does require that food companies list their nutritional contents so people know what in in their food. Likewise it is important to be aware of what we are watching. [Whether or not the Motion Picture Association of America should label movies for their political agendas is up for debate. However, for now, it is the individual guardian's or parent's duty to be aware of such motives.](#)

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