

On Gore's threat to censor Hollywood

23 September 2000

The following letter was written in response to David Walsh's September 20 article, "Democrats Gore and Lieberman threaten state censorship of US entertainment industry"

Dear WSWS and Dave Walsh,

I was glad to see your response to Gore's recent threats against democratic rights. I have looked eagerly for your commentary every day since Gore's outrageous attack on the entertainment industry. In the meantime, I've been angered, though not surprised by the reactions of the liberal establishment, which have ranged from silence to mild criticism or even an outright defense of Gore/Lieberman.

Your analysis is excellent. How can one deny the connection between the state of popular culture and the broader culture at large? This is nothing new. I recently saw the last 30-or-so minutes of the 1941 film *Sgt. York*, for which Gary Cooper won an Oscar for his portrayal of a World War I hero. I was struck by the superficiality of both Cooper's performance (the worst Tennessee accent I've ever heard!) and the script. Hollywood clearly marched in lockstep with the needs of US imperialism at the outset of WWII by making dozens of such films. The fact that they awarded such crap with Oscars can only further underscore their compliance.

In a contemporary context, the political/cultural climate is clearly one of "I've got mine and screw everyone who doesn't have theirs." The poor are to be tossed aside, or worse, if they turn to even petty crime. The message of the Republican convention struck me very much as "Yes, we know we have been less than accepting of minorities in the past, so if you're one and you've 'got yours' c'mon in." Hence, all of the observations that the convention was something akin to the old Cotton Club (whites in the audience, blacks on stage). Of course, the Democrats, regardless of their past role, are running away from any suggestion that they have a responsibility to those left behind by the

present economic boom. As for the reflection of this in films, music, and the rest—the entertainment industry has always been driven by profit; the fact that this vile, moronic and gratuitous garbage is profitable represents an indictment of modern capitalism.

One thing you left out of your discussion of the Production Code-era and the history of attacks on Hollywood is the role of anti-Semitism. This may be less of an issue today, especially when one factors in Lieberman, but the fact that it is so bound up in the history of these issues makes these attacks all the more repugnant.

Your recent reviews of *American Beauty*, the *Hurricane* and the *Insider* exposed Hollywood's aversion to making films that deal seriously with social issues. Those three films represent Hollywood's best efforts in this regard, but in two out of the three cases they fall seriously short of the mark. Only the producers of the *Insider* manage to deal honestly with the matter of corporate greed and power, and in so doing, are able to deliver a gripping film without all of the Hollywood indulgences thought necessary to avoid "boring" the audience. The powerful reaction to this film (and to *American Beauty*, as poor as I think it was) indicates to me a great potential audience for movies that attempt to expose the banalities and crimes of capitalism.

I'll continue to read and enjoy your reviews for some time, I'm sure.

Yours truly,

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20 September 2000



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