

# A reader comments on *Tears of the Sun*: "Weapons of mass media"

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If you judged *Tears of the Sun* solely on the trailers you might think that it's just another meandering, thoughtless action brouhaha with more emphasis on bombs and bullets than on dialogue and plot.

If you did, you'd be right.

Lt. A.K. Waters (Bruce Willis) is a war-worn Navy SEAL who leads his men into Nigeria to rescue Dr. Lena Kendrick's (Monica Bellucci), an American who runs a mission, from an impending attack of local militant rebels. The doctor, however, cares for a number of patients and will not leave unless the SEALs take the patients on the long trek to the border of Cameroon. Against orders, Waters agrees, and soon the SEALs come under attack, and find themselves protecting a man sought by the militia.

There are no real surprises in this film. Gun fights. Explosions. A "by-the-book" officer finds himself throwing the "book" out and struggling against orders and his morality. Willis and Bellucci fall in love. The character's are cardboard cutouts of other characters that we've seen in many different films before: Willis plays the same guy that he played in *Hart's War* or in *Mercury Rising* or in *Color of Night*, etc., the doctor is the archetypical woman in distress who can be as tough as the hero; the bad guys are just "bad guys" with no real life to them.

It's trite and overly simplistic, resorting to the "main-character-is-indestructible" syndrome that Willis seems really comfortable playing all too often (i.e., Waters gets slashed with a huge knife from one of the rebels and sustains a wound that would kill anyone else, but he waves it off and tells everyone, "I'm okay!") But what else would one expect from an action film? This is what you pay your money for. It's not like it's conveying some sort of "message" at all, right?

Wrong. Dead wrong.

This film does convey a message, and it comes at the

end, after the final bullet is fired, when the kiss has been planted on the lips. Viewers are subject to a quote by the late Edmund Burke: "*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.*" And then it hit me.

I'd been watching a propaganda piece.

One wonders if Willis, or if director Antoine Fuqua, or if anyone in the theater knew who Edmund Burke was, what he stood for and what that quote was originally supposed to mean.

Edmund Burke was a British statesman and political philosopher in the late 1700s, who held steadfast in his loyalty to the King and Crown. Although he was against war with the colonies, and actually pleaded to King George III to recognize the prudence of ending the attacks, Burke was indeed in support of taxation and English influence on the colonies.

Later in his career, Burke wrote "Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents," an essay in opposition of the French Revolution and the speech from which the "evil-triumph" quote is culled. However, the quote at the end of the film is not actually an Edmund Burke quote, but a watered-down version of the original which states: "*When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.*"

The history of the misquotation began in the 1960s with *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, when the writers and editors incorporated a section of Edmund Burke in the revised 14th press edition. The "evil-triumph" quote was, as the editors suggested, included in a letter Burke wrote to William Smith. However, an inspection of the original letter demonstrates that it is not even remotely related to the "evil-triumph" quote.

The misquote, and variations thereof, have been used to justify military actions. For instance, Ronald Regan used a misquotation of Burke two times; once to justify

an invasion of Granada, another against Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. But perhaps the greatest misuse of it in recent history came on the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks, when the Joint Chiefs chairman, Gen. Richard Myers, used it in a speech at the Pentagon for a rally for the “war against terror.”

And now, the quote is used once again to gain support for the war with Iraq.

Another interesting fact pertaining to the film is the role of Bruce Willis himself. It has been long known that Willis is a staunch supporter of the Bush family and the Republican administration. But what is quite disturbing is that it seems that Willis has actually taken to implementing an old Republican administration tactic in his interviews for this film. What he does, apparently, is sit down with interviewers and tell them what he or she can or cannot ask.

He preempts his press just like the president.

But recently, on a “TechTV” interview, Willis was subject to a pile of “uncanned” questions by Mr. Martin Sargent. Sargent asked Willis if he thought the film was nothing more than (like I’ve already stated) a propaganda piece. Willis went ballistic and threatened to beat Sargent! (A download of this “lost interview” can be accessed at [techtv.com](http://techtv.com))

Although the film’s income is slowly tapering off as of late, there still are a lot of people seeing and recommending this movie. And even though there were “free thinking” triumphs at the Academy Awards (Michael Moore’s speech, Susan Sarandon flashing the peace sign), there is still something dangerous about a film like this, especially at this point in our time and culture. It not only rouses support for the war in Iraq (or, actually, “attack on Iraq” would be a healthier choice of syntax), but it twists something in the mind of the susceptible, impressionable individual watching it: It makes war look clean and scripted and bloodless; it makes war look like a fantastic way to settle differences.

And although *Tears of the Sun* ended with a misquote, I thought it fit to end with a genuine quote from the Nuremberg trial of Nazi leader Hermann Goering:

*“Naturally the common people don’t want war. But after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine a policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag people along whether it is a democracy, or a fascist*

*dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.”*

—Mike McHone



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