

TED ANKARA COLLEGE

English A2 Group2 Extended Essay

An Advanced New Weapon: "Hollywood"

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Abstract

Today, countries realized in order to have a better statue in the world they need to control the cultural changes both in their own borders and other countries'. Hollywood is the biggest motion picture industry in the world and a medium with the ability to reach and communicate with a very high number of people all around the world. Also It is a very powerful weapon for America that provides a great advantage to America as it is used to make positive advertisements for the benefits of United States. I was attracted to this subject because of my interest in movies, TV series and the messages given by different productions of motion picture. In this essay my intention was to explain the way that Hollywood is used by United States in order to establish the order, ease and comfort of their citizens. Moreover, how Hollywood is used as an advertiser of America in such a way that is beneficial to it? I did this simply by answering the research question:

How does Hollywood reinforce positive stereotypes about America?

Starting from the early development of motion pictures, the movie medium of media is always considered highly important by United States government. The government always tried to support Hollywood and it's productions by giving out tax breaks to the companies that control Hollywood and in advance "Hollywood" repaid the government by supporting the stereotypes of America and advertising it throughout the world and also by helping the government to control the public opinion and public mood of America. My conclusion is that Hollywood succeeded at this "trade-like relationship" and supporting American stereotypes by giving out subliminal and direct messages like solidarity, patriotism, America's greatness, through its productions and also by selling the "American Dream".

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An Advanced New Weapon: "Hollywood"

With the end of World War I, the superpowers of the era have realized that only having the greatest technologies, the most powerful weapons and the best armies are not enough to win "the war" in the long run. In order to get out victorious from the biggest wars, countries need to be able to control and manipulate their own citizens' reactions and emotions and also the other countries citizens' perspective and ideas because the real war is not the one that goes on the battlefield. It is the war of cultures and ideologies in which every country tries to show themselves as the most beautiful and powerful one. The reason for that case is countries try to accomplish to attract people with money, intelligence or talent in order to start a brain, and money migration to their lands. The list of weapons which countries can use against each other in this war is too long; starting from the statues, paintings, music and books to fashion and lifestyle. However of all the products of popular culture, none is more sharply etched in our collective imagination than the movies.¹ By using movies countries can transfer every idea and ideology to the spectators and also movies allow every kind of propaganda and brain washing possible. In other words the nations who are successful at breeding the film industry are able to easily control both its own citizens and the other nation's citizens. Considering one of the strongest factions of our time, United States of America, there must be an element that differentiates America from every other country in the war of cultures and manipulative tactics and that element is called Hollywood. Hollywood is used by U.S.A in a way to make positive propaganda of itself and also to support and strengthen the "American Dream". The main question that must be answered here is how does Hollywood reinforces positive stereotypes about America? In other words, how does Hollywood help America control its own citizens and attract citizens of other countries? Hollywood succeeds at doing this by giving direct or subliminal messages in both its movies and television shows and those messages are given away by the help of specific elements such as, plot, emotional effect and mood, characters, and style and texture. Examples for those messages are; solidarity and patriotism of U.S citizens, the invincibility of U.S.A, gloriousness of U.S Army and the peace supporting policy of U.S presidents.

1) 'Hollywood as History', *Digital History* <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>>

Knowing the reason why does film studios in Hollywood help American government at the war of cultures will help answering and fully understanding the question how does it do that. So, why does Hollywood support the American Dream and reinforce the positive stereotypes of America such as the greatness of its army, anti-war structure of its politics, economical state of it, the solidarity between its citizens and its allowance to the immigrants.

There are two main reasons for why Hollywood illustrates America in this way. First and the main reason is that Hollywood is simply a business cooperation which needs money to keep on working and make a profit. Therefore American government gives tax breaks to the cooperations in Hollywood in order to be able to force them to make movies that will serve for America's benefits. Starting from the formation of Hollywood American Government have always been nice and gentle about applying laws to Hollywood and taking taxes from Hollywood film producers. There have been tax break programs such as "California Film and Television Tax Credit Program" that has started in 2009 and since then "according to the California Film Commission, the five-year tax credit program has already generated 41,000 jobs and \$2.2 billion in economic returns"² By these tax breaks film studios are charmed and persuaded to make films which glorifies United States. "Those tax breaks would probably stop if the studios turned out to stop making a lot of anti-communist propaganda"³ says Paul Scott Murray an intellectual and an English teacher at TED College. Also as the audience who watches Hollywood productions are mostly American citizens and most of the investors that gives the funds to movies are private investors, therefore Hollywood is producing films that touches the "good tastes" of those investors in order to make more profit. That is why Hollywood couldn't produce a film that perhaps tells some of the truths about exploitation of employees⁴ and about people who works on real hard circumstances since the investors are not interested in those subjects as they are the employers of those people.

The secondary reason is that Hollywood is a huge industry. Ever since Hollywood has been established, it breeds too much success and money. Moreover all the employees of the sector have been gaining too much richness and popularity as well as the huge film studios and blockbusters. In advance to this Hollywood doesn't want to change. It tries to stabilize its

2) 'Hollywood as History', *Digital History* <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>> .

3) Murray, Paul S. Personal Interview 23 September 2011.

4) Murray, Paul S. Personal Interview.

position and popularity in the world in order to be all time successful. In other words "Success breeds success."⁵ In that manner; as long as blockbusters exist, people will go on to watch them and pour money to those companies. Therefore; Hollywood, with all the richness, glamour, shows and lights it has, wants to stay as Hollywood.

The idea of using Hollywood came with the end of World War 1. After the motion picture technologies reached a reasonable level and fun places like "nickelodeons" lost its importance during 1920's "a small group of film companies known as the "Big Five" - Paramount, Warner Brothers, RKO, 20th Century-Fox, and Lowe's (MGM) and the "Little Three" - Universal, Columbia, and United Artists consolidated their control"⁶. At the head of each of these companies there were such powerful entrepreneurs like;

"Adolph Zukor, Wiliam Fox, Louis B. Mayer, Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle, Harry Cohn, Joseph Schenck, and the Warner Brothers who determined what the public was going to see. It was their vision - patriotic, sentimental, secular, and generally politically conservative which millions of Americans shared weekly at local movie theaters. And as expressed by such producers as Irving Thalberg, Darryl F. Zanuck, and David O. Selznick, it was a powerful vision indeed."⁷

After the American government realized that these studios are able to reach to so many people and control and manipulate them by giving out messages, the government thought that they can use such an organization in order to regulate their citizens during hard times. The first proof of that came with The Great Depression in 1930's. As Will Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association says: "No medium has contributed more greatly than the film to the maintenance of the national morale during a period featured by revolution, riot and political turmoil in other countries."⁸ Hollywood played a valuable psychological and ideological role during the Great Depression, providing reassurance and hope to a demoralized nation. "Even at the Depression's depths 60 to 80 million Americans attended the movies each week, and, in the face of doubt and despair, films helped sustain national morale."⁹ Horror movies like Dracula, Frankenstein The Mummy and Vampyr, went out in that era in order to busy people's heads with subjects like science-fiction and fantasy rather than, economical

5) Murray, Paul S. Personal Interview.

6) 'Hollywood as History' <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>> .

7) 'Hollywood as History' <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>> .

8) 'Hollywood as History' <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>> .

9) 'Hollywood as History' <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>> .

problems and war. Charlie Chaplin's movies were the other trend that became popular at those years. The reason for this was that people needed to laugh occasionally since the depression was not only used to describe the economy but it was also used to describe the overall mental state of the public. After the great depression during World War 2, Hollywood again was working hard to give morale, hope and support to the American citizens by producing films that rally patriotism, and makes anti-Nazi propagandas such as "Confessions of A Nazi Spy(1939). Also with movies like Casablanca(1942) in which the emotional effect that the movie leaves on the spectators and it's texture, composes love and war to give the message to American citizens that even in war times never to stop loving each other.

Then by the beginning of the Cold War Hollywood went in to a new era in which it became the most effective element on citizens of America. Movies that emphasize anti-communist propaganda started to went out like; "The Manchurian Candidate" (1962) in which communism is showed as just another brand of power-mad fascism¹⁰ by the help of a neatly prepared plot. Movies like "The Hanoi Hilton" (1987) in which the story of how communist Vietnamese soldiers torture and brutally treat American soldiers in a prison and "Guilty of Treason" (1950) which tells the story of the execution of an anti communist priest were also broadcasted. Those movies emphasized communism's evilness by their mood and the emotional effect that they leave on the spectators. A final example would be the well-known movie of 1980's, "Scarface" (1983) which creates a role model who is very effective on peoples actions and over the character "Tony Montana" (a refugee from Cuba in America who hates communism) it is provided subliminally to cause the spectators to dislike communism and communists. Furthermore the texture of the movies started to change with the Cold War too. The movies started to show the difference between good and evil in the simplest way, and started to emphasize the concepts, hard-working and ambition. Examples for this case are the two well-known movies "Superman"(1978) and "Rocky"(1976). In both movies the message is conveyed over the main characters to the spectators such as In "Rocky" the leading figure Rocky Balboa is used to explain that the major property that someone has to have is ambition and hard-working in order to get what they want. Where in the "Superman" Clark Kent is used to symbolize the ordinary American citizen and the superhero inside him to symbolize the hero

10) <http://www.movieguide.org>

inside that citizen. In other words Superman gave out the message that every citizen is a hero in itself and everyone is able to work for its country. In addition superman same as all other superheroes is not a creation of movie industry however as all superheroes started to be known better after their movies came out, it is seen that, to use the superheroes in movies are much more effective than showing them in comic books, moreover this situation is also the proof of the statement that movies -or in other words visual media- are more effective than any other medium in the cultures war.

Following the Cold War the problems of United States thus the work of Hollywood never ended. America's participation to Gulf War the following economic depressions and of course the events of terrorism and the attack to the "World Trade Center" in New York were the most obvious problems America have had recently. Considering the years in which those events had take place Hollywood did its best work to keep America and American public at ease. By the end of 1990's movies "Saving Private Ryan (1998)" and "The Patriot"(2000) with the aim of reinforcing patriotism and solidarity for American citizens has come out. Looking at how did these movies affected the public specifically, "Saving Private Ryan" by using the very emotional effect it contains aimed to increase the interdependence of Americans by giving out the message that they should always take care of their compatriots and give them a hand during hard times. Where "The Patriot" used characters and significant scenes from the movie in order to convey the message it carries. For example in the scene after the war has ended the waving of the American flag by Mel Gibson (Benjamin Martin) is a scene which subliminally rallies the patriotism of Americans. Also the name of the leading character is Benjamin as it is referencing Benjamin Franklin, an American hero of the civil war, which is a great example of the usage of characters to convey the movie's messages.

After the terrorist attack to World Trade Center in New York September eleven Hollywood published productions which again reinforced the aspects solidarity, patriotism and America's trustworthiness on protecting its citizens. "We Were Soldiers(2002)"a movie based on Vietnam War, and "Spider Man(2002)" came out and in addition to those film productions, Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg published a new TV Series called "Band of Brothers(2001)"

which is based on nearly the same theme in "Saving Private Ryan". These movies and TV Series played a key role in bringing the United States to its original position in both the eyes of Americans and non-Americans. In the movie "We Were Soldiers" speeches of Mel Gibson carries direct, into-face messages. The scene where, Mel Gibson or as in the role he plays, Lt. Col. Hal Moore advises to his soldiers at the training area to bind together and be like a family; since during war the only thing they will have will be the man next to them.¹¹ is one example of this. Another direct message is from the post war speech of Mel Gibson. During the speech Hal Moore says:

"Look around you, in the 7th Cavalry we got a captain from the Ukraine, another from Puerto Reuco, we've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics, Cherokee Indians, Jews and Gentiles, All AMERICANS. Now in the states some man in this unit may experience discrimination because of their race or creed but for you and me now all that is gone."¹²

By those speeches the film is using the texture element in order to reach to its aim – which is as same as the aim of Hollywood at publishing that movie- which is to combine everyone by erasing the concepts of racism and individuality in America in order to reinforce the interdependence of individuals and organize them against terrorism. In the movie "Spider Man" this message of supporting each other is transferred to the spectator again by using the element texture. Like in the scene where people who watch Spider Man fight against the goblin, unite against the one and only enemy of Spider Man, the goblin and attack to him fearlessly. "You mess with one of us, you mess with all of us."¹³ one of the men yells from the bridge to goblin in order to stress out the concept of solidarity. Also the subliminal message that everyone is a hero in oneself is again conveyed over the character Spider Man like it did in Superman. "Band of Brothers" also carries the same messages as "Spider Man" and "We Were Soldiers" however with one little difference which is, in "Band of Brothers" the message is not just carried on over the fictional characters but it is also passed over by the real war veterans that fought in the II. World War. Giving an example on how the messages are carried on by the real veterans in the first episode one of the veterans says that he did things. He didn't do them to win medals or accolades. He did them because that was what it had to be done.¹⁴ Which

11) *We Were Soldiers*, dir. Randall Wallace 2002

12) *We Were Soldiers*, dir. Randall Wallace 2002

13) *Spider Man*, dir. Sam Raimi 2002

14) *Band of Brothers*, TV Series, Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg

means “things” must be done when they have to be done without expecting any profit in order to protect the country. Moreover there are also scenes in “Band of Brothers” which gives subliminal messages, like the one where the soldiers of Easy Company tries to get on to planes, every man helps the other to wear his parachute and finally their captain helps every man get up by holding their hand. The message in that scene is when one American struggles a problem the others should help and support their fellow citizen.

America has become a hot shot at manipulating its own people by the help of Hollywood as Hollywood reinforced the stereotypes, patriotism, solidarity and trust for the American citizens. However it is not enough just to control the own public of the country to win “The War”. As it is stated before countries must also control the public and individual opinions of other nations in order to succeed at brain and money migration. Considering the number of immigrants in United States which is nearly 38 million¹⁵ it is seen, America really succeeded to inject the “American Dream” to each mind in each country. Americans are very clever at self-promotion and are very good at telling the world America is the best. “They are very good at selling the "American Dream". They tend to gloss over the bad habits. They like to show us the success so people, when they watch Hollywood films they'll say: Wow! That's the reality.”¹⁶ The most obvious organ that American’s use at making their own advertisement is of course Hollywood. Hollywood creates an America which is too immaculate and glorious since the majority of the productions are debugged by the producers. Therefore, it is really easy for people living in countries where they don't have much chance to meet a real American citizen to believe in the America created by Hollywood.

The shiny, glamorous world of America that is shown in movies attracts people all over the world. Daniele Boggione, an English teacher at TED College and an American citizen herself, when she's asked how close the America as someone who have never been to America before imagines it and the real life America are; she answers: "Obviously very different because the America, they dream about is the America in the movies. We have the portrayal of this wealth and wellness that movies try to show us however if you go as an immigrant you will suffer the consequences.”¹⁵ and she gives the reason for why they are different as: "Somehow, we have

the power to streamline and cut off what we don't like, what we don't want people to see about mishaps of our culture."¹⁷ She also adds that without the lights, the glamour and the makeup America looks just like another country. That's why a company like Hollywood is assigned by America to do a "make-up" to America and hide its imperfections. To give an example on how does Hollywood productions reflect America as the best country in the world in the TV series called "How I Met Your Mother" the scenes where the other characters mess up with the character Robin, they also gibe with Canada. In other words the idea of America is way better than Canada is carried on to the audience over the character Robin Scherbatsky.

One of the other differences between the real America and Hollywood's creation of America, is that in Hollywood productions America is shown as "the land of milk and honey"¹⁸, even though it is not in the reality. The most obvious example for this is the reflection of American families to world by Hollywood. Nearly in all Hollywood movies, which includes the family concept, American families are reflected as the perfect family type for every person in world. In Hollywood productions there are beautiful families without any problems, and if there is a problem, it is solved magically.¹⁹ For instance in the movie "Home Alone", McAllister family is a beautiful, happy family without any problems at first but as the movie continues, with thieves appearing who might hurt the eight years old kid Kevin, the boy fights with both thieves at the same time and unbelievably manages to defeat them. Proving the point made, a problem of a perfect family is solved magically in the movie. Another example of "the perfect family" can be seen in the movie "2012". In the movie the Curtis family is shown to be broken and had fell apart in the beginning; however while the movie goes on, as deleterious catastrophes starts to destroy the earth, the family starts to get closer and closer and in the end when all members of the family miraculously survives, the family reaches the perfect family stereotype.

Political approach on foreign affairs, visions of the presidents and military forces of Hollywood's America are also differentiated by Hollywood in order to support the stereotype that America is the number one country at standing against war. To be clearer, presidents and the militaries of Hollywood made U. States are shown to be the best defenders of peace and the main opposers of war. In Hollywood productions which illustrate the aspect of war, America

is shown as the country which would never start a war and which joins to a war just to preserve the world peace. For instance while Captain Hal Moore from "We Were Soldiers" talks to his daughter he tells her, his job is to stop people from taking the other people's lives and to prevent people from doing evil things to the others.²⁰ Furthermore in "The Thin Red Line" showing American soldiers getting along very well with the native people of the lands that is invaded by American soldiers is an example of using the texture in order to support humanity aspect of American army which as seen from the war in Iraq is something that American army lacks.

Hollywood, in conclusion, is not just a composition of big, white nine letters standing on a hill, charming lives of famous film stars' and a boulevard with those stars names are written on the sidewalks. It is however a medium that plays a crucial role in America's appearance from the world and also in American government's politics on the American citizens. It is a vital organ which covers up America's imperfections and frames it up in the eyes of world. In other words Hollywood is a corporation which reinforces the positive stereotypes for America both in the eyes of American citizens and in the eyes of other countries citizens. In times when America is in a bad condition such as the times when terrorism rates or economical problems increase in the country, Hollywood by producing movies which imposes the concepts of patriotism, solidarity, hard working and heroism to the minds of people, helps the society to stay connected together and it prevents inner disorder. Sometimes the stereotypes are supported over a character that is easily taken as a role model by the audience same as in the example of the movies Scarface and Superman. Movies also can support the stereotypes by using a specific scene from the plot as it's done in the Spider Man and sometimes the movie conveys these messages by using the texture or the emotional effect it leaves on the audience as seen in the productions Saving Private Ryan and We Were Soldiers. Hollywood also works as a perfect advertisement company for America. It supports the "American Dream" and it creates an environment as real as the world which becomes the truth.²¹ That's why "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses."²² In

conclusion Hollywood a strong hand of media in the world is the best weapon that America can ever have since it gives America the ability to play with the “truth” so easily.

21) R. Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, Del Rey Books, New York, 1953, 84
22) ‘Media Control Quotes’, *Tentmaker*, 2011, 28 Sep. 2011
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