American Films And Problems Of Time

The underlying values of the film echoed the views of many, veering towards individualism and away from communalism, with issues of race being explored as well. In the instance where the protagonists were pursued by a posse, the race of the posse tracker was singled out, even though the focus was on the protagonists' escape. Native Americans were depicted as the stereotypical savages, possessing great tracking skills and expertise with beasts because of their implied barbaric hunting practices. Barring that, societal norms were constantly contested throughout the film. These irreverent twists on American Western clichés were speckled throughout the film, and same trend could be observed in other movies of that time, such as Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and Little Big Man (1970). What was once seen as the champion of communal values that brought people together, was now seen as an impedance from a much need societal reform in 1960s America.

Bullitt (1968) was another unusual take on traditional cop films. Unlike the dull and dreary cop shows of the time, the protagonist inspector Frank Bullitt was portrayed to be somewhat of a rebel, who takes matters (cases) into his own hands and will do whatever it takes to get the job done, often toeing the line between good and evil. The oppression and bureaucracies of a seemingly corrupt government was depicted in the film, where politician Walter Chalmers had several heated exchanges with Bullitt, often splattered with veiled threats. The inspector was unfazed by the threats and continued to do his job, ignoring the possibility of angering the upper echelons of the government and jeopardizing his career. Bending rules to his advantage, Bullitt somewhat illustrated the inadequacies and failings of the law at that time (Leitch, 2002). The scene where he brings his injured witness to the hospital was an interesting attempt to introduce diversity to the film, with the head surgeon being played by an African American actor. Despite America being one of the most progressive countries at that time, a significant proportion of people would still be reluctant to be treated by an African American doctor, lest a surgery. This could be seen as an attempt to pay tribute to the then deceased Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated just six months before. In a way, the film reflected the hippie movement of the 1960s, where activists fought against (and rejected) societal norms.

The issues of race and civil rights were explored in greater detail by the film Planet of the Apes (1968), which visualized race in the form of different primate species. It was revolutionary in its time, as humans were deemed to be animals of a higher order due to our superior cognitive abilities, a topic explored extensively by Darwin (1871). The male lead protagonist, Taylor, was the quintessential white American male, who was thrust into a new environment where he experienced a complete reversal in roles, benefits and virtually everything that he knew (McHugh, 2000).

The skin tones (and designated societal roles) of the primates portrayed in the film echoed that of American society in the 1960s. One's future in life would have already been determined from the skin tone that he/she possessed, regardless of their attributes. The so-called societal norms perpetuated by those higher up in the hierarchy convey benefits only to themselves (Murray, 2012). The double stigma of lesser animals depicted in the film further illustrates the superior mindset of humans, particularly those in power. Elements in the film sought to marginalize white people—such as the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) group—and demonstrated the

inconceivability of having other races in power (Greene, 1998). It also illustrated the fading white dominance and privilege in a society that had a growing counterculture and was on the cusp of reform.