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Media, Culture, Identity

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Final Project Reflection

When choosing the topic for my project I wanted to combine both an interesting topic and something prevalent to course material we have discussed. In high school I was introduced to the idea of the military industrial complex. This concept fascinated me and still does, and there are plenty of prevalent examples of it in current day media. Topics surrounding this complex excite and intrigue me and I was very interested in doing my videographic essay on this idea. Although many examples of this are written off as crazy conspiracy theories or “fake news” I have always found the ones with some degree of merit fascinating. I feel it is important to be aware of the influence of such a complex on the government, which in turn can have effect on media. We as consumers of media must be aware of this impact and understand some of the reasons why it happens.

In making my video I hoped to argue that political pressures have a large impact on films concerning the United States’ military. Additionally, I wanted to spark thought in my classmates on how media representation of our military influences our thoughts. We can see countless examples of United States soldiers being represented as heroes for slaughtering Muslims or other minorities. This exemplifies the spin present in films regarding the United States military and I aimed to expose this and open the minds of my classmates to this phenomenon.

The keywords I incorporated in my argument were censorship, power, and representation. I used censorship in two ways. First, I used censorship in relation to “This Film is Not Yet Rated.” We see David Robb, the author of “Operation Hollywood” explain how the United States military will only allow use of their equipment if the script is carefully reviewed and doesn’t portray the military in any negative way. This is a form of censorship because it is not showing the true nature of what happens in the military. What is seen in movies is an altered and cleaned up version to make sure the troops look good.

The second form of censorship I focused on was the actual censoring of news regarding the United States military in negative light. As seen from the tweets included in the video, there are many war crimes or potential war crimes committed by the United States that many Americans never see. It is understandable that a country would not want to promote negative stories. However, in this case they are pushed away from mainstream media and spun to be responses or defendable even when they are not. Although a variety of factors contribute to what the mainstream media covers, political pressures are certainly one of the most significant. Censorship in both uses plays a large role in this relationship between the United States military and media.

Power was the second term I wanted to incorporate, and this also can be seen in two different forms. One focus can be the power the military or political pressures have on media. The second being the power of the media has on us, the American citizens. One example of power the military has can be seen in the example given by David Robb. The Pentagon will only allow the use of military equipment after a movie’s script has been reviewed by their panel multiple times and revised to their liking to portray the troops in a certain way. In doing this the Pentagon has a huge monopoly, and in turn power over the war film industry. If a film is based on war or a military plot, they will need the use of the Pentagon’s equipment to do it well. To get this equipment however, the Pentagon must approve of the script and the overall message of the movie. They decide if a movie is made and what message it conveys.

Additionally, the power that media has on us needs to be acknowledged. Similar to our readings on “Algorithms of Oppression,” humans can create content that creates strong images in our heads. Although movies depicting military action and algorithms for search engines are structurally different, the effect they can have on an audience are comparable. By glorifying American troops even after committing atrocities against crowds of people, we are desensitizing the American people to violence from our military. To bolster this positive image of American troops, the people they harm are vilified. The prime example of this has been seen in the Arab and Muslim community. Jack Shaheen’s work, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* exemplifies this and was a large reason why I chose the topic that I did. Such power is exuded through these films, as it has molded American thinking and created a strong stereotype for the American troops and Arab people.

The last keyword I incorporated into my essay was representation. Representation relates to both the argument made by the essay and also how the keywords are used. As seen in countless movies how the troops are represented completely changes the opinion the audience receives of them. For example, in *Rules of Engagement* the soldiers are shown as brave heroes defending the homeland, rather than murders of innocent people. This a result of representation in media. The political forces that have power over public opinion through movies accomplish this through representation. Through spin and careful framing of events they can create exactly what they want the audience to think when seeing a piece of media.

Through this project, and the class as a whole my view of media, culture and identity was changed tremendously. The aspect that I learned the most about through this project was the power and influence that media can have on culture and identity. The way a culture is viewed can be impacted if not created as a whole through media. This project opened my eyes about how much the identity of the United States military can be impacted through media. Additionally, other cultures were degraded at times to help bolster this positive image or identity of the military. Seeing these various examples reinforced the newfound meaning and importance of media, culture, and identity that I learned in class.

Works Cited:

Dick, Kirby, director. *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*. 1 Sept. 2006.

Friedkin, William, director. *Rules of Engagement*. Scott Rudin, 7 Apr. 2000.