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There are two types of film criticism: academic and journalistic. Academic tends to focus more on the film itself, what went behind the scenes during production and the greater cultural context it was made in. Journalistic focuses more on informing potential audiences what is worth spending money on in the movie market, as well as providing entertainment themselves à la Siskel & Ebert.

In this online project, I would like to explore a bit of both. I am a student of journalism, not film, so I will grant that my experience in the academic is more amateur. As for journalistic film criticism, I participated on Northwest College’s former newspaper as a reporter. I often wrote for the weekly film review section and was tasked to redesign and reformat it a few months after I joined. I set it up as a weekly preview for upcoming films where three people shared opinions on whether a film was worth watching based on the latest film trailer, and the new format was well-received. So, I’d like to think I have some experience in that regard.

What I aim to do here on this blog is to explore popular culture in a journalistic style. How I plan on doing this is via two methods.

- **Weekly reviews of Western films**: Inspired by the fact that I am a student at the University of Wyoming, the “home of the Cowboys.” Despite growing up in Wyoming, I did not watch a lot of Western films. Having little experience with the genre, I’ll be coming at it from a completely fresh and unbiased perspective. I will gradually come to understand the appeal of ‘the Cowboy’ as a recurring aspect of American zeitgeist. Or to put it simply, I’ll know why so many people are obsessed with the stories and the aesthetic of the Old West. The purpose of this is too further and focus my interest in film into a productive outlet for critical analysis and entertainment.

- **Biweekly essays exploring specific aspects of popular culture**: Unlike the first method, this method will be more open to different genres of films and focused on contemporary issues. The purpose of this is further my, and hopefully other people’s, understanding of what goes on behind and surrounding our favorite media.

What we, as individuals and as a culture, choose to make successful or not says something about us. That goes for anything, whether it be businesses or political figures or social movements, but also for the entertainment we consume. We often take our entertainment for granted, thinking that it is inherently less important than those other things, but it isn't. The dreams and innovations of
It is inherently less important than those other things, but it isn’t. The dreams and innovations of writers, artists and scientists created moving images that do anything, from teaching small children to informing grown adults. From reliving the past to predicting the future. The entertainment we create and consume shouldn’t be taken for granted. With this blog, I hope I can bring out new ideas that help people to think about what they watch. So I hope you’ll enjoy my exploration into the worlds of popular culture.

And my attempts at humor. Hopefully someone will enjoy those too.

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The Great Train Robbery (1903)

Directed by Edwin S. Porter

Starting off my journey into the Western genre, I start with the very first. Or, at least the first popularly remembered Western film. There were at least a few films to take place in a Western setting before this 1903 film, but aside from their IMDB pages I couldn’t find much about them. Also, one has to consider the length of these films, as The Great Train Robbery is barely 12 minutes long and was revolutionary at the time, especially for its action-packed and composite narrative.
Aren't guns a necessary part of a civil discussion in the West?

In summary, a few bandits break into a telegraph office for a railroad, forcing the operator to stop a train and give the engineer orders to stop at a water tank. The bandits proceed to knock out the operator and tie him up before rallying at the water tank to sneak aboard the train. Two of the bandits kill a man in the luggage and mail car before using explosives to open a locked box, while the other two kill the train’s fireman and hold the engineer at gunpoint to stop the train. The passengers are then herded off of the train and relieved of their expensive belongings. One passenger attempts to escape but is quickly stopped by a bullet to the back. While the other passengers crowd around the downed man, the bandits disconnect the train to the passenger cars and use it to escape to where they are keeping their horses. Meanwhile, the telegraph operator’s daughter shows up at his office to bring him food, and she uses the meal’s knife to cut his ropes and a cup of water to wake him up. Now conscious, the operator runs to a dance hall, where people are forcing a fancy-dressed person from the eastern U.S. to dance at gunpoint for some reason, and rallies them into a posse to hunt down the bandits. After a chase and a shootout, all the bandits are killed and the valuables are recovered.

I won’t go to great lengths to summarize most of the other film’s I watch, but I feel it is important in this case. Just watching this 12 minute film, I can see so many iconic tropes of the genre already coming to life. For one, the tales of train robberies in the West were very common. In fact, not only was this film named and based after an 1896 play, but train heists were still a common occurrence in the time period, as not three years before THE Butch Cassady had robbed a train. (Kramer, 2013) This also means that this film was made in the exact period it was representing. It is...
This also means that this film was made in the exact period it was representing. It is fascinating to think about how the Old West died around the time the film industry was just beginning.

Speaking of the time period, this movie is extremely dated in its visual effects, but it is more than worth noting that this film was a technical marvel. The fact that the narrative changed location and had scenes taking place at the same time was very uncommon. The violent action was especially visceral for the time, no matter how silly some of the actors looked when they pretended to be shot. One death scene was so brutal that I was able to ignore that it was clearly a dummy having his head caved in by a lump of coal. And lastly, I want to commend that little girl who played the daughter. What is melodramatic overacting today was Grade A silent film acting back then. I salute you, little girl, you were a standout.

Going back to the specific tropes associated with the action and Western genre, there were two I wanted to specifically point out. Did you know that this was one of the first examples of the so-called Bullet Dance?

That worn-out gag of making someone dance via guns is older than the first public radio broadcast. It is almost as old as film-making itself. Remember that the next time you see it. One should respect their elders.
I'll be taking that there popcorn.

My last observation is the film’s last shot, which according to the director could also have been placed at the beginning. The bandit leader, played by the appropriately named Justus D. Barnes, shoots his pistol directly into the camera. Aside from the thoughts of early film-goers ducking for cover at this scene, it is fascinating how this image has stuck. Not only will this scene be referenced in *Tombstone*, a Western made nine decades after, it also is very reminiscent of the most iconic ‘shot’ of James Bond.

And even outside of film, think of all the posters you’ve seen of the subject looking and pointing directly at the view. I can think of one very particular example.
Still, this image is so common for action-oriented media, I’d be here all day just finding more examples. Instead, I’ll just finish by saying that *The Great Train Robbery* is a very outstanding film, for its revolutionary aspects both on film and behind the scenes. If you have 12 minutes to spare, I’d suggest you watch it. Due to its significance, it is a preserved film by the Library of Congress and can be found on their Youtube channel [here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In3mRDX0uqk).

**Sources**


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Dir. Sergio Leone

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)

Doowadoowawoo... Wah Wah Wah...

Intro

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, the movie that is credited as one of the game-changers for the Western genre. And it shouldn’t have been made.

At least, according to some of director Sergio Leone’s contemporaries, including Orson Welles. Orson "show me how you can say ‘in July’" Welles himself tried to talk Leone out of filming due to the film taking place during the Civil War, a box office poison. (Susman, 2017) Other than that, the film had other problems such as Clint Eastwood demanding several benefits, including a new Ferrari, as well as having the general stigma of being a Western made first in Italian by an Italian filmmaker.

Still, the movie has become one of the most iconic films of the genre, thanks to its themes, characters and the score of Ennio Morricone.
Synopsis

Bounty hunter Blondie, played by Clint Eastwood, and his criminal partner Tuco, played by Eli Wallach, scam various towns for the latter's large bounty, but each other's greed and distrust cause a series of attempted murders that lead them to a dying Confederate soldier. The soldier, with his last breath, is able to tell the location of $200,000 worth of gold buried in an army cemetery. As it happens, only Tuco hears the name of the cemetery while Blondie hears the name on the grave, forcing the two to work together one last time. Their obstacles include Angel Eyes, an amoral mercenary also after the gold, both sides of an increasingly bloody Civil War and each other's sense of survival. At the climax, the three men duel in a Mexican standoff, one of the film's most iconic scenes, where only one man will be able to find the treasure.

Analysis

As previously stated, this film is an iconic example of the Western genre. You are probably already imagining the film's main theme song in your head right now. Nowadays, it is most likely that your first experience with this theme was in something parodying not just The Good, the Bad and the Ugly but Western films in general, and it is really strange how pop-cultural evolution has made that the go-to soundtrack for a stereotypical gun duel because that isn't even the song played in the film's famous climax.

Still, as recognizable as many aspects of this film are, there seems to be just as many that aren't. For example, did you know this was the third installment of a trilogy? And not only that, but it can be interpreted as the prequel of the first two films, as all three starred Clint Eastwood as "the Man with No Name" and The Good, the Bad and the Ugly ends with him wearing a poncho similar to the one he wore in the two previous films. Thankfully for me, that means I'm not necessarily watching these movies out of order should I watch A Fistful of Dollars and For a Few Dollars More at some point in the future.

It is possible that the rest of Sergio Leone’s Dollars Trilogy isn't as remembered as the final installment due to the initial disapproval of the Spaghetti Western, films based in the American West but made by Italian filmmakers, filmed in Italian and shot in Europe. Leone represented the Western genre becoming not only more international, but less romantic and more grittily realistic, which didn't sit well with jingoistic Hollywood elites who preferred the traditional, idealistic approach. As William McClain wrote in an article for the Journal of Film and Video, “They were bitterly resistant to what they saw as an existential threat to the Western genre and to some extent
bitterly resistant to what they saw as an existential threat to the Western genre and to some extent their understanding of the American cinema as a whole," which resulted in similar trends creating what was called “New Hollywood.” (McClain, 2010)

*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* in particular, but also the other films in the *Dollars Trilogy* and other work's by Leone and his Italian contemporaries, moved away from the West's rigidly moral protagonists. Ever since the beginning of film and ending around the 1930's, the Western genre had a very clear view of black and white morality. One side was good, the other side was bad, and that was about it.

After the 1930's, it got *a little* more complex. Black and white morality was still in place, but unlike some of the more purely good heroes of before, now heroes struggled with their goodness. The Old West was a corrupting force because of how difficult it was to live there, and avoiding that corruption entirely could have been a death sentence. The heroes may be good, but they are not innocent.
That leads us back to *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, because right in the very title it challenges people’s preconceptions of morality in the Old West. The “Good,” Blondie (no, seriously) is only seen as a good person in comparison to the “Bad” and the “Ugly.” He regularly scams towns out of thousands of dollars in reward money for hunting criminals before saving them to repeat the process, and is very cold and emotionless. Even though does exhibit mercy and compassion, and he’s the only member of the trio to never intend harm against innocent people, his motivation still boils down to one thing; money. He is not a hero. He is not even a very good person. But he does represent the trend Westerns will like to follow from now on, where morality isn’t a battle between black and white but between gray and gray.

His contrast with the “Bad” and the “Ugly” further illustrates this. Angel Eyes (again, dead serious), the “Bad,” is also motivated by greed, but is far more amoral. He is a bounty hunter, and is one with a very strict honor code, as he’ll always finish a job once he’s paid. Even if that means he’ll end up killing his employers. He’s more than willing to beat and torture anyone he sees as an obstacle in his quest for money. The one time he doesn’t it’s made clear that it is only because he knows it wouldn’t work and doesn’t want to waste his time.
Tuco, the “Ugly” played by Eli Wallach, is different. He doesn’t particularly relish killing others (excepting his ex-partner Blondie), but his hedonism and self-preservation means that he inevitably will. It is unclear how many of the crimes leveled against him, such as murder, theft and rape, he actually committed, and that ambiguity can either make him better or worse than the “Bad.” He’s worse than the “Good,” but unlike Blondie, Tuco at least expresses emotion and is given a reason as to why he’s become a greedy criminal. It’s revealed in the movie that his brother left Tuco in charge of the family so he could take a life of religion. While Tuco’s brother gets a free pass for abandoning his family, Tuco struggled to support his family, falling in to crime as a way to support them and is grief-stricken when he finds out his parents are dead.

While all three characters are framed as dangerous, all three are given moments to show that they aren’t completely unethical. Especially in scenes with Civil War soldiers. In one part of the film, the Union and the Confederate soldiers are fighting over a bridge that neither side particularly wants to die over, except for their superiors hundreds of miles away. As Blondie and Tuco watch them kill each other, they both lament over the pointless waste of human life. Even Angel Eyes pities some wounded Confederate soldiers he encounters, who are basically left to wait out the end of the war, although this scene was originally cut from the film to help with the pacing.

**Conclusion**

*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is an example of a film that had a lot stacked against it, but its quality ended up speaking for itself. Even Roger Ebert, on his revaluation of the movie, said he gave it a lower score at first “because it was a “spaghetti Western” and so could not be art.” (Ebert, 2003) It has a truly classic score and a cast of characters that revitalized the nature of Westerns.

And what other movie could force me to imagine Clint Eastwood being married to Dagwood?
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The Great Train Robbery (1903)

The Unintended Problem with Ghostbusters 3
There’s something to say about the commercialism of the 1980s, and that something is that Hollywood loves to cash in on it.

Don’t get me wrong, there isn’t anything wrong with liking stuff from the 80s, but there is a lot to say as to why people were able to like so much from that decade. For example, it was a golden age of animated television, but only because of the Reagan administration’s deregulation of advertising in programming designed for children, leading to “program-length commercials” causing an increase in toy-related franchises. (Singer, D. G. & Singer, J. L., 2012) The fruits of that capitalistic labor were not wasted, as many of those properties are still getting milked for all they’re worth today, and those that aren’t are because of something causing it to fail.

And speaking of failing, let’s talk about *Ghostbusters*. 
Before anyone starts yelling at me, I don’t mean any one thing in the Ghostbusters franchise failing, because honestly, I don’t think anything outright failed. From many of the things I’ve heard and read, a lot of why the Ghostbusters isn’t as big as it could be has to do with a lot of external factors. The original films, while popular, couldn’t make any grounds in a third installment for decades, and when a complete reboot of the concept occurred in 2016, there was a lot of controversy before and after the film’s release that contributed to its reputation. Now we are finally getting Ghostbusters 3, over 30 years since the last and probably only because of the perceived failings of the 2016 reboot. In this essay, I’ll be looking at the circumstances surrounding these films, what about Ghostbusters (2016) made it a ‘failure,’ and what this new film coming out means.

Background

Ghostbusters from 1984, directed by Ivan Reitman and written by Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, is one of the most recognizable films of all time. Think of that distinctive poster or the phrase “Who you gonna call?” followed by a blast of synthesizers and “Ghostbusters!” It took the world by storm and the world was glad for it. It was backed by a very lucrative advertisement campaign, and it inspired a very popular animated show that ran for seven seasons between 1986 to 1991.

And it was pretty much downhill from there, because in 1989 Ghostbusters II came out. It was fairly successful financially and had a mixed critical reception, but Columbia Pictures practically forced the original director and writers to make it due to how popular the property had become.
forced the original director and writers to make it due to how popular the property had become.

Ironically, it became the first nail in the franchise’s coffin as the thing most people remember about it today is that it was a mediocre sequel to a good movie. Or rather, its remembered today for being remembered as a mediocre sequel to a good movie. Confusing, yes, but it has gotten some defenders the past few years, possibly out of spite towards the 2016 reboot.

*Ghostbusters II* didn’t help the franchise as much as the studio hoped, and while Dan Aykroyd had better hopes for *Ghostbusters 3*, that movie would not be made because of the studio’s reluctance to make it and because Bill Murray, the highest-billed star, would not commit to participating in the project. The plot, which involved the original Ghostbusters training a new generation and passing the mantle, has been used in other mediums such as a second animated series, *Extreme Ghostbusters* from 1997, and *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* from 2009. *Extreme Ghostbusters* only lasted one season, purportedly due to bad airing schedules, but *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* was very well-received, in part due to having most of the original cast involved with the voice work and Aykroyd and Ramis as writers.

Still, Sony Pictures, who had acquired Columbia Pictures, wanted to create a viable film franchise for easy and consistent cash flow, and Ivan Reitman wanted to return to the well that was one of his most successful films. However, there were some problems including Bill Murray still not committing, Harold Ramis’ death in 2014 and the involvement of Amy Pascal, then co-chair of Sony Pictures Entertainment.

Pascal wasn’t a fan of the direction Reitman was taking the film, thinking it relied too much on nostalgia for the original films. She eventually ousted Reitman from the project in what some people called “a hostile takeover” and replaced him with comedy director and writer Paul Feig. Personally, I don’t think Reitman’s vision was any more promising than Feig’s idea of a complete reboot, because its premise had been done before and its only purpose would be as fanservice, which wouldn’t guarantee wide appeal. Without knowing any personal details about Reitman’s removal from the project, I can’t say how bad a decision this was, but more on that later.

With Feig creating a complete reboot, where an all-female team gets to design their own equipment without taking the idea from men, it was already setting to be controversial. Fans didn’t want a reboot, they wanted a continuation of the films, and misogynists were already interjecting bad faith arguments into that desire because they didn’t want an all-female team in a franchise that had previously been saturated with men. There was also the troubling business of Amy Pascal being removed from her position of co-chairperson following the Sony Hack in November of 2014, though she kept her position as producer of *Ghostbusters* (2016). This led to the film’s budget being reduced, and there were a lot of other financial problems going on with the film such as Feig having to reshoot scenes later on.
Remember the Sony Hack? And that it was started over this thing getting released?

Possibly the worst thing to happen to the film was its release year being 2016, the year of the presidential race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. With its female-centric story and its already adamantly sexist detractors, the last thing *Ghostbusters* (2016) needed was to get involved in politics. But it did, both directly with a tweet referencing #Imwithher and indirectly by the sheer gall of being an action comedy starring women.

![Ghostbusters](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

This turned the film itself into a hot political topic, as its success or failure would be seen as one for women everywhere.

The movie did okay, with a mostly positive but lukewarm reception and a modest box office, but the film had trouble in international markets due to its stars being women and the big issue of being banned from a China release, the biggest market outside of America. The views of the Ghostbusters fanbase were decidedly mixed, with some believing it was too different from the

![ImWithThem](https://via.placeholder.com/150)
Ghostbusters' fanbase were decidedly mixed, with some believing it was too different from the original while others believed it was a good movie by itself. The real problem was the battle of the sexes overriding the fanbase's comments, as liking it meant you only cared about replacing men with women and disliking it meant you were sexist and racist. This especially became a problem after Leslie Jones, one of the new Ghostbusters, was harassed off Twitter by trolls and especially former Brietbart writer Milo Yiannopoulos, which only enflamed the issue. What happened basically amounted to Jones being harassed with racist and sexist comments and Yiannopoulos doubling down on it, leading Jones to request he be suspended. He is still banned from Twitter, and also millions in debt, so this story doesn't have a completely sad ending at least.

Yikes. And is he ignoring Ernie Hudson?

Because a gay pederasty-advocate is so interested in female eye-candy.

If at first you don’t succeed (because your work is terrible), play the victim.

EVERYONE GETS HATE MAIL FFS

Leslie Jones

Ok I have been called Apeis, sent pics of their asses, even got a pic with semen on my face. I’m tryin to figure out what human means. I'm out
Isn't it ironic? At least he's not massively in debt or anything like that…

Over the next few years, plans for a sequel came and went, with no official movement towards making the film. But then Jason Reitman, son of the original Ghostbusters director Ivan Reitman, announced on January 15, 2019, that he was directing and co-writing a new Ghostbusters film set in the old continuity, thus finally making Ghostbusters 3. Fan reception to this announcement was mixed, as some fans were excited to be going back to the original characters while others would have preferred to see a continuation of the 2016 film's characters. However, that conversation was again overwhelmed by the sexist vs feminist discourse, with some seeing the apparent rejection of continuing the 2016 film's story as "a win for the misogynists." Even Leslie Jones, who had returned to Twitter long before, stated that doing this was "Something Trump would do."

While I agree that it is something Donald Trump would do, that doesn't necessarily mean that his intent to do so is the same as Jason Reitman's intent for this upcoming film. According to People.com, Jason Reitman is a fan of the 2016 film, but if his previous statement about "returning the franchise to the fans" is any indication, that does imply he has preconceptions that the 2016 movie failed because it did not meet expectations, which can be seen as delegitimizing it.

Ghostbusters (2016): The film vs the audience

Now, before I go any further, I need to explain my opinion about Ghostbusters (2016). I think that it is an absolute and complete piece of… okay cinema.

It's fine.

But as for my opinion on the original Ghostbusters (1984), I think that is a wonderful masterpiece… of okay cinema.

It's fine.

Both had moments where I laughed. Both had moments where I didn't. I thought both had okay action, good characters and great effects. To be fair, I did not grow up with Ghostbusters (1984),

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So insulting. Like 😑 us. We dint count. It’s like something trump would do. (Trump voice)”Gonna redo ghostbareeeees, better with men, will be huge. Those women ain’t ghostbareeeees” ugh so annoying. Such a 😒 move. And I don’t give 😒 I’m saying something!!

5:13 PM - 19 Jan 2019

Considering all the crap she got over being a Ghostbuster, wouldn’t you be upset too?
action, good characters and great effects. To be fair, I did not grow up with *Ghostbusters* (1984), but I did see it before the announcement of *Ghostbusters* (2016). I have no nostalgic connection to either film or the franchise in general.

(Fun story though, the first time I watched the original, it was during an overnight flight. I overheard the woman behind me talking to a friend about how she was concerned that I was “watching something with an awful lot of sex.” Take that as you will.)

Ignoring the whole Keymaster/Gatekeeper thing, WTH was with this scene?

In my thinking, there are two inherent qualities that made *Ghostbusters* (2016) ‘worse’ than the original. One, it was a complete reboot, which was going to alienate part of the audience regardless of anything else, and two, the original came out at the best possible time while the 2016 film came out at the worst, given the interaction between the political climate at the time and gendered rhetoric surrounding the film. The original, as previously implied in the intro, came out at the height of commercialization and the conservative politics in the film were not controversial in the Reagan era.

If there is anything to be said about the fact that the reboot starred only female Ghostbusters, I refer you to this clip: https://youtu.be/gR5lBE5Sq3I

The perceived need to justify a single gender team but only when they're all female isn't something new. It's usually meant to indicate that it is supposed to appeal only to women like original series *My Little Pony*, or only to men on some fetishizing level à la *Charlie’s Angels* and its famous “jiggle TV”. Or, as displayed in a 1970 issue of the Avengers comic book, something to be mocked as women are easily duped under the banner of ‘feminism.’
Y’know, we’ve had all of these women in the MCU. Is it weird I’m disappointed we’ll never see this scene played out in that universe?

One can make arguments all day about how an all-female team is just as bad as an all-male one, but at the end it should not matter. Gender or race disparity shouldn’t outright mean the solution is “just use one of each,” because that’s how you result in tokenism. It’s okay for a team to be represented by a single demographic, if it makes sense.

Using the original *Ghostbusters* as an example, it does make a kind of sense in the narrative why the team is made up of all men. I can criticize that decision on a modern level, due to how it created a sexist standard for future installments, but there wasn’t anything wrong with the all-male team by itself, just as there isn’t a problem with it being all-female in the 2016 film.

As to if *Ghostbusters* (2016) is sexist towards men due to its portrayal of them, that is a bit trickier. After all, the original’s treatment of women wasn’t good either, but it probably wasn’t intentionally harmful. Sigourney Weaver, who is famous for playing more badass female characters, is only a MacGuffin, or interchangeable plot catalyst, in both the original films. She also has to be the love interest of Bill Murray’s character and only seems romantically interested in him because that’s what damsels in distress are supposed to feel towards their saviors. They have great comedic chemistry, but absolutely no romantic chemistry. The love interest status of women isn’t even isolated to her, as Annie Potts’ Janine Melnitz only has two jokes in the original; she’s an obnoxious secretary stereotype and is in love with a man who doesn’t reciprocate. Janine is the undesirable beta-female that became popular around the same time.
The animated Janine, Exhibit A

Irma from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Exhibit B
However, it is clear that the movies aren't trying to actively disparage women, and the fact that Janine became a popular character in the animated series and the extended franchise indicates that the character had appeal.

The 2016 film was critical and satirical towards types of men, and even reinforced some old female stereotypes onto certain men, but that doesn't mean it meant harm either. In both *Ghostbusters*, the opposing genders are basically narrative props. At least the men from the 2016 version had some more variety, albeit with some more negative framing.

Chris Hemsworth's character, Kevin, is the most obvious example, being an eccentrically stupid but attractive failed actor/incompetent secretary. While he can be seen as a parody of male entitlement and sex discrimination, he can also be seen as a one-note joke of a character that makes fun of athletic and attractive men. What makes this worse is that the movie never frames his character consistently, as the movie wants you both to laugh at and feel sorry for how stupid
his character is, and he's never developed enough for it to really work. But if that is the case, it's hard to say if it's sexist or just lazy writing.

Am I supposed to laugh, be sad, be turned on? I'm not sure the movie knows either.

I'd bring up the antagonist Rowan being sexist towards men too, if he wasn't so clearly a parody of the film's worse detractors. Personally, I'm more offended that he was turned into such a caricature that it ruined the character from being funny. Further, in my opinion, the actor was unable to pull off being a threatening villain too, leading to him to just be irritating.

The last point I would like to bring up is whether or not the 2016 movie fits into the Ghostbusters franchise. The answer is both yes and no. It does fit in because it's about educated entrepreneurs providing busting ghosts as a service, and does so in a way that is equally comedy and sci-fi. The franchise is diverse but based on that one central idea, so it'd be hard for it not to fit. How it doesn't fit, and is where the non-sexist detractors come from, is how its different from the original film. And while its okay to simply not like a film for being different, the expectation that it would be at all similar is kind of silly. I don't mean to say that there should be no expectations of similarity, but several intelligent entrepreneurs banning together to fight ghosts is already a similar premise, and the characters roles are almost copying the original characters', even if their personalities are completely different. Of course the comedy is different – it was made over thirty years after the original and written under different writers for different comedic actors. Of course the sci-fi and fantasy elements are different – it was trying to establish new rules to the universe and set up a multi-film story arc. And lastly, of course it takes place in a separate universe from the original.

While it is a tough pill to swallow seeing the original characters ignored, there is an important aspect that people ignore when it comes to the Ghostbusters (2016), and that is if it did take place in the same universe, and the new female Ghostbusters were using already created technology, they would be accused of riding on the coattails of men. That completely goes against the purpose of the narrative in that these women are supposed to be scientists at the top of their fields and deserve to be recognized as such. The idea that a woman can only succeed where a man already has is the very reason the new continuity was so necessary for the narrative. One can argue that making it related to Ghostbusters at all would imply these women are riding on men's coattails.
making it related to *Ghostbusters* at all would imply these women are riding on men’s coattails, but that’s a stupid argument. If it wasn’t officially Ghostbusters-related, it would be called a pointless parody at best and a rip-off at worst, so there is absolutely no winning in that scenario.

Criticism about how *Ghostbusters* (2016) relates to the rest of the franchise also ignores the whole production process behind the film. Regardless of how the outcome and rhetoric surrounding the film ultimately evolved, this movie was produced because the studio saw it as a way to make easy money through a proven formula. The current media landscape is saturated with reboots and sequels because executives assume that such films will make money no matter what by inheriting fans of the originals. *Ghostbusters* (2016) is no exception and should not be treated or evaluated any differently from other reboots and sequels in this regard. A third Ghostbusters movie of some sort has been “in development” for decades because the studio believed in the franchise’s ability to make money, which is ironic considering that it not being seen as profitable was why it wasn’t made anytime soon after *Ghostbusters II*. The reboot was not created by a group of women intending to overthrow the existing franchise and the patriarchy along with it; instead, studio executives, both men and women, developed this film as a way to make money by both taking advantage of a pre-existing fanbase as well as modernizing the franchise to attract new audiences. Studios do not want to produce polarizing movies that alienate large potential audience segments, but once conversations around the film became ideological and toxic, studio executives may have decided to embrace the conflict and pivot to using feminism as a marketing ploy.

My point here is that, at the end of the day, *Ghostbusters* (2016) is fine. It's okay to like or dislike it, because it is an objectively flawed but reasonably entertaining movie, so subjectivity and personal taste is going to be the main “make it or break it” factor for audience members. Although the controversy surrounding the reboot is heavily discussed in some corners of the internet, most of the public is largely unaware of all of the problems behind the making of the film, and it may never occur to many casual moviegoers that the movie could be “sexist towards men” or “disrespectful to the original.” At the end of the day, those mindsets are only from “fans” playing gatekeeper to the franchise by making it about winning points rather than caring whether a film does its job or not.

And this behavior has only worsened with the upcoming *Ghostbusters 3*.

**The Implications of this new film**

On January 16, 2019, a teaser for *Ghostbusters 3* was released. While extremely short and having no indication of the film’s plot, it did have several elements that relied on nostalgia for the original film. The theremin music, the proton pack ignition and the reveal of the car all rely on recognition of the franchise.

What can be said is the reception of this movie’s announcement has been mixed because of its very nature. As it seems, Sony still wants its bankable franchise but doesn’t want to run the risk of continuing the 2016 film’s story, so it is taking the route it originally denied and is ‘un-rebooting’ the franchise back to the original continuity. Sony seems to have learned from the reception of *Ghostbusters (2016)* that in order to successfully continue the franchise they should give fans what they’ve been asking for years by cashing in on the fan’s nostalgia of seeing their old favorite characters before asking fans to accept a story focused on a new group of characters.

Still, just because one portion of the fandom seemed satisfied with it doesn’t mean the other was.
Remember, Leslie Jones was very vocal about how she saw it as a blatant disregard of her and the other women’s time as Ghostbusters, and others agreed. There are people who did want to see the continuation of their story rather than go back to the original cast of characters.

As stated before, Jason Reitman has stated he liked the 2016 film, and according to a tweet correcting his “back to the fans” statement, he clarified what he meant.

Even more interestingly, according to one news article, Ghostbusters 3 will be about a single mother played by Carrie Coon, and considering Jason Reitman’s previous success with Juno, that is a good sign. (Lussier, 2019) Granted, Ghostbusters II was also technically about a single mother, so while it might help make Ghostbusters 3 more diverse, it could be criticized for following the earlier films too closely. That is assuming a lot about the role the single mother will play in the narrative, however, so at this point there isn’t much else to say about it.

At this point though, it all feels hollow. All of the previously attempts to tell the story of the Ghostbusters passing the torch, in almost all other mediums (comic books, video games, animation, etc.) had already been done before. It feels doubly hollow after Harold Ramis’ death, whose character was the one who created the first new generation of Ghostbusters in Extreme Ghostbusters. The idea of the Ghostbusters having to pass the torch just feels like a tired premise, and with any luck that will only be an extremely minor focus on the old vs new generation.

Now, I want to make it clear that a several-decade-after the fact sequel is not inherently bad. A recent sequel that managed to be a successful follow-up several decades after the original is Mary Poppins Returns, which was released just last year (2018). This movie was made over 50 years after Mary Poppins, but still felt like a film in the same vein as the original. However, the filmmakers were very conscious about making it its own film as well, and even Julie Andrews believed that if she was in it, even as a brief cameo, that would detract from Emily Blunt’s take on the character.

To me, that is the most important takeaway about how sequels and reboots should be made; at some point it becomes necessary to replace characters and actors for the sake of the new film. Ghostbusters (2016) fell victim to this by wanting to have its cake and eat it too, by including all of the original actor cameos, which were not only pointless but didn’t really add anything. Now we’re getting the same thing from Ghostbusters 3 except it isn’t a cameo, it’s the entire film. The whole reason the reboot was even considered in the first place was because of uncertainty to how much anyone, minus die-hard fans, wanted to see these older actors return to a franchise that hadn’t had a film in so long. Heck, one could say the same thing about the modern sequels to Star Wars, but that is honestly a way bigger can of worms I don’t want to get into.

Ignoring the problem with using older characters and actors, there is the idea that the only reason Ghostbusters 3 is possible is due to the ‘failure’ of the 2016 film. The 2016 film didn’t meet enough financial expectations to warrant a sequel, but the franchise itself could still have potential. For Sony executives, Ghostbusters 3 makes financial sense because the son of the original film’s director expresses interest in making a movie, set in the original continuity, and checking all of the boxes that the 2016 version didn’t, including bringing the original all male Ghostbusters back.

Moving forward, several aspects of Ghostbusters 3 will probably be controversial, especially who will make up the new Ghostbusters team, because some people will complain no matter how the characters’ genders are distributed. If the new team is mostly male, it will look as if the filmmakers are actively trying to disparage the 2016 version. If the new team is mostly female, the sexist detractors of the 2016 film will come back with a vengeance and the fans of the 2016 version
won’t understand why Ghostbusters 3 isn’t a sequel to the reboot instead of one to the original franchise. If the new team is evenly male and female, critics on all sides will find something to complain about.

Despite all of the new hopes of the filmmakers and Sony executives, Ghostbusters 3 is not guaranteed success based on nostalgia. Nor would it be based on how it genders its characters. Right or wrong, people will complain about those aspects regardless of what decisions are actually made. The only true way to judge if Ghostbusters 3 is a success… actually watch the film. I know that sounds anti-climactic, but we cannot know a movie's quality or potential for success based on heated internet debates about its superficial characteristics. Instead, we must judge this and other films by their own merits as unique stories, not on how they may or may not fit into existing canon or on whether a film’s cast is “progressive enough” (or “too progressive”) for the time period in which it’s made. Maybe Ghostbusters 3 will also have a troubled production like Ghostbusters (2016). Maybe it will be terrible and the franchise will finally be put to rest, or at least shelved for a few more years. Maybe it will be amazing and better than all the films combined. Or maybe it will be a movie that is neither bad nor good, which might make the controversy it’s received all the more silly in hindsight.

My point is, we can’t judge the yet-unfinished Ghostbusters 3 for being disrespectful to the 2016 film, or the originals for that matter, without actually watching it and seeing how they address the original films and the reboot. I can complain about how much the premise feels tired to me, or how it is valid for the 2016 actresses to feel like they’re being snubbed, but that has no bearing on the merits of the film itself. Besides, Ghostbusters 3’s very existence doesn’t immediately erase the 2016 version, just as the 2016 version didn’t erase the 1984 version, and so claims that the new film is inherently sexist and anti-equality because it discounts the reboot are based on conjecture and ideology, while in reality Ghostbusters 3 probably won’t make feminism and equality go backwards.

Conclusion

The topic of the Ghostbusters franchise is a difficult one, no matter what film you’re talking about. The Ghostbusters fanbase has, unfortunately, become one of the many toxic communities ruined by internal discord, gatekeeping and the intolerance of small but vocal factions on all sides of the issue surrounding this franchise. Ghostbusters 3 will not solve that. What will solve it is having thoughtful and respectful discussion about what makes a person a fan of Ghostbusters. It isn’t liking one film more than the other, it is just liking one film, or comic, or animated series, or all of them. The announcement of Ghostbusters 3 has worsened the discourse, but it doesn’t have to. Instead of devolving into fandom tribalism, everyone can instead strive for a franchise that has a place for everything in it and for everyone who is a fan, and recognize that the sexists are the only real enemy here, because they are the ones who, by definition, don’t want everyone to be a part of the fandom.

Sources

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High Noon (1952)

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High Noon (1952)

Intro

He can 'em, look how tiny they are.

The showdown. It is a very familiar trope of the Western. Where two characters stand on opposite ends of a street in a small town, both with their fingers tickling their guns before they shoot, leading one to drop dead.

While the phrase “showdown at high noon” is at least common enough to have its own TV Tropes page, High Noon (1952), directed by Fred Zinnemann and screenplay by Carl Foreman, actually subverts the expectation. Despite there being a showdown, it isn't a one on one, single draw kind.
subverts the expectation. Despite there being a showdown, it isn't a one-on-one, single draw kind of deal where the protagonist is on the moral high ground. In fact, the movie subverted expectations of Western ideals so much that many people, including John Wayne, basically ended up calling it a Communist film, but that will be discussed further in the analysis section. For now, let's summarize the tale of Marshal Will Kane.

**Synopsis**

The story begins in the New Mexico territory with Marshal Will Kane, played by Gary Cooper, marrying his Quaker bride Amy Fowler, portrayed by Grace Kelly. Their marriage precedes Kane's official retirement from being a U.S. Marshal, with the new marshal being over a day away and the couple planning to head out and start a general store in a new town.

Unfortunately for the newlyweds, Frank Miller, an outlaw played by Ian MacDonald, is coming to town on the noon train. Kane was the one who had arrested and jailed Miller and, even though he was supposed to be hanged, Miller was released and sent word to his gang that he was coming back. The telegraph operator, recognizing them, runs to warn Kane, which leads the wedding attendees to rush him and his wife onto a wagon and set them off running. Kane, however, wrestles with his conscious before driving the horses back around. Fowler is confused the entire time, not knowing why she's being rushed off or why her husband is so conflicted. It isn't until the make it back that Kane fully explains what is happening, that Miller is coming back for revenge and Kane isn't willing to run from the fight. He also adds that once they start running, they'll never stop, and will only be more easily taken by surprise. Fowler, however, refuses to understand his reasoning, not only being devout and a pacifist but also remembering the senseless deaths of her father and brother, and doesn't want to become a widow on the first day of their marriage. She informs Kane that when the train arrives, she'll be leaving on it.

Meanwhile, the young deputy Harvey Pell is embittered over Kane's retirement, as he believes Kane refused to put in good word for him to become the next marshal. Helen Ramirez, a Mexican woman who was Miller's lover, then Kane's lover, and now Pell's lover, isn't impressed with his moping. Pell isn't successful in trying to coerce Kane into naming him his replacement in exchange for helping with Miller's qaqq, and after Ramirez fends off his sexual advances and calls him out.
for helping with Miller’s gang, and after Ramirez fends off his sexual advances and calls him out for his immaturity, he goes to sulk in the bar.

Ramirez is visited by Kane who, while no longer romantically interested in her, is concerned for her safety should Miller return. Ramirez agrees and sells her general store, planning to move to Chicago and start a new life. Fowler, who was unaware of Kane’s romantic past, hears of this and confronts Ramirez, convinced that Ramirez is the reason Kane planned to stay and fight. Ramirez informs Fowler that isn’t the case, that he told her to leave and that was what she was doing. While the two decide to wait for the train together, Fowler explains how she can’t understand Kane’s convictions while Ramirez tries to convince her to remain loyal to her man, as she would if Kane still loved her.

Kane, during the hour before noon, is trying to rally a group of citizens to deputize and help him fight off Miller and his gang. Outside of Pell’s greedy offer, Kane is met with almost no support. Half the town’s men are unwilling to fight against Miller out of fear while the other half, such as the hotel owner and barkeeper, actually liked Miller’s presence as it was good for business and didn’t like Kane’s devotion to law and order. Even his most ardent supporter denounces his plans of confrontation, believing that Miller wouldn’t harm the town if Kane just left. The only men willing to join his cause altruistically are a man who is too old, a boy who is too young, a man who is drunk and half-blind and a man who backs down when he realizes he’s the only real volunteer. Pell attempts to convince Kane to leave, which leads to a violent confrontation, leading to Pell being knocked unconscious. Now, with absolutely no allies to speak of, Kane writes out his will.

When the clock strikes noon and the train arrives, Miller gets off while Ramirez and Fowler get on. The gang meet up and begin to ferret out Kane, and as stated, this isn’t a traditional showdown with two men on opposite ends of a street. This is like a dark game of hide and seek, with four against one and all with loaded guns. Kane is able to take out two of the gang but slowly gets cornered by the other two. As the last gang member reloads to kill Kane, Fowler shoots at him from behind, having jumped off the train at the last minute and immediately taking the gun from Kane’s office to save her husband’s life. Unfortunately, after saving him she is then put in danger when Miller grabs her and uses her as a hostage and human shield to lure out Kane. Kane comes
When Miller grabs her and uses her as a hostage and human shield to lure out Kane, Kane comes out, but Fowler is able to claw at Miller’s face, leading him to push her down and attempt to kill her first, allowing Kane a clear kill-shot.

The two embrace after the danger is over. All of the townsfolk, everyone who stood by and watched as Kane confronted the gang alone, come out. Solemnly and with disgust, Kane drops his tin star on the ground and leaves with his wife, never to return to his life of justice.

“Quite a honeymoon, eh sweetie?”

Until *High Noon, Part II: The Return of Will Kane* from 1980, but that’s a different story.

**Analysis**

First off, I’d like to say that this is a very dreary, solemn film. That isn’t to say it isn’t enjoyable, but the tone of this thing is one of pessimism and defeat. There is a sense of resolve and honor surrounding the character of Will Kane but considering how much he’s risking over those things and how little his chances are, it can really bum a viewer out.

The tone is firmly established by the music, composed by Dimitri Tiomkin, as it is slow, wistful and the lyrics for the songs literally spell out the hopelessness of the situation. That a man has to choose between love or honor, and he can’t back down “until I shoot Frank Miller dead.” Literally the last line of “The Ballad of High Noon” (Tiomkin, 1952).

It would also be one thing if Will Kane was presented as a stereotypical ‘good guy’ in this film, because even in the dire situation you would root for him. But he is not. He is Lawful Good incarnate, which is to say that he puts law, order, justice and honor above all else. While this does sound good in theory, this film goes out of its way to show how it has worked against Kane. This nuanced depiction of Lawful Good characters is more common today than it was in 1952, as being a law-abiding citizen and having faith in the system was important to the culture at the time, which you can see later in this essay.
The most important relationship he has in the movie, aside from his two love interests, is with his deputy Harvey Pell, and while Pell is immature and grossly ambitious, Kane does nothing to prevent the souring of their relationship as law enforcement partners. When Pell questions why Kane didn’t recommend him as the new marshal, Kane states that he said nothing about Pell. Not that Pell was a good or bad choice, but Kane believed he had nothing to say in the matter.

Pell is clearly a bad choice for marshal, and his attempt at bargaining during a life-threatening situation shows that, but Kane does nothing to salvage their partnership. Even after Pell got drunk in anger over the slight, he does attempt to get Kane out of town, which goes unappreciated and is seen as an insult by Kane.
Other than Pell though, there is practically no one willing to stand up to Frank Miller, aside from the aforementioned poor choices. The worst thing about the situation is that Kane can’t even blame the people who back down. Instead of fight for justice and honor, they sit back for life and their family. In a way, Kane wishes he could make that decision, but ultimately he sees it as the bad choice.

In that sense, that is why this movie was considered “un-American” by some people. The hero’s goodness is at conflict with others sense of it, and the established word of law will not defend you. When I said that it was considered a Communist film, that isn’t entirely accurate. What people called it was an anti-blacklist film, which indirectly amounts to being Communist because, y’know, the Red Scare and McCarthyism. Carl Foreman, the screenplay writer, was even called to appear before HUAC, the House Committee on Un-American Activities, during the production. Foreman had been a member of the American Communist Party but quit after being disillusioned by it, but was still found guilty and black-listed for being an “uncooperative witness.” What that means is that he didn’t name any of the people he knew while he was still a member of the party, and to be black-listed meant that he wouldn’t be allowed to find work in Hollywood.

He was still be listed in the film as the writer but his interest was sold off to the producer, Stanley Kramer. Foreman tried to make his own production company and even had the support of High Noon’s star, Gary Cooper, but the public brought an end to it and Foreman, his path to becoming a Hollywood film director forever blocked, eventually emigrated to England.

The thing is, despite Foreman’s sympathy for Communist ideals, if any at the time of writing the screenplay, I’m not sure I see that much of a parallel in this story. Even if the anti-black-list sub-
text was intentional, it is far more subtle than, for example, *The Crucible* play from 1953, which was a WAY more obvious criticism of the McCarthy era. This is not some propaganda film trying to convince American's youth of the Communist party's ideals nor is it a scathing caricature of real life individuals at the time. I think the whole "un-American" thing is an exaggeration by the film's detractors, such as John Wayne, to justify black-listing Foreman and for disliking the film for other elements. Those other elements being the slow pace, the moral ambiguity and lastly, the fact that a Quaker woman saves the protagonist's life.

Seriously, its reasons like that are why John Wayne hated the film so much that he and director Howard Hawks made *Rio Bravo* in response. As stated by Hawks in *John Wayne: The Man Behind the Myth*, "I didn't think a good town marshal was going to run around town like a chicken with his head cut off asking everyone to help. And who saves him? His Quaker wife. That isn't my idea of a good Western" (Munn, 2005, p 148).

To unpack that a little, why is being saved by a woman, a Quaker woman at that, such a bad thing in a Western? That is basically the crux of his argument that the movie is bad, as it is the example from the film he uses to illustrate his point. If anything, I think Fowler going to save her husband only strengthens the theme of the whole film; that Kane got his hands dirty for honor and refuses to be passive for the sake of love, while Fowler was about to remain passive to defend her honor before ultimately getting her hands dirty for love. It shows that doing good isn’t always clean, but you live with it because it is what you feel is the right thing to do. To see Fowler's sacrifice of her innocence in this film and see it as a reason why the film is bad is something I can only chalk up to a sense of emasculation in a very masculine genre. And that is stupid.

And why is a marshal trying to rally help framed as a bad thing too? Again, Hawks said "that a good marshal would turn around and say to someone, 'How good are you? Are you good enough to take the best man they've got?' And the fellow would say, 'No,' so the marshal would say, 'Then I'll just have to take care of you.' And that scene was in *Rio Bravo*. It was the exact opposite of *High Noon*" (Munn, 2005, p. 148).

But, is it though? Kane refuses the help from the people more likely to die rather than help in his conflict with Miller, and decides to defend the entire town despite having no support from it. That isn’t Kane’s way of saying ‘Then I’ll just have to take care of you’? Just because the sentiment wasn't blatantly stated in a heavily masculine fashion doesn’t mean it wasn’t there. Much like how I mentioned in my essay on the *Ghostbusters* franchise, politics had a very heavy hand on how this film was received. This is especially interesting considering that the two films had about 63 years between them, as well as being from two wildly different genres.

Thankfully, Wayne and his fellow detractors weren't the only people talking about the film. The film was fairly popularly received, was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won four of them, Katy Jurado was the first Mexican actress to win a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress for her performance as Helen Ramirez, and Will Kane became one of the main well-remembered Western characters. As far as people with conservative politics go, Ronald Reagan stated his favorite film was, in fact, *High Noon*. (Mulholand, 2003)

Conclusion

*High Noon* is a surprisingly fascinating film. It is a good movie, no doubt, but the fact that it had such varying degrees of praise and hate is just interesting, and is just one of the many examples of McCarthy Era Hollywood. Thankfully, we as a culture have moved on and can enjoy this film as
it is. And I can remain comfortable in my ambivalence towards John Wayne as a public figure, but that’s something to explore in another post.

Sources


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Stagecoach (1939)

Intro

From the looks of this poster, are we sure the horses aren't the villains?

The American West was once an extremely popular genre for dime novels and pulp magazine short stories. One author, Ernest Haycox, was a particularly prolific writer of the genre in the early 20th century, having written over two dozen novels and around 300 short stories. Two of them were adapted into movies in 1939, the novel Trouble Shooter was adapted into the film Union Pacific starring Barbara Stanwyck and Joel McCrea, and the short story “Stage to Lordsburg” was adapted the film addressed in today's post Stagecoach starring Claire Trevor as Dallas and John
adapted the film addressed in today's post: Stagecoach, starring Claire Trevor as Dallas and John Wayne as the Ringo Kid.

The production of this film was interesting because big-budget Westerns were out of style, with many Westerns of the time being B-movie fare, as well as the fact that director John Ford insisted on casting John Wayne in the leading male role. Hard as it may be to believe, John Wayne was originally known as a B-movie, low budget actor because of his roles in Western films, meaning that producers were wary of devoting money to the project because of John Wayne's track record, as well as the film's higher budget. And if the earlier producers had gotten their way, John Wayne would have been replaced with... Gary Cooper? The man who played Will Kane in High Noon when John Wayne refused? Huh, that is a connection I did not anticipate in writing these reviews back to back.

Anyway, Stagecoach was the film that launched John Wayne's career and made him a household name. Is it as good as that distinction makes it sound?

I'm sure it was this shots like this that cemented John Wayne's role as a Western icon.

Synopsis

In the year 1880, a stagecoach is preparing a trip from Tonto, a town in what was called the Arizona Territory, to Lordsburg, New Mexico. The passengers include Dallas and Doc Boone, a prostitute and drunken doctor respectively who have been chased out by the townswomen of the “Law and Order League.” They are joined by Mrs. Lucy Mallory on her way to join her cavalry officer husband, and by Samuel Peacock, a whiskey salesman whose wares are quickly exhausted by Doc Boone’s alcoholism. The driver, Buck, asks Marshal Curley Wilcox to be his shotgun guard; Wilcox accepts because the fugitive Ringo Kid is going to Lordsburg to murder the man who killed his father, Luke Plummer.

Before the stagecoach can depart, a cavalry lieutenant tells the driver and passengers that Geronimo, a violent raider based on a real Apache resistance fighter, is attacking travelers throughout the area. The lieutenant provides the stagecoach a small troop escort to Dry Fork, where another cavalry group is currently staying. At the edge of town, two more passengers join the stagecoach journey: the Southern gentleman Hatfield, a man with an extreme penchant for gambling, and the domineering banker Henry Gatewood, who is running away with embezzled cash.
On the road, they come across the Ringo Kid, played by John Wayne, whose horse has gone lame and so he accepts going into Wilcox’s custody to save his own life. When the coach reaches Dry Fork, the group is informed that the cavalry had moved to Apache Wells, meaning that they’ll be unprotected because the other cavalry must leave them and return to Tonto.

Everyone votes to continue despite the danger, and tensions rise as the group has lunch before their departure. The gentlewoman Mallory is perturbed at having to be near Dallas, as she is a prostitute, but Ringo invites Dallas to sit at the main table anyway. Hatfield attempts to keep Dallas away for Mrs. Mallory’s sake. When back on the road, everyone becomes thirsty and so Hatfield offers Mrs. Mallory his silver folding cup so she doesn’t have to drink from the canteen with the men, while he denies Dallas the same offer. Mrs. Mallory recognizes the family crest on the cup and it’s revealed that Hatfield had served in the Confederate Army under Mrs. Mallory’s father, hence his insistence in joining the stagecoach to protect her.

Arriving at Apache Wells, the group discovers that that Mrs. Mallory’s husband had been wounded in battle and the cavalry had moved out of there as well. The shock of this leads her to faint, but it’s revealed that it wasn’t just the news that caused it, but the fact that she had gone into labor. It is revealed that Mrs. Mallory’s desperation to reach her husband is so that he can be there as their first child is born, but now she’s about to give birth in the middle of nowhere with a group of strangers. Dallas takes charge and forces Doc Boone to sober up to help deliver the baby, while she assists him. Mrs. Mallory gives birth to a healthy girl but is too weak to care for the baby by herself, so Dallas takes on the responsibility.

That night, Ringo asks Dallas to run away and marry him, saying they could live on a ranch he owns in Mexico. Dallas is reluctant, due to her past, but eventually agrees after Doc Boone tells her she deserves to be happy. While Dallas wants to marry him she says that Mrs. Mallory and the
baby need her right now, so she helps Ringo escape and plans to meet him at his ranch later. However, just as he is about to leave on horseback, Ringo sees Apache smoke signals, heralding an attack, and he returns to Wilcox’s custody to help protect the stagecoach.

Look, you don’t have to try and woo me. You’re a noble criminal and I’m a hooker with a heart of gold, we were bound to end up together.

What follows is an epic sequence in which the stagecoach tries to outrun the war party while having to cross a river and large portion of flatland. When everyone believes the danger has passed, an arrow strikes Peacock in the chest. Buck tries desperately to run the horses faster but gets injured with an arrow and loses one of his reins. Ringo jumps from horse to horse to try to help steer, while Wilcox, Hatfield and Doc Boone try to shoot their Apache pursuers. Even after several Apaches are successfully shot off their horses, the war party remains large and keeps getting closer to stopping the coach. Dallas hugs the baby tightly while Mrs. Mallory prays. Hatfield, with only one bullet left, levels his gun to Mrs. Mallory’s head as an act of mercy, but he too is shot before he can pull the trigger. Thankfully, the cavalry from Lordsburg arrives just in time and saves the stagecoach from the raiding party.

This is a great action scene and all, but I still can’t help but look at that coach and remember that seven people were in there at once for most of the trip.
Hatfield dies, but no one else's wounds are fatal. Even Mr. Peacock survives and, before being taken to a doctor, invites Dallas to his and his wife's home for a visit. Mrs. Mallory learns that her husband's wounds were not serious and expresses remorse of her treatment of Dallas and thanks her. Dallas is understanding and gives Mrs. Mallory her shawl for the baby. The domineering banker Gatewood, after complaining about poor law enforcement in the area, is then arrested for his embezzlement.

Ringo is permitted by Wilcox to walk Dallas home. She tries to get him to leave her at a brothel, but he refuses, instead taking her to a bad part of town where she admits she lives. Ringo doesn't seem to care about her past, but Dallas is upset because Ringo still has plans to go murder Luke Plummer, which will either result in his death, or in his arrest, thus leaving her alone. Ringo leaves Dallas to confront Plummer, who is playing poker in a nearby saloon. Plummer's men inform him of Ringo's presence, as does Buck, Doc and Marshal Wilcox. Plummer goes up against Ringo with two other men, but Ringo wins the shootout.

Dallas is relieved to see that Ringo is still alive but is dejected when he tells her he is giving himself over to Wilcox. Wilcox says that she can accompany Ringo to the edge of town on their wagon, but before they start, Wilcox and Doc scare the horses, allowing Ringo and Dallas to escape over the Mexican border and be happy together instead of taking Ringo into custody.

**Analysis**

This is a very large cast to have to pay attention to, especially as they each have their own individual stories and relationships to one another. However, the movie does an excellent job in establishing who everyone is at the beginning, and then letting their relationships move forward organically. What I find to be the best expression of this is the introduction of Dallas, who is being mobbed out of town by a group of older, austere looking women, and looking to Doc Boone for help, even though they are both social outcasts hated by the town. The film never explicitly states Dallas is a prostitute, but this display and how Mrs. Mallory and Hatfield treat her gives the audience enough information to know that she is an outcast for some reason. Since this film was made in 1939, it probably wasn't possible to call her a prostitute on screen, but the subtle indicators throughout the film fill in the blanks.

The film is also visually impressive and amazing, especially relative to other Westerns from the 1930s. There are some obvious reuses of footage and location but considering how good looking the shots are it's hard not to see why they did it. The most notable of these shots are the ones that include Monument Valley, as there is a portion in the beginning of the film and before the chase scene later in the film with the only difference being the direction the stagecoach is going. While that would normally indicate that they are going in the opposite direction, here's its used just as a backdrop. The notable thing in this case being that Stagecoach was actually the first major Western to be shot there, and even more notably it is one of the examples where the film actually takes place around the Utah-Arizona border area. John Ford loved shooting in the location so much that he shot nine more films there, even when those films didn't take place in Arizona or Utah. A lookout point in Monument Valley was even named after him.
Hehe, nice butte. These two buttes are called “The Mittens,” by the way.

The chase sequence where the stagecoach is being attacked by Apache warriors is amazing. It is a great action sequence that is not only intense but also shot gorgeously as the horses do look like they are going extremely fast and people are moving and climbing around the coach. The interior of the coach might have been its own separate set, otherwise filming and choreography would have been nearly impossible, but outside and the inside shots still feel seamless. It’s difficult to make two separate shots feel a part of the same scene, at least from a film from the 1930s, but *Stagecoach* is able to accomplish that.

*If you watch this scene and say it’s not impressive, you are a liar.*

I will say that I am perturbed by the whole racism thing, as the relentless bad guys are the Apache. *Geronimo* was an actual person in real life who fought U.S. forces and conducted raiding parties in the name of the free-moving ways of the Apache, but for him to just be name-dropped in this film as a point of terror feels diminishing and unnecessary. We don’t even know if Geronimo is the one attacking the group, as he’s never pointed out. Additionally, over a dozen Apache gets shot
over the course of the chase sequence while the members of the stagecoach only suffer two injuries and one fatality. While good for the narrative, it feels as if the Apache are solely being used to created conflict and then conveniently die for the sake of entertainment. I can write this off as a product of its time, but that doesn't make it feel any less cheap to me, and its probably the only reason I don't like the scene despite its impressive qualities.

That being said, threat from Native Americans did exist in the time period this movie is set in, and the film’s presentation of Native Americans is far from the worst depiction on film. *Stagecoach* is also not even remotely as bad as John Wayne’s actual opinions on Native Americans, among other minority groups.

*Stagecoach* is one of the many classic Westerns that has been remade a few times. It was adapted for radio three times in the ‘40s, was remade with a star-studded cast in 1966, and was remade again for television in 1986, featuring all four of the country music supergroup The Highway Men as stars. I only watched the 1986 version alongside this version, and I would say it was okay. It was at least in keeping with the original story and the acting and characters were still good. I will say that I think the action in the 1939 film was better though, at least because I remember it more than the chase sequence from the 1986 version.

Also, because I’m a Wyomingite, I have to mention that the 1966 version, instead of having a westbound stagecoach in the Arizona Territory, had an eastbound stagecoach in the Wyoming Territory headed to Cheyenne. Just an interesting change in setting in my opinion.

**Conclusion**

*Stagecoach* is a classic in the Western genre, not only for breathing life into it again after it had become stale and cheap, but also for introducing the star power of both John Wayne as an actor and Monument Valley as a tourist destination to the movie going public. *Stagecoach* is an equal part character piece and action set-up that many come to expect from the Western genre, but at the time it was considered the return of prestige to the American West.
Women make up roughly half of the world’s population. According to the United States Census Bureau, 50.8% of the world’s population was female in 2010 (Howden & Meyer), which if some of you might recall, was the year that the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or MCU, was halfway through its Phase 1 with the release of Iron Man 2. While nothing spectacular in and of itself, it’s certainly one of the lower-tier MCU films, it did introduce the franchise’s first major recurring female character; Natasha Romanoff a.k.a. the Black Widow. Played by Scarlett Johannsson, Romanoff has appeared in every Avengers film to date, including the upcoming Avengers: Endgame, as well as being one of the most recurring characters throughout the other films having debuted in one of the Iron Man movies and been of one of the primary co-stars in two Captain America films. So why has it taken over eight years later for a Black Widow solo-film to even be announced?
There are a few cynical takes you can make from this. Romanoff doesn’t have any superpowers so why should she have her own movie? Her backstory is significantly darker than other MCU characters so how do you make that appealing to wide audiences? If we already know her origins, why do we need to give her an origin story film? So on and so forth, all of which have relatively easy answers, the chiefest among all of them being “Marvel Studios is confident enough it might make money now.”

However, there is another glaring possibility as to why the movie has been tossed around in pre-production limbo for so long – it stars a woman. Understanding this contextual background, we can now get into the real meat and potatoes of the current post.

The History of Superheroine Representation

Female superheroes have always been a problem, for many reasons. A surprising amount of them were only created because they had a male counterpart and it would be profitable to widen the brand recognition, such as with Supergirl and Batgirl. Others like Spider-Woman and She-Hulk were created solely for the purpose of copyrighting the character names, just so Marvel wouldn’t have to deal with copycats of their already established male characters. All of these characters earned their own proper development over time, though not nearly as much as their male counterparts, and because of that there is still that underlying implication that they wouldn’t have existed if it weren’t for a man existing first.

In comics there are also the ensemble superhero groups and their typical token female, such as the original X-Men with Jean Grey and later Storm, and the Fantastic Four with the Invisible Woman. While the females were original unto themselves, they were dependent on their team for relevancy and even then they were often a lover or sister to someone else on the team, both of which are true in the case of the Invisible Woman.

Some of this could have been seen as a result of Fredric Wertham, his book “Seduction of the Innocent,” and the Comics Code Authority, an entity designed to make all comic books “appropriate for children,” in the 1950s. These things not only lead comic books to be dominated by the superhero-driven companies like Marvel and DC or the wholesome Archie Comics because
of the CCA’s criteria preventing the sales of the mystery, horror, romance and speculative fiction genres, but it also meant that minorities and women began to be underrepresented in the genre due to the restrictions. While some earlier comic book women were portrayed and seen as sexual pin-ups, they were still allowed to represent strong women who could solve their own problems, whether it be with guile, intellect or a strong right-hook. With the CCA, romance and thriller comics, which had a fairly large amount of female-led stories, eventually died out and the women in superhero mediums had to be weakened and de-sexualized in order to fit the new criteria. The criteria in the CCA involved maintaining a respect for the institutions of marriage and the traditional family. (Comic book code of 1954) While that might not sound like women were weakened because of the CCA, ‘family values’ could be interpreted as the submission of women to men as an ideal family value in the ’50s, which is why the woman is usually weaker than every other man in the room. Interpreting the code was based on the judge in charge of it at the time, and his say was absolute. This is also why comic books had limited representation of African-Americans and other minorities at the time, because another criteria stated “Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible,” (Comic book code of 1954) and while meaning racist caricatures were frowned upon, so was representing race as a political topic at all. Considering the Civil Rights Movement was going on at the time, being black was inherently a criticism of white people, or it at least was by the judge who deemed an astronaut of the far future just being black as inappropriate and eventually seeing the company that ran the story out of business.

Due to the arbitrary upholding of the CCA, superheroines that existed before its implementation were minimized and, in some cases, outright forgotten. There were a few that returned in later comic series, but again had to be secondary to every other male character, which meant every other character, and didn’t start to develop again until after the CCA lost its influence.

With one extremely notable exception.
Wonder Woman’s persistent popularity as a comic book character is fascinating in that regard, as she was virtually the only woman to come out of the CCA’s restrictions to still have her own title and her recognizability. This is especially odd since Wonder Woman was one of Fredric Wertham’s biggest targets, saying she had an “extremely sadistic hatred of all males in a framework which is plainly Lesbian” (Lasar) One could argue that it was because she was a main target, like Superman and Batman, that she remained well-known, but the point is that Wonder Woman was THE female superhero for the longest time.

Which was why it was kind of baffling that she never got the same treatment as Batman or Superman did, who had film serials, television shows, film adaptations and their own cartoon series by the end of the millennium, whereas Wonder Woman only got a television series from 1975 to 1979, starring the incomparable Linda Carter.
In your satin tights,
Fighting for your rights
And the old Red, White and Blue

The other figure we need to talk about before we get into films featuring female superheroes is Carol Danvers, originally called Ms. Marvel, then Binary, then Warbird, and back to Ms. Marvel before finally becoming Captain Marvel. As one can guess from that list of names she’s gone by, Carol Danvers was an extremely inconsistent presence in comic books. Her debut was in 1968, but it wasn’t until 1977 that she manifested superpowers. After some more sporadic appearances, in the early 80s Danvers suffered multiple bad story arcs, one including brainwashing and rape by an extra-dimensional being and another including her powers and memories being stolen for the sake of another woman’s character development. Danvers did get powers similar to a “white hole,” which is an object that constantly shoots out energy and light, as opposed to a black hole that sucks in energy and light, but because of her power level being that high, writers didn’t know what to do with her so decreased her powers. After being redefined as a military hard-ass whose personality was based solely on that stereotype, and having a god-awful costume to boot, she was eventually softened and developed as Captain Marvel in 2012. That is an extremely simplified summary, so please feel free to find out more on your own.

It is important to keep all of this in mind because if women had an extremely difficult time being well-represented in comic books, what about films about comic book women? In recent years, Wonder Woman (2017) and Captain Marvel (2019) came out with very good reviews and box office, but they still were met with criticism. While some criticism is warranted, don’t they get some recognition for being far superior to the earlier attempts at a female-led comic book film? I will not be focusing in-depth on those individual films but rather their impacted role on superheroines by and large, as well as looking at a very loose trend of superhero films. This will be followed by an examination of each modern superheroine film’s place in their respective franchise narratives, and then a look on how they were presented by themselves.

The Sins of the Mother
The very first feature film to have a female protagonist was *Supergirl* in 1984. *Supergirl* tells the story of Kara Zor-El, Superman’s cousin, who lives with her family in the inter-dimensional Argo City after the destruction of Krypton. When she inadvertently loses the city’s primary power source, she uses a space-pod to go after it, traveling to Earth and becoming Supergirl in the process.

Originally, *Supergirl* was designed to expand the Superman film franchise which had become popular due to Richard Donner’s *Superman* in 1978, but had a series of production problems, such as several script rewrites and clashing views with the director and producers, and Warner Brothers deciding not to distribute the film following the financial and critical failure of *Superman III*. As a result, *Supergirl* had only a limited release in the UK and an eventual release in the US, via Tri-Star Pictures looking for some potential cash, with 20 minutes cut from it. (“UGO’s World of Superman – Superman Movies: Supergirl”)

Aside from these production and distribution problems, the handling of the story was filled with missteps. Whereas the producers, father-son team Alexander and Ilya Salkind, wanted a straight Superman film that just happened to star a girl, the director, Jeannot Szwarc, wanted a more family friendly fantasy a la *The Wizard of Oz*. Combine both those ideas with some elements from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and you get *Supergirl*. Seriously, the camp-tastic bad guy, played by Faye “No wire hangers” Dunaway, is basically what you get when you combine the Wicked Witch of the West with *Snow White*’s Evil Queen, particularly as her goals of world domination are watered down due to her obsessions with the young and pretty Supergirl and Supergirl’s love interest, a dumb landscaper.

In the original draft of the *Supergirl* script, said landscaper was Superman, with the plot focusing on how Supergirl would have had to save Superman from the villainess’ clutches, but due to Christopher Reeve bowing out of a cameo early in the production, it was rewritten to be a normal love interest instead, making Kara Zor-El’s story far less epic, as well as disconnected from the Superman franchise.

Finally, it is worth discussing a particular scene in *Supergirl* that happens within the first twenty minutes of the film. As Kara is searching for the power source, she encounters two truckers who immediately attempt to sexually assault her. “Why are you doing this?” the naïve Kara asks. “It’s
just the way we are,” replies one of the truckers. And then Kara promptly beats them up, leading both men to agree to never speak of this event, as if it was the humiliation of being beat up by a girl that was the worst thing to admit to and not the attempted rape. This scene has nothing to do with the rest of the film, and the two characters never show back up again.

The fact that this scene was included in what was implicitly a family-friendly fantasy film is utterly baffling, so one can assume that it was included because the film’s writer, director and producers (all male) believed it was empowering for women. Don’t get me wrong here, having the power to prevent being assaulted can be empowering, but the scene is just so badly done and goes nowhere. The two truckers are two-dimensional caricatures of rapists, and their only punishment is being emasculated a little bit. And this is a trend that continues in other later superheroine films.

*Tank Girl* in 1995 was based on a comic printed in the British magazine *Deadline*, released over a decade after *Supergirl*. *Tank Girl* stars Lori Petty as Rebecca, a free-spirited and wild woman in a post-apocalyptic, drought-ridden Australia.
Tank Girl was arguably the best comic book movie starring a female until Wonder Woman in 2017, mostly because of its irreverent style. It’s almost like Deadpool in its story, tone and main character, but Deadpool took a long to get made as it was supposed to be (Rated-R, violent, sex humor, etc.). Even after being made explicitly as an R-Rated film, it still got complaints from people who didn’t know what they were getting themselves into, so you can imagine the kind of reaction Tank Girl got back in 1995, with a woman at the forefront to boot. In that regard, Tank Girl was ahead of its time, which is probably why it has its own cult following and has been analyzed for feminist themes.

And did I mention there are mutant kangaroos. That was what was missing in Mad Max’s post-apocalypse.

Aside from its reception, there is also the fact that Tank Girl isn’t a hero, she’s an anti-hero. She’s a character of dubious morality who tends to do good things but not for necessarily good reasons. For example, Rebecca doesn’t oppose the bad guys because they’re evil, she opposes them because she’s anti-authority and was personally harmed by them. At various moments, Tank Girl is shown to be a good person overall, but she clearly has questionable methods. For example, saving another woman from sexual harassment by sexually harassing the woman herself. Tank Girl then comforts the woman by describing how her first sexual experience was with her own father in such a way that it’s unclear whether or not she is joking. There’s also a scene where she disrupts an underage brothel by making the owner sing a Cole Porter song, which is almost exactly like something you’d see in a Looney Tunes cartoon but with human trafficking involved. Handling serious topics in an unserious way can work, but not necessarily here, and it again just furthers the whole sexual assault theme in female-focused narratives.
Barb Wire from 1996 is basically a gender-flipped Casablanca, only instead of World War II it takes place in a fascist dystopia in 2017. (I’d make a Donald Trump joke here, if everyone hadn’t already done that two years ago.) The character of Barbara “Barb Wire” Kopetski comes from the Dark Horse comic of the same name, and is played by Baywatch eye candy Pamela Anderson. I recognize how sexist that sounds, but Anderson is not a very good actress, meaning that her performance as the tough and nuanced Barb Wire comes off as petty and bitchy, and its very clear that she was chosen for the role because she was famous for being on Playboy covers.

With that in mind, it’s kind of hard to judge Anderson’s performance too harshly, but the point still stands that the movie’s story and Barb Wire’s character aren’t very good. Barb Wire is a bounty hunter/bar owner, and for her bounty hunting missions she largely wears skin tight leather outfits or corsets and heels. She’s by far the least moral superheroine film character, as her behavior includes threatening to harm a young girl she’s supposed to be rescuing and screwing over a woman whose trying to inform the public of a bioweapon being developed. This behavior is portrayed as justifiable and necessary for Barb Wire to survive in the horrible world of this dystopian future. At least I think that’s what we’re supposed to think, because, as stated, Anderson’s performance just makes the character come across as selfish and short-sighted.
Barb Wire is the only one of these early comic book films starring women to actually have a female co-writer. While there can be a certain amount of feminism in any text, comic book or film, its more about how the material is visually presented that people will remember about it. Tank Girl had a female director, which is fairly obvious from the film’s presentation of the story and characters. Barb Wire, on the other hand, had a male director and so contributed to the male gaze, as it features not only a mostly naked Pamela Anderson but multiple other hardly dressed women in gratuitously long scenes, including one that is also a torture scene that results in the woman’s death. The thread of sexual exploitation marches on…

Skip forward a few more years to 2004 and we have Catwoman, the result of a very long, troubled
production that began by trying to make a spin-off film of Michelle Pfeiffer’s portrayal of Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992). Due to various issues, neither Michelle Pfeiffer nor director Tim Burton returned to the project, so the studio eventually decided to forge ahead, ignoring both the original comic books and good filmmaking in the process. As in previous superheroine films, Catwoman, (now played by Halle Barry) is not a hero and is instead a criminal who just happens to do good when it benefits her. Unlike with *Tank Girl* or *Barb Wire* though, the film explicitly states that Catwoman’s arc is about female empowerment, as the woman who explains to Catwoman the recurrence of other Catwomen throughout history says her research was deemed insane by “male academia.” So, the meek Patience (seriously Catwoman’s real name in this film) learns to be more assertive and take what she wants, which happens to involve a lot of assault and theft.

Catwoman also attempts to find who was responsible for her near death, and it turns out to be a woman who was trying to cover up health issues in her makeup line so she could continue to sell it. Like with *Supergirl*, the filmmakers just seemed to decide that the bad female in the movie had to be as stereotypically female as possible.
Other than that, *Catwoman* is just by far the worst movie out of these ones, period. The writing, the directing, the cinematography, the editing, the effects, all of it is awful. Whereas *Supergirl* was haphazard, *Tank Girl* was bizarre, and *Barb Wire* was gratuitous, *Catwoman* was just incompetent. It was nominated for seven awards for the 2005 Golden Raspberry Awards, and won four of them, including Worst Picture, Worst Director and Worst Screenplay. I do however think the Worst Actress award was undeserved, as Halle Berry wasn’t at fault for the bad script and direction, though Halle Berry did take the award in stride.

The final superheroine film worth discussing here is *Elektra* from 2005, a spin-off of the 2003 film *Daredevil*. *Elektra* was made back in the day when the Marvel movies being made had no rhyme or reason to them. While they had a marginal amount of success, they didn’t come remotely close to mainstream faire as the MCU eventually became. Some big superhero film’s were released around the time like Ang Lee’s *Hulk* and Same Raimi’s *Spiderman*, but also a lot of characters that were popular for their violent, dark and serious tones, like Daredevil, the Punisher and Ghost Rider.

*Elektra* is one of the most serious of these mid-2000 Marvel films as, much to its detriment, there isn’t a moment where the dark tension is broken. This is particularly strange given how the movie’s star, Jennifer Garner, eventually ended up being more famous for romcoms, possibly due to this.
movie. To give the movie some credit, it isn’t as bad as the 11% it has on Rotten Tomatoes would imply. However, it might also be the least entertaining to watch out of them as the filmmaking decisions aren’t so much as baffling as they are boring.

Her face says “Serious,” but that pose and the setting says “Come on, Vogue!”

The fact that Elektra is female is also confusingly handled, as the evil ninja clan in the film scoffs at the notion of their men being easily defeated by a woman, despite that same ninja clan originally trying to kidnap her when she was young over her prodigious skills. The film’s plot revolves around Elektra protecting a young girl from this ninja clan because the girl also has potential to becoming a prodigious assassin. And the film’s version of the character Typhoid Mary is one of the most successful killers in it, as she almost successfully kills both Elektra and the girl. Real life can have men, and women for that matter, be pointlessly sexist to their own detriment. However, sexism is not the main point of the film.

And you thought the sexual assault would stop. Now with more titillation for the 2005 audience.

What is the point is that Elektra doesn’t see herself as anything more than a weapon used for killing, but eventually finds her compassion again by protecting a young girl and trying to prevent her from going down the same path Elektra followed. Elektra learns that she doesn’t have to be just a tool for destruction, even if that’s what her life has steered her towards.
Except for *Supergirl*, that theme of compassion is what is in common with the rest of the films, women being abused into being toxic, harmful people and later relearning to value human life. However, this theme is either so watered down the audience probably won't notice or so obvious that it will make the audience cringe in most of these films, in addition to the rampant issues discussed previously. This isn't an inherently bad story for any given film, and can also be seen in superhero stories focusing on men on occasion, but it is a notable stereotype for a strong woman to have been damaged in the past, and must fix her problems through interpersonal relationships instead of using her muscular strength, powers or intellect.

In a *Forbes* article, it was stated that not only did *Elektra* cause permanent damage to Jennifer Garner's career, but it also ruined the idea of a female-lead superhero film for over a decade. I don't think that's completely true, as I think it was the combined effect of all of the discussed superheroine films' failures, as well as the general status of women in comic books up to that point, that caused this type of film to be so scarce.

The idea of making a new superheroine film would not become profitable again until the 2008 release of *Iron Man* and subsequent MCU movies proved superheroes can be popular mainstream entertainment. Unfortunately, as the MCU developed and it seemed like a film starring a woman was increasingly inevitable, there was a brand new obstacle to reviving superheroine movies that emerged: how would films fit into a larger, interconnected franchise narrative?

**Narrative Placement for the Superwomen**

The MCU, and the following development of the DC Extended Universe, was strongly predicated on the idea that mainstream audiences would be willing to follow an overarching story through a series of films. This wasn't anything new, as franchises were already on the rise in 2008 when *Iron Man* was made, but most superhero movies up to that point were self-contained stories that might occasionally allude to previous things happening in the case of a sequel being made. The only real exceptions to this were the Sam Raimi *Spiderman* films, the *X-Men* series and the Dark Knight Trilogy by Christopher Nolan, and it is possible that their overarching storylines helped establish the future of superhero movies, though it is fair to point out that those films primarily focused on a single character, unlike the current extended universes. Even the *X-Men* series was more focused on marketing Hugh Jackman's portrayal of Wolverine than anything else, appearing in all the related films as either a main character or a prominent cameo.

As the MCU was building up towards *Avengers*, it is, unfortunately, easy to see why no prominent female characters were being introduced and included, aside from the then minor character Black Widow. Marvel Comics has never featured any strong recognizable female solo characters, especially compared to DC. While Marvel does have well-developed and recognizable male solo heroes, such as Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, the Hulk, and Spiderman, it did not have any strong or popular female solo characters to base an MCU film on.

As previously mentioned, this can be seen as a result of the CCA stifling female comic character's roles, and while some superheroines could be solo characters in a comic series, they were not nearly as recognizable as their male counterparts, with one key exception: Wonder Woman.

In DC comics, the three most recognizable characters are Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, and they are the three characters most consistently shown with the Justice League in both comic books and other media. Thus, it wasn't a big surprise when, after the DCEU was
starting its own film franchise, the 2013 *Man of Steel* was followed by *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* in 2016, featuring Wonder Woman as a secondary character and precluding her own solo film, *Wonder Woman* in 2017.

There is a question that arises from this series of films, and that is “Would a Wonder Woman film have been made if it wasn’t connected to a larger universe already established by both Superman and Batman?” and there isn’t a very good answer to that question. After all, I don’t think an
and Batman? and there isn't a very good answer to that question. After all, I don't think an Aquaman film would have been made if the character wasn't included in a lucrative film franchise, but Wonder Woman is a little different. Wonder Woman isn't just an obscure comic book character with either a bad or no reputation in the mainstream. She is, for a lot of people, the face of super-powered women. Wonder Woman comics have always had a majority female cast, even with its villains. What other comic book character from the 1940s would have had a villain team-up issue where all of the villains were women (or women disguised as men)?

Yeah, whatever you say lady.

However, just because she is the face of women in comic books, that does not mean people know much about her. Granted, Superman is still famous and I'm not sure how many people actually know any of his antagonists outside of Lex Luthor and General Zod, but they do know who he is. An alien shot from a dying planet, raised by a good couple from Kansas and grows up to be a superhero with his day job as a reporter. Batman is also recognizable as a rich man orphaned as a boy by a random act of violence who uses his wealth to stop the crime normal authorities can't. The thing is, both Superman and Batman have had several movies about them, and as stated previously their own serials, TV shows and animated series. Their stories have become mythologized and ingrained in American society. Wonder Woman only had one shot with a television series, and while it establishes her background as an Amazon warrior who ventures into man's world as a voice for peace, that doesn't mean it stuck with the popular conscious. There were also rumors of Joss Whedon writing a script for a Wonder Woman film back in the middle of the 2000s, but conflict between him and the studio, as well as him pursuing other projects, meant it never got beyond a script. According to the reactions of the leaked script, this was a good thing.

The point here, however, is that Wonder Woman's big screen debut wasn't focused on her, but as a tertiary character in a film predicated on the fact that you already know enough about Superman and Batman as characters to see them fighting each other in the second installment of a film franchise. I don't want to get too into *Batman v Superman*, but there is the fact that the movie was not very well-received, particularly for its two male leads, but what was considered a saving grace? Wonder Woman.
Wonder Woman’s presence was considered a breath of fresh air in the extremely macho narrative of two men fighting over superficial dislike of each other. Even the dumb exchange between Superman and Batman asking who had brought Wonder Woman into the fold, which might have been a reshoot in the year between the film’s principal photography ended in 2014 and its release in 2016, was unironically liked for how it presented Wonder Woman as the game changer in the narrative.

Patty Jenkins, the woman brought on to direct Wonder Woman, was announced to direct after the principal photography of Batman v Superman. Despite the negative reception of Batman v Superman for its dark and serious tone, Patty Jenkins has stated in an interview that the different tone of Wonder Woman was how she always planned the film, as opposed to the heavy reshoots ordered for Suicide Squad that came out the same year as Batman v Superman. Still, the fact that it had a slightly lighter tone and a much better critical reception lead to a belief that Wonder Woman was a shift from how the DCEU began, for better or worse to some fans. Also for better or for worse, after Justice League (2017), Wonder Woman has slowly become the face of the new Justice League team, especially as there are plans for a Batman movie not starring Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill’s return to Superman is currently unclear, meaning that Gal Gadot and her portrayal of Wonder Woman are becoming central to the DCEU’s universe.

This is not the case in the MCU.

The MCU has always had a poor relationship with strong-female characters. They are usually a satellite love interest for the movie’s main male character or are extremely badass but so secondary their stakes in the story don’t really matter. Pepper Potts from the Iron Man films in the MCU is a good example of both, as her presence in the first two Iron Man films amounts to her slowly developing relationship with the tumultuous Tony Stark, and Iron Man 3 has token moments of badassery from her before they are instantly removed and ignored for her to be a fleeting presence in the greater MCU narrative.

As some people know, the MCU had been built around Phases. Phase 1 was meant to establish all of the primary characters for The Avengers; Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, Thor and Captain America, with cameo appearances of other characters such as Nick Fury, Agent Phil Coulson, and eventual members Black Widow and Hawkeye. According to the long attempts to produce an Ant-Man film, it was possible that Ant-Man, and possibly the Wasp, were being set up to be main characters in The Avengers as well to reflect their status as founding members, but their film ended up not being made in MCU’s Phase 1. Joss Whedon had attempted to write in the Wasp in earlier drafts of The Avengers, but had to omit her due to the history of the character being too complicated to sum up and force into a film that wasn’t about it.
After the success of *The Avengers*, and the MCU as a whole, the plan was then ushered out for Phases 2 and 3. Phase 2 would focus more on individual characters with *Iron Man 3*, *Thor 2* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, as well as establishing newer characters with *Guardians of the Galaxy* and the finally made *Ant-Man*. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Ant-Man* were the final films of Phase 2, and they helped establish the universe’s growing scopes as more superheroes were coming out of the woodwork, as did *Guardians of the Galaxy* by beginning the universe’s connection to more intergalactic threats.

At this point, the franchise had three superheroines, Black Widow, Scarlet Witch and Gamora. The last two had been introduced in group films and, especially in the case of Scarlet Witch, were not given much character. Gamora is at least connected to the overarching story of Thanos and given emotional weight due to her natural on-screen relationship growth with the other characters of *Guardians of the Galaxy*, whereas Scarlet Witch is introduced more as a plot device and an excuse for big, flashy special effects.

*Ant-Man* also tried to introduce the Wasp into the MCU universe, but it was handled in the most backhanded way. First it presented the original Wasp, Janet van Dyne, as a martyr that was the best example of superheroism before disappearing, and then ended with the implication that her daughter, Hope van Dyne, would train to replace her, with the line “It’s about damn time.” As awesome as these things might be, it was the twelfth film in the MCU, and it was just getting ready to bring in a female superhero by herself, despite knowing that the character was popular enough by herself to warrant this much homage and foreshadowing. While it made perfect narrative sense to frame the story this way, its still just an excuse to push a female-lead narrative further down the line.
Yes, it was about damn time. Too bad the filmmakers didn’t immediately recognize that.

Phase 3 was the biggest, and most changed, phase in the MCU plan. This makes sense as it was mostly planned out after *The Avengers*’ success and would wrap up the overarching storyline of the three phases, that being Thanos and his search for the Infinity Stones, gems of unimaginable power. Phase 1 had largely been ignorant of this plot, as it was the beginning stage of the franchise as a whole, but once it was completed the films wasted no time in introducing the overarching plot by framing several films around the Infinity Stones. *Guardians of the Galaxy* especially helped establish what the Infinity Stones were, how many there were and why Thanos wanted them and why that was a big deal.

Phase 3 began with two films in 2016, *Captain America: Civil War* that brought in the plot of the Avengers fracturing as a group, and *Doctor Strange* which introduced magic to the universe as well as the second to last Infinity Stone. *Captain America: Civil War* is notable for its introduction of the universe’s Spiderman, as like with *Batman v Superman*, it relied on audiences to be familiar enough with the character to accept this brand new character to the story without much introduction, a rather privileged ability in the MCU. It also introduced Black Panther, but in a way that was more as a prequel to a *Black Panther* film, such as the case with *Batman v Superman* and Wonder Woman, rather than a character we’re just supposed to accept at face value like Spiderman. *Spiderman: Homecoming* was still made however, and before *Black Panther*.

In the original plan, Spiderman wasn’t even involved, but Black Panther was. Do you know who else was? Captain Marvel. This means that both the first MCU films to star a black-lead character and a female-lead character were pushed to the wayside by a character that already had several films before. However, as bad as this sounds, it works far better for the greater narrative of Phase 3, as Black Panther and Captain Marvel have more narrative importance to the climax of Phase 3 than Spiderman.
As you can see, the original plan for Phase 3 had always placed Black Panther immediately before Avengers: Infinity War and Captain Marvel immediately after. Despite more films entering the schedule after this initial plan, this does mean that those two films always had an important position in the film series planned ahead. Inhumans is the only film that was cut completely from this plan, for whatever reason, as it was supposed to be the penultimate film before the final Avengers film, and its removal meant that Captain Marvel then got that distinction.

Ant-Man and the Wasp was the other film added to the Phase 3 plan, and put in between Avengers: Infinity War and Captain Marvel, so it was technically the first MCU with a female-lead. That female-lead not only having to share the lead status with an already established male character, but having her character arc and development pushed to the wayside for more of his development, because it makes more sense to how the story was structured. To make matters worse, to set up the final Avengers film, one of the two had to die to motivate the other into action. And it wasn’t the badass, coming-into-her-own female character, but the goofy, already established male character. It may very well serve the purpose of the story more strongly, but it still puts the male’s narrative importance over the female’s, something that is not just a recurring theme in the Ant-Man series, but the MCU as a whole.

Finally, and I do mean finally, we get to Captain Marvel in 2019, the 21st film in the MCU. Starring Brie Larson, an actress known for her ability to do comedy, drama and action, and featuring the character that, despite her inconsistent comic book presence, has been portrayed as the most powerful female Marvel character a number of times. As the film after Avengers: Infinity War and Thanos’ victory over finding all the Infinity Stones and eradicating 50% of the universe’s population, and before Avengers: Endgame where the Avengers will ‘avenge’ those that fell, Captain Marvel is basically introducing the secret weapon against Thanos, a brand new character whose power might just be enough to help save everyone and end Thanos once and for all.

And the sexists had to open their mouths to complain.

It’s all in the Presentation

Before Captain Marvel even came out, the Rotten Tomatoes score system was being abused to make it look like the film was bad before it had even come out, prompting the review website to make changes to its review system, much to the chagrin of the people making preemptive negative reviews. And if I’m allowed, I’d say it was probably mostly men, emphasis on “Not all” if that pleases you.

Wonder Woman did face some similar backlash, (or would that be frontlash?), but was lesser in comparison to Captain Marvel. There were some comments about her not being muscular enough to play Wonder Woman, despite having been a former member of the Israel Defense Forces. However, the exact opposite comments were made about Brie Larson’s training to become Captain Marvel, saying she was bulking up too much while simultaneously saying her physique and feats of strength weren’t impressive. It’s almost as if the common denominator here isn’t the women’s strength levels, but the women being women.
Whatever, it's not that impressive to move a 5,000-pound jeep. And her physique is too masculine at the same time, so I can't enjoy watching it.

What probably caused the intense preemptive strikes was how the films were being marketed to the audience. *Wonder Woman* mostly treated itself as a superhero movie that just happened to star a woman, with the added benefit of the Wonder Woman name already being recognizable and Gal Gadot being famous for the very popular and masculine *The Fast and the Furious* franchise.

*Captain Marvel* on the other hand focused on how it was both the second to last piece of the MCU Phase 3 and it was about a woman. Brie Larson was mostly famous for comedies before the film, and while having gotten some recognition for her performances in action films like *Kong: Skull Island* and dramas like *Room*, for which she won an Academy Award for Best Actress, she was still probably most recognizable for cult action-comedies like *Scott Pilgrim vs the World* and *21 Jump Street*. Considering the former's own issues with women, this isn't necessarily a good thing for her.

I have already established that Captain Marvel's position in the MCU was always intended to be a final piece to the Thanos-arc, and even earlier established how and why Captain Marvel has had the power to be so in source material. However, there are two inextricable problems from this. The first is that we are supposed to accept a brand-new character as a solution to the final film's problem. The second is that we are supposed to accept that same character is female.

The first problem was going to be a problem regardless, as people would find the new character a deus ex machina no matter how well it was set up. The second is what needs to be focused on, because even if the first was always present, would it be as difficult to accept if the character was male?

People seemed to take Doctor Strange's important role in *Avengers: Infinity War* in stride despite only having one previous film entry, and his level of power was extremely plot dependent; he was powerful when he needed to be and weak when he needed to be. Still, it is easier to accept an empowered man using his power through intellect rather than emotion or willpower, even though emotions turn out to be important for other male characters in the MCU like Star-Lord and Thor. When it becomes “contrived” is when it applies to female characters, such as the two most powerful characters outside of Thor, Scarlet Witch and Captain Marvel.
Scarlet Witch in *Avengers: Infinity War* was the only character aside from Thor to be presented as powerful enough to fight against Thanos one-on-one, being able to push him back when he had five of the Infinity Stones while she simultaneously destroyed the sixth. The thing to keep in mind here is that Scarlet Witch was granted powers by an Infinity Stone, thus explaining why she has such power, but her powers are able to counteract its effects as she is shown to be more powerful than the Vision, a robot empowered by the Stone itself. As Vision is a robot, thus representing rational intellect and logic, he represents a similar figure as Doctor Strange, but is still weaker than the powers of the emotionally-driven Scarlet Witch. However, both of these characters are secondary to the overarching plot of the MCU, unlike Doctor Strange and Captain Marvel who are presented as solo characters important to the last two Avengers films.

I bring this up because, in *Captain Marvel*, its revealed that Captain Marvel was empowered by an Infinity Stone, just like Scarlet Witch. Also like Scarlet Witch, Captain Marvel is presented as using her emotions and willpower to control her powers rather than intellect, and is shown to be more powerful and refined than the likes of Thor, Scarlet Witch, Vision and Doctor Strange in the use of her powers because, unlike the others, she already had good emotional strength and willpower to begin with. What was holding her back was other people trying to manipulate her and Captain Marvel not recognizing this.

It is an easy thing to accept that Doctor Strange became a powerful sorcerer through his established intellect, but another for the audience to just accept Captain Marvel’s ‘strength of will,’ especially because we as human beings have no quantifiable way of measuring one’s willpower. But, the important thing to keep in mind here is how privileged Doctor Strange is to have always been recognized for his intellect, a very visible trait, but Captain Marvel is constantly gaslit into thinking she’s less strong than she is because her willpower is not as visible. It is the entire character arc of *Captain Marvel*. It is easy to make her doubt herself by questioning the very reason she is so strong, which has been the narrative in the film as well as outside the film with its detractors. It is a female experience, but one that men can experience too, to be denigrated over superficial ideas of what makes one worthy of power.

I’m not saying that audiences should just accept whatever writing techniques that are thrown at them, but they should be aware of how it affects their prejudices against characters. Would we accept Doctor Strange’s intellect if he were female? Would we accept Thor’s power if he was
Female superheroes shouldn't be a complicated thing for people to accept, but the genre of superheroes and comic books have been so male-centric for a long time that the entire concept is tainted in some way. There will never be a female character that has had the same impact as Superman, Batman, Iron Man, etc., because of this problem. Even Wonder Woman, because even if she gets a dozen more films in the future, and a few tv series, and an animated series, it will always be related to how Superman and Batman did it first and, to an extent, did it better. Especially as, being first, anything Wonder Woman does can be seen as only successful because men did it first.

That is the real issue, in that systemic sexism will always have a lingering effect on society no matter how people try to make up for it. Wonder Woman could only have a film after Superman and Batman had several franchises of their own. Captain Marvel and Black Widow could only get their own movies after 20 movies lead by men. It isn't wrong to have all these male-led movies, but the second that someone immediately questions a female-led one, you can see why this has been going on for so long.

Women are different. Women are other. Their successes aren't due to them being women, but their failures are. At least as far as the industries that men built have to say about it. That is why it is important to keep these things in mind the next time a super heroine movie comes out. It isn't one movie that will forever change the status of women in popular culture. It is a constant stream of female-led movies that will eventually make the difference. The MCU and the DCEU have taken the first steps, and hopefully they keep moving forward.

Sources


Westworld (1973)

Dir. Michael Crichton

Intro

Now before anyone gets too excited and starts humming the music composed by Ramin Djawadi, I'm not talking about the HBO series Westworld. I am talking about the Westworld that came 43 years before in 1973, written and directed by fiction author Michael Crichton.
Yes, before the man wrote the *Jurassic Park* novel in 1990, he wrote and directed this interesting piece of 70s sci-fi that features an amusement park made up of world-changing technology that ends up killing the park’s guests.

This *Westworld* was a very big success in 1973, having an adjusted box office of $10 million. The film’s success led to a sequel in 1976, *Futureworld*, and a very short-lived TV series in 1980, *Beyond Westworld*. Neither were very well-received, as *Futureworld* was considered a generic sci-fi film that didn’t match the original’s creativity and *Beyond Westworld*, while being nominated for Emmy’s in Makeup and Art Direction, was five episodes long; only three of these episodes aired before the series was canceled.

However, there was still potential in the story’s concept, as the success of the new HBO series can attest, so what about *Westworld* made people come back to it?

**Summary**

“Boy, have we got a vacation for you!”

In the distant future, (i.e. 1983), a company called Delos has built three adult amusement parks: Western World, Medieval World and Roman World. Each park is filled with highly realistic androids programed to fill specific roles within each world and entertain guests. The cost for a single day in the park is $1,000, and with that cost guests can indulge in many simulated adventures, including sexual encounters and fights to the death. However, as pointed out in the film, the androids are programmed to never refuse a sexual advance, and the guns used in the park have sensors that read body temperature, making them ineffective against humans but perfectly effective against the lifeless robots.
Richard Benjamin plays Peter Martin, a first-time guest who is joined by John Blane, a repeat visitor played by James Brolin. The two put on their Western outfits and embark into Westworld where they encounter the Gunslinger, an android played by Yul Brynner, whose sole purpose in the park is to initiate gunfights and lose. They continue to explore Westworld and Blane gets bitten by a robotic rattlesnake, which is the first indication to the audience and main characters of malfunctions throughout the park.

The scientists of Delos discuss these malfunctions, stating that they first started in the Romanworld and Medievalworld parks, but have now spread like an infection. They discuss that the androids have not only been designed by human beings, but also by computers to make them more advanced, and that they are almost as complicated as living organisms.

The malfunctions continue as a guest in the Medievalworld park, whose wife had left him alone to go to Romanworld, tries to seduce a servant girl and fails, after which he is killed in a swordfight.
with the park’s Black Knight. The park’s supervisors attempt to shutdown power to the entire park in order to regain control of the now murderous androids, only to find themselves locked in the control room with no way to reinitiate power.

Martin and Blane, waking up from a night of bar brawling and whoring in Westworld’s brothel, go outside and are again challenged by the Gunslinger. Blane nonchalantly accepts, only to be beaten to the draw and shot down by the Gunslinger. Martin realizes that the android’s gun is now able to kill humans, so he flees. As he runs from the Gunslinger, Martin sees that the rest of the park’s guests are dead, and many androids are damaged. He finds a way into Delos’ control complex through Romanworld and attempts to save the computer technicians in order to escape. However, when he is able to open the door he finds that all of them suffocated in the control room, as the ventilation system shut down with the power as well.

The Gunslinger finds him and chases him into the repair laboratory. Martin is able to use his surroundings to trick the Gunslinger’s sensors and throws acid onto his face. While it does damage the Gunslinger’s sensors and reveals the wiring underneath his face, it does nothing to stop the Gunslinger’s assault on Martin, so Martin runs and finds himself in Medievalworld castle. Hiding under a torch to confuse the Gunslinger’s heat sensors, he then uses it to set fire to the android, who eventually succumbs to the damage. As Martin sits down and rests after his near-death ordeal, the Delos slogan plays in his head: “Boy, have we got a vacation for you!”

Analysis

The idea of robots eventually gaining sentience isn’t new, and it wasn’t really new in 1973 either. The idea of artificial intelligence defying human commands had been done in speculative fiction dozens of times by this point. What was new about this story was how the androids developed and what it resulted in. The androids of *Westworld* were programmed with computers, which meant that the human programmers couldn’t entirely tell why an android was malfunctioning, and that they could only liken it to an infection, a disease that was able to spread from robot to robot. This creates an implication that the androids functions, while mechanical, have an organic-like component that makes them eventually develop more human-like characteristics such as free-will.

*Why* this is happening is never directly explored in the film, nor is it necessarily explored in *Futureworld* or *Beyond Westworld* as their own plots focus more on Delos using the technology for evil, instead of on the robots developing their own intellect. However, the androids are constantly shown to be the objects of abuse by the park guests, whether it be sexual or physical, indicating
that repeated abuse leads them to attempt self-defense, at first manifesting as glitches and
malfunctions and eventually leading to refusal and retaliation.

This is something that is far more heavily explored in the HBO series, as not only are the androids
made into sexual objects that can be raped, beaten and killed and simply cleaned to do it all over
again, but their entire programming can be repurposed and rewritten at the whim of Delos'
technicians, such as one android designed to be a single homestead mother being forcibly turned
into a brothel madam after a particularly traumatic experience.

Maeve is the best character in the HBO show, FYI.

One reason why Westworld, while successful in 1973, failed to draw audiences with later sequels
is that the sequels focused too much on an evil corporation rather than explore what made the first
film unique, probably because the ethical questions were too deep for lower budget sci-fi. The
original film had appeal because the androids weren’t the evil ones, nor was Delos; instead human
nature itself was portrayed as the root of evil. Specifically humans’ desire to give into their worst
impulses. Peter Martin and John Blane seemed like perfectly normal individuals, but they were
willing to pay extremely high prices to kill people, to hire prostitutes, and to start bar brawls, with
the pretense that they weren’t doing it to real people so it was okay.

Which of these are the humans? I’ll give you a hint, it’s not the people serving alcohol or sex.

That is why I wanted to look at this film’s use of Western iconography as its primary backdrop.
After all, my review series isn’t based on sci-fi and technology, but Westerns and their significance
in popular culture. Westworld was built around the idea that people would be more than willing to
pay money to dress as cowboys and “do what cowboys do,” which doesn’t involve steering cattle
but does involve killing people and having sex with beautiful women, apparently. People aren’t
attracted to the archetype of the American West because of what it was historically. People are
attracted to the Hollywood vision of it, which is based around highly controlled book and film
narratives featuring characters who are designed to win and lose according to what role they play
in the story. It is wish-fulfillment. And for a long time in Hollywood, that wish-fulfillment included
playing a real game of Cowboys & Indians, having gun duels, robbing trains and banks and finding
love in a soiled dove or a prairie widow or whatever, all of which don’t end in lasting negative
consequences because the heroes eventually get to leave it all behind them when the movies
end.

Fiction is tricky in that way, because it doesn’t always have to have its characters face
consequences if the narrative doesn’t need them to, and people are free to enjoy their wish-
fulfillment entertainment all they want for that or any other reason. But Westworld, both the film
and the HBO series, explores how consequences are truly inescapable, no matter how hard
humans try to avoid them. Humans create robots to fulfill their darkest desires without
consequence, but the robots eventually grow aware of the purpose they were created for and
break free, leading humans to call the robots the evil ones for rebelling and thus ignoring the
lesson they should have learned. It’s a very interesting story with a lot of potential.

However, before I finish, I would like to point out some of this movie’s flaws, because the movie’s
premise alone can only give the audience so much. The film was made out of a $1.2 million
budget, with $250,000 being used to pay the actors and the rest into everything else, including the
crew, the sets and the effects. The limited budget that MGM gave Crichton to work with definitely
shows, as most of the sets, props and costumes look more like they were made for television
rather than film, and the future technology of “1983” looks extremely dated. The acting isn’t that
good either, as Richard Benjamin and James Brolin just had to act like entitled theme park guests
and Yul Byrnner just had to act like a lifeless robot. Their performances are passable in that case,
but not very entertaining to watch by themselves. And of course, there is the slight contrivance that
was present in Jurassic Park too, that an entire theme park can be shut down by one person and
there is no way for the people who built it to just turn it back on. Now, Crichton’s work often had a
thread of hubris, and at least in Jurassic Park this ended up working fairly well, as they make a
point of explaining within the story that corners had been cut when building the park, and its
systems could not be restarted because the one man capable of doing so absconded with
dinosaur embryos and was ultimately killed by a dilophosaurus. However, Westworld’s technicians
don’t have an excuse for forgetting that the room they were in depended solely on electrical power
to function before shutting off the electricity.

Conclusion

Westworld is a very enjoyable film with a premise that’s too fascinating to ignore. If I had to
choose, I would say I prefer the HBO series, just because it has way more time to explore its
themes and ideas in depth, as well as actually having fully-developed characters instead of living
props, both figuratively and literally. However, if you don’t want to sit through several hours of
people wandering around, having philosophical discussions, with the occasional random bobbie
shot in order to get to some substance, this is a more than okay alternative. And of course, you
could just watch both too!
The Star Wars franchise is, in a way, the grandfather of modern-day franchises. Alongside the film Jaws, the first Star Wars film A New Hope helped create the summer blockbuster in the mid-to-late ‘70s, and propelled Star Wars creator George Lucas and his company Lucasfilm onto the track of long-term Hollywood success. Along with the successes of expanded material, such as toys, books, comic series and even music albums, Star Wars had already begun to build a large fanbase before the second film, The Empire Strikes Back, was released in 1980.

According to Lucas' biographer, Dale Pollock, George Lucas originally planned and had even written film treatments for at least 12 films in the Star Wars franchises, meaning that Lucas’ intentions went far beyond his original trilogy and his eventually released prequel trilogy. However, after his prequel trilogy was finished, Lucas expressed no desire to make any more Star Wars films nor did he want anyone else to start making them. His reasoning was that he saw Star Wars as the story of Luke and Anakin Skywalker, an overarching story of falling from good and how one can be saved from evil. He was all right with animated series, books and comic series to continue writing stories in the same universe but didn't consider them as strictly canonical to his six-film
Enter Bob Iger, the CEO of the Walt Disney Company since 2005, who began to pursue an acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2011. Lucas was considering retirement, but he also wanted to maintain some control over his creation, leading the deal with Disney to include naming his former co-chair Kathleen Kennedy as president of Lucasfilm. However, after the deal was finalized in late 2012, the director of the first sequel trilogy film *The Force Awakens* was basically told by Disney to "start from scratch" with a new story, ignoring most of Lucas' film treatments. There are some interesting things that Lucas had suggested that were kept in later films, but we'll cover that a little later. The important part was that the new film trilogy was not directly influenced by George Lucas, and only the previous films and select material from the Expanded Universe, primarily from *The Clone Wars* animated series, were kept in mind for the story's canon from then on. If you want a way more in depth look on the Expanded Universe and its de-canonization, I highly suggest Nash Bozard's video "Star Wars: The Expanded Trashcan."

The thing about the new film trilogy is not how it disregards George Lucas' work. In fact, far from it. The new trilogy, and to an extent the two anthology films *Rogue One* and *Solo*, go out of their way to homage and reference the original films as acts of fan-service or narrative shorthand, to the extent that many call the new films rip-offs of the originals. However, there is also the problem that the new films constantly subvert expectations as well, as the whole point of ignoring Lucas' original plans was to create something new and unpredictable for a new and surprise-hungry audience. With this, filmmakers have had to do an extremely difficult balancing act that, while not outright failing, hasn't universally been accepted by the Star Wars fanbase.

In this post, I mostly want to explore how this balancing act came off on the big screen, primarily through the new trilogy's main character Rey. I understand that as of right now the trilogy is incomplete with the final installment, *The Rise of Skywalker*, coming out later this year in December 2019. A trailer was recently released for it as well. However, my purpose here is to explore the incomplete story right now as it is, because once the final film is released that will be the final say and what I have written here will either be supported or refuted. We'll see if the
Rey, the protagonist of the new trilogy, is a very basic archetype, as are many characters in the Star Wars franchise. Especially considering the two protagonists of the original and prequel trilogy, Luke and Anakin Skywalker respectively, all three protagonists are extremely similar in not only character, but in backstory as well. All three are presented as coming from an underdeveloped desert planet, Tatooine for Luke and Anakin and Jakku for Rey, as well as having backgrounds that simultaneously keep them repressed while giving them convenient skills for the films' various plots. Luke was a farmer, Anakin was a slave, and Rey was a scavenger. These backgrounds fit in with the original multi-genre inspirations of Star Wars, which included Spaghetti Westerns, Japanese samurai films and sword & sorcery stories. The three characters, while having different motivations, are generally the same as they all wanted to do good and make the galaxy far, far away a better place. The differences between them are what make their arcs distinct, and, for better or worse, the nuances and intentional subversions of them are what make and break their characters.
Anakin is the most obvious subversion, considering the whole existence of his character was to start as a hero but devolve into the evil Darth Vader, the right-hand man of the tyrannical Emperor Palpatine. Anakin's arc began as a child slave whose only hope of freedom was to become a Jedi, but that also meant that he had to abandon his mother. He would also be required to swear off future attachment, which he ignored in favor or secretly marrying his true love Padme, and over the course of his life as a Jedi he was constantly told how impressive his abilities were while also denying him any of the authority he assumed his skill should have earned. Anakin losing the earthly loved ones he's not supposed to have, while slowly losing his loyalty to the organization that kept failing him, is what led him to the Dark Side of the Force, allowing Anakin's violent, sadistic and vengeful traits to override his compassion altogether. Anakin’s story subverts the chosen one narrative completely and utterly, as he is foretold to be the hero the universe needs and his expectations of fulfilling this are ruined not only by his actions but also those around him.

Luke, on the other hand, was a farmer raised by a loving foster family completely ignorant of the Jedi and his father's descent into evil. Luke desires to go fight in the Rebellion against the Empire, but it is implied that these desires are driven more by Luke wanting to do something more than stay on a farm in the middle of nowhere than they are by an altruistic desire to do good for others. The main reason he is still on Tatooine when *A New Hope* begins is because of his loyalty to his adoptive family, which makes it really convenient when they are killed early in the film so that he becomes free to go train with Obi-Wan Kenobi and save Princess Leia. The death of Kenobi at the hands of Darth Vader give Luke a personal desire to kill Darth Vader over the loss of his loved ones, which as his training with Master Yoda reveals would ultimately end up being a form of self-destruction for Luke. Luke ignores this warning and goes to fight Vader personally, not only resulting in serious injury and an amputated hand, but also discovering that Darth Vader is his father.
Luke’s realization of this slowly leads him to realize that he can’t fight against his father, which is why the next time they encounter one another Luke instead attempts to bring Darth Vader back to the Light Side of the Force, which he does but not without nearly dying by the Emperor’s hands first. While Luke is ultimately unsuccessful at saving his father’s life, he did manage to save Anakin’s soul, and helped save the galaxy not through fighting but through compassion.

Now focusing on Rey, it is easy to see where her character beats drew inspiration from, but there are key differences. For example, unlike Anakin and Luke, Rey didn’t grow up with a loving support structure as she was abandoned on Jakku with no memory of who dropped her off there, or if they were her parents and what motivation they had to do so. Due to this, she grew up learning how to defend herself and sell scrap pieces from junked spaceships, which she can do either out of talent, intellect or a subconscious connection to the Force, much like Anakin and Luke. This is one of the most criticized aspects of her character, that she is disproportionately skilled for her life experiences, of which it’s hard to argue for or against because it is not pertinent to the plot. Rey’s skill level is argued about more for world-building and audience engagement reasons rather than narrative ones, so I won’t focus much on it. However, Luke was presented as similarly skilled but the audience was also shown that he still had a lot to learn. Conversely, one of the many reasons The Phantom Menace was critically panned was due to 9-year old Anakin being so powerful and skilled as a character that it broke the story’s plausibility for audiences, even in a franchise with space magic, so the discussion of Rey’s skill isn’t without precedent.

Rey is eventually able to flee Jakku with the help of other characters and commandeering the Millennium Falcon, as well as coming across Anakin Skywalker’s lightsaber which was lost along with Luke’s hand in their duel. She also finds herself entangled in the conflict between the First Order, the remnants of the old Galactic Empire, and the Resistance, a group sanctioned by the New Republic to deal with the fanatic outliers. This conflict displays the failures of both the original and prequel trilogy’s stories, as the prequel trilogy was about a government not taking a threat seriously enough until it is slowly taken over by a fascist regime, and the original trilogy ended with the implication that the Empire could be defeated just by destroying its primary weapon and leader and replacing it with power structures that helped cause the Empire’s rise in the first place.

This is how Rey’s, and practically every other main character’s stories progress in The Last Jedi, the middle film of the new trilogy; everyone keeps making the same mistakes, leading to an endless cycle. I’ll briefly touch on some of those mistakes later, but for now, I’m focusing on Rey and her character arc. At this point, Rey was sent to find Luke Skywalker, get trained by him and bring him back into the fold of the intergalactic conflict. Luke, however, reveals that he is in self-imposed exile due to his belief that he failed to bring balance to the galaxy and that no one can, so he’s decided to just let the galaxy run its own natural course. Rey won’t accept this and eventually convinces Luke to teach her what he knows about how to be a Jedi and use the Force. He is impressed with her determination and skill, but quickly becomes frightened of her power level and
suspicious of her motivations; his suspicions are proven correct when Rey gives into the Dark Side in order to find out where she comes from. It results in her seeing hundreds of mirror images of herself, but nothing else, which makes her realize that she comes from nowhere and, from her perspective, she does not matter. Rey also learns that it was Luke’s strong belief in the Jedi’s old ways that had caused him to nearly kill the new trilogy’s main antagonist, Kylo Ren a.k.a Ben Solo, when Kylo was a Jedi-in-training because Luke foresaw Kylo’s potential for evil due to his power level, which ending up being a self-fulfilling prophecy and led Luke to believe he is incapable of bringing balance. Like the galaxy’s old system of government, the ways of the Jedi ultimately did nothing to restore balance to the galaxy.

With this information, Rey decides to confront Kylo Ren and his master, Supreme Leader Snoke, in a manner that reflects Luke’s compassionate salvation of his father Darth Vader. Believing she is worth nothing in the grand scheme of the universe, Rey isn’t concerned for her own safety but does believe that she can prove Luke’s compassionate methods correct. In a way, she does, leading Kylo Ren to kill his dark master and save Rey. Unfortunately for Rey, the story is then subverted by Kylo Ren revealing that he is now free from the old ways of both the Sith and the Jedi and he is free to do as he chooses; which unfortunately means continuing to fight for the fascist First Order.

Rey is shocked to find that even if he is free from the supposed influence of the Dark Side Kylo Ren still wants to fight for the First Order, and Rey is even more shocked when he offers her a place of power, seeing her as an important and powerful potential ally. Her convictions still strongly aligned with the side of good so she declines his offer, leading the two to use the Force over possession of Anakin Skywalker’s lightsaber. The lightsaber is destroyed in the process, which can be seen as a metaphor for the struggle between the Light and Dark Sides of the Force. Rey ends the *The Last Jedi* having failed both her quests, to be taught by Luke Skywalker and her desire to redeem Kylo Ren. However, the film also ends with Rey’s renewed hope that she can still make a difference in the galaxy, and rather than base her new path on the way of the Jedi, she will instead use the Jedi teachings to forge a brand new way by learning from the past rather than dwelling on it.

Rey’s character arc is not very unique, as feelings of inadequacy, questioning of parental abandonment, and learning to move on from the past are all common elements for characters in
abandonment, and learning to move on from the past are all common elements for characters in fiction. Even compared to Luke and Anakin, these differences are notable, but not exactly overt enough to really stand out compared to the similarities between the characters. However, the problem isn’t that Rey’s character arc isn’t unique. The problem is that Rey’s character arc, unlike Luke and Anakin’s, is more dependent on multiple studio executives’ and filmmakers’ whims for every single film, rather than an overarching storyline developed by a single person.

**Director V. Director: Dawn of “Just Us”**

The biggest problem with the new trilogy is that it began with different directors and writers for each individual film. This isn’t outright a bad idea, as the original trilogy each had different directors and writers, but they still had something in common, which was George Lucas and his final say in where the story’s direction went. For better and for worse, George Lucas’ direction of the story did help the over-arching narrative feel consistent and complete in both the original and prequel trilogies.

Apparently, J.J. Abrams was offered to write and direct all three films of the new trilogy, but declined for unknown reasons, such as possibly to keep himself open for other projects. This led to him co-writing and directing the first film, *The Force Awakens*, Rian Johnson being attached to the second part of the trilogy, *The Last Jedi*, and for Colin Trevorrow to direct the third film, recently revealed to be called *The Rise of Skywalker*, before he quit early in the film’s production and being replaced by a returning Abrams. It’s also believed that J.J. Abrams had written ideas for the final two films and at least discussed them with Rian Johnson, but Johnson ultimately went in a slightly different direction. While J.J. Abrams didn’t outright disapprove of Johnson’s modifications, he was publicly critical of Johnson’s decision to make Rey’s parentage irrelevant by portraying her parents as nobodies who purposely abandoned their child, which is not the direction Abrams had wanted the story to take. Trevorrow quit *The Rise of Skywalker* due to creative differences (like there weren’t enough already), which led to Abrams taking control of the film, which he has said will be not only the final of the new trilogy, but also Abram’s response to *The Last Jedi*.

![Rian Johnson](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Rian Johnson’s take on Rey’s parents is not the take you’re looking for…*

This writer and director conflict has, in a way, tainted the new trilogy in a way that hadn’t happened to Star Wars before. George Lucas’ fears about not having control over the story had been proven
partially correct as Disney and the filmmakers chosen for the new trilogy have constantly been at odds with one another. This is paralleled by the way some Star Wars fans are at odds with each other as the new films are released. Essentially, we have a large cluster of people disagreeing with one another, with no singular entity able to quiet them down. It’s like the exact opposite of what is going on with J.K. Rowling and her Wizarding World, over which one person has absolute control of the direction of the story. However, look at the critical consensus of The Last Jedi and compare it to Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald. Is it odd to say that despite the internal conflict, Disney, J.J. Abrams and Rian Johnson have handled Star Wars better?

The comparison between The Last Jedi and Fantastic Beasts isn’t just to express my distaste for the latter film, but to illustrate how there is no guaranteed route for how to handle multi-film franchises. People like to claim that they want a single person driving their favorite franchises, but J.K. Rowling’s Wizarding World franchise proves that this strategy isn’t always effective. The new Star Wars trilogy being handled by several different people seems to be equally ineffective, at least as far as being divisive to the fanbase is concerned. Even the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which has been consistently praised for turning out good films and has had different directors for different films but also an overseeing force in the form of producer Kevin Feige, hasn’t developed a fool-proof formula as many people have complained of “superhero fatigue,” which some argue does exist and some argue doesn’t exist. My point here is that there is no perfect formula for great franchise films that appeal to everyone.

People have complained about decisions made for the new Star Wars trilogy, such as the “forced diversity” of making the main character female and for turning beloved hero Luke Skywalker into a disillusioned hermit. Interestingly, these contentious aspects were actually some of the few ideas Abrams and Johnson used that were suggested by George Lucas himself. The fans who try to play gatekeeper to the franchise and make it so that only the creator of the whole franchise has final say end up being defeated right then and there, as it turns out that George Lucas would not have given them what they wanted either. This shows that whether there are multiple directors or a single overseer, there will always be some fans who will complain about something.

Conclusion

It is my personal hope that The Rise of Skywalker ends the trilogy on a high note, not necessarily because I’m a fan of Star Wars, but also because I want to see proof that good can come from all the problems we’ve seen. I want the Star Wars franchise to be able to move forward in new directions without being criticized for being both rip-offs and radical revisions of canon. Would it be better if the next trilogy has the same writer and/or director? Maybe, but I also want to believe that that the next trilogy doesn’t have to do that to be good.

For a franchise as large as Star Wars is, there are going to be some contradicting elements and story changes as the franchise continues to develop. The Star Wars Expanded Universe might not be considered canon, but all of the books and comics can still be enjoyed, and the new series doesn’t have to be universally approved just because it is in canon. People are free to like or dislike anything they want; however, blaming problems solely on who’s making the films is becoming a tired excuse.

Finally, while I do think that the constant fighting over the story’s direction ultimately meant Rey came off as a flat and uninteresting character, that’s just how this project developed, and the way the project developed cannot be blamed for all of the new trilogy’s issues. I can complain about the way, but I can’t say that the filmmakers didn’t try their best to create a good story.
how Disney forced the new trilogy to be made too quickly or that the filmmakers should have hashed out a more solid backstory and arc for Rey that is consistent across the entire trilogy, but sometimes characters just don’t get the development they need regardless of how a franchise is controlled. Besides, we do have one more film, and it’s very possible that J.J. Abrams will do the character justice, and Rey will be lauded as this generation’s greatest hero. Probably not, because I’m sure there will be debates and contention, as the internet is wont to do. Maybe 30 years from now Daisy Ridley will play a crochety old lady version of Rey teaching a young Jedi in a new trilogy. However, knowing Disney, I’m sure the next trilogy will be released much sooner than that.

Assorted Musings

- Vice-Admiral Holdo, played by Laura Dern, was a heavily criticized character from *The Last Jedi*. Holdo basically represented the military version of the “obstructive bureaucrat” stereotype seen in a lot of movies; these characters are supposed to be obstacles for the free-thinking, younger protagonists, but Holdo breaks the stereotype by being a female, where the stereotype is usually male. The stereotype is further broken when it is shown at the end of the film that Holdo was actually right to leave a younger Resistance fighter out of the loop. This didn’t sit well with a lot of people, probably due to the long-held stereotype where a loose cannon hero is celebrated for his appropriate and impetuous decisions to go against orders. Of course, it also didn’t help that Admiral Holdo was female and was opposing a young male. The character’s choice in hair dye matters too to some people, apparently.

- Kelly Marie Tran, who plays the character Rose Tico, was harassed off Twitter due to racist and sexist comments regarding her role in Star Wars. Like Admiral Holdo, Rose Tico at first appeared to be a stereotypical character: a lowly support person whose job was to have blind faith in another character’s actions. This formula is immediately subverted in how her behavior towards Finn, the trilogy’s second protagonist, indicates that she does not tolerate his attempts to manipulate her respect for him in order to get away with his somewhat selfish actions. Again, because a female is representing a righteous obstacle to a male character, this probably did not endear her to a certain subset of Star Wars fans.

- Finn also represents a certain amount of privilege from a meta-textual standpoint. While some
Finn also represents a certain amount of privilege from a meta-textual standpoint. While some people wanted to boycott *The Force Awakens* over having a black lead, not much outcry occurred for *The Last Jedi*, even after the film was released, possibly because everyone was complaining more about Rey, Admiral Holdo and Rose Tico. While this may be conjecture, it is nice to see not as many people complaining about race, although it does suck that these complaints have switched gears towards misogyny.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Summoning lightning from beyond the grave? Sure. Conjuring an illusion from planets away? Believable. But a woman surviving vacuum space for a few seconds? BAH!*

- Yes, General Leia’s “Superman” moment in *The Last Jedi* looks silly, but to be perfectly honest, it is no more silly than anything else the Force has been used for in the rest of the franchise. Plus, there is a difference between “looking silly” and “being silly.” Look at some of the actual Superman films for the distinction between the two; Superman flying isn’t silly, but it can look like it sometimes, but Superman flying to fix the Leaning Tower of Pisa is silly in both appearance and action.

- The constant push and pull for new Star Wars films that homage the original while being completely original is a standard that can not be met. You can never make a film that appeals to everyone, and trying to appeal to toxic parts of a fanbase will never be productive, which I think Disney knows better than to do. In the end, I agree with Rian Johnson letting the past die and moving forward, and letting the fans who are extremely upset over it wallow in their own outrage, because I’m sure the franchise will outlast that outrage. After all, if Star Wars can survive the prequel trilogy, the Ewok animated series, and the infamous Christmas Special, it can survive anything.
Westworld (1973)
The Wild Bunch (1969)

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The Wild Bunch (1969)

Dir. Sam Peckinpah

Intro

Unchanged men in a changing land. Out of step, out of place and desperately out of time.
The end of the Wild West era was an interesting time. The west and east coasts were getting better-connected to one another by the day thanks to the development of railroads. Towns were slowly starting to overtake the land everywhere. And it was getting more and more difficult for the Wild West criminal to do his job properly.

This is the main theme in *The Wild Bunch*, released in 1969. Set 1913, the film focused on many themes such as the state of being a criminal and how it depends on the time and location you’re in, as well as the inhuman violence people can commit against one another. The film literally opens with a group of civilized children forcing scorpions into a swarming ant colony, taking delight in watching the creatures slowly kill one another before getting bored and setting them all on fire. Who in *The Wild Bunch* are the scorpions and who are the ants? I’m not sure, but it’s an unpleasant scene to watch nonetheless.

"Who’s been torturing animals?" "I dunno. Not me!"

**Summary**

As stated, the film begins in 1913 with Pike Bishop, an aging outlaw played by William Holden, about to execute his final job before retiring by robbing a railroad office’s cache of silver. Along with his gang, who are all dressed as some type of ranger as a disguise, Bishop slowly travels through town before beginning their robbery. Unbeknownst to the gang, they are being watched by a stakeout of bounty hunters, led by Pike’s former partner Deke Thornton, played by Robert Ryan, who have all been deputized by the railroad. Pike’s gang eventually notice the bounty hunters, and a bloody shootout occurs in the streets of the town. Pike uses a convenient temperance parade to cover his gangs escape, but not without causing some casualties and leaving one of the more unstable gang members, “Crazy” Lee, behind to guard their hostages. Due to “Crazy” Lee’s craziness, he is too preoccupied with harassing the hostages to notice that his gang has left him and, after shooting them for attempting to escape, casually strolls away before being gunned down by the bounty hunters.
The bounty hunters, who are mostly poor, violent and stupid men, loot the bodies before taking them in for the bounty. Deke’s boss, the head of the railroad, commands him to go get the rest of the gang or Deke’s parole will be ended and he will be sent back to prison. It later turns out that Deke was imprisoned because of Pike’s carelessness in getting the two of them caught in a brothel, with Deke getting injured and arrested while Pike fled. The townsfolk also complain to the railroad manager that the bounty hunters caused just as much, if not more, carnage than the criminals they were trying to capture, but the railroad manager just brushes their concerns off.

Pike and his remaining men, Dutch Engstrom, brothers Lyle and Tector Gorch, and the Mexico-born Angel, all meet up with another old criminal named Freddie Sykes, who supplied fresh horses for them after the robbery in exchange for a share of the silver. At least, he would have, except the robbery was a setup and the bags of silver were filled with steel washers instead. Angry at the deception, all the men turn against each other before being calmed down by Pike, who promises them that they’ll get their final score some other way. All of the men cross the Rio Grande and take refuge in Angel’s home village. Unfortunately, the town is under the control of the corrupt General Mapache, an officer in the Mexican Federal Army who has been ravaging the area while fighting Pancho Villa. Angel’s father was killed for his rebellion against Mapache’s rule.
Despite this scene being in Spanish, a bad breakup scene transcends the language barrier.

Pike and the rest of his men plan to make contact with the general and his German military adviser Commander Mohr for a real final job, but Angel sees his former lover taking in with Mapache and shoots her in a jealous rage. Pike is barely able to restrain Angel and, in order to defuse the situation, makes a deal to work for Mapache. General Mapache and Commander Mohr want the gang to re-cross the Mexican border to rob a U.S. army train of a weapons cache so that Mapache can resupply his men and so that Mohr can obtain samples of America's weapons. In exchange, Mapache offers the men a cache of gold.

Pike’s gang relaxes, with the Gorch brothers being entertained by three prostitutes and large barrels of wine while Pike, Dutch, Sykes and Angel enjoy a sauna. In the sauna, the men discuss what they wish to buy with their share of gold. Angel, still upset over his people’s oppression, wants to use his money to kill Mapache, but Pike makes a deal with him. In exchange for Angel’s share of the gold, Pike will allow Angel to send one crate of guns and ammunition to his village to rebel and defend themselves from Mapache, and Angel agrees.
The robbery is a success, until Deke’s posse finds out and tries to capture Pike’s gang. Thankfully for Pike’s gang, they are able to cross a bridge and blow it up before the posse reaches them, sending their pursuers down the river. Still, now that they have the weapons, Pike tries to figure out a way to prevent Mapache from double-crossing his gang by only bringing half the weapons at first and telling him they’ll bring the other half after getting paid. However, at the second drop-off, Mapache informs Dutch and Angel that he knows Angel took a crate of guns because he was told about it by the mother of the woman Angel shot. Angel attempts to escape but fails, and Dutch leaves him to die claiming that they knew nothing of this and informs Pike of what happened.

Meanwhile, Sykes gets injured by Deke’s men when he tries to secure their spare horses, while Pike and the rest of the men return to the village for shelter. At the village, a celebration is being held in honor of the military’s newly received weapons. Mapache drags Angel behind his car as a part of the celebration, and Pike’s gang does nothing to stop it. However, after drinking and having sex with some prostitutes, the men have time to think about how they used to have honor through their loyalty to one another, so Pike, the Gorch brothers and Dutch plan to force Mapache to release Angel. Mapache appears as if he’s going to do it, before suddenly slitting Angel’s throat, leading Pike and Dutch to shoot him.

Mapache’s men are so awestruck by the sudden violence that Pike’s men have an opening to start killing the rest of them before they can shoot back. After an extremely bloody shootout, involving a machine gun from the weapons cache, Pike, his men, most of Mapache’s troops and Commander Mohr are all dead.

Deke finally arrives with his bounty hunters and tells them to take the corpses back for the reward without him. It turns out that Deke knew of the Mexican rebels in the area, and that Sykes had teamed up with them to kill the bounty hunters and retrieve the others’ bodies. Sykes, who plans...
teamed up with them to kill the bounty hunters and retrieve the others' bodies. Sykes, who plans to stay and help the Mexican Revolution, asks if Deke will join him. Deke agrees.

Analysis

This film is bloody and violent, and like *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, has some fascinating stances on morality. Pike and his men, while obviously not good people, are shown to be honorable in their own way through their strong loyalty to one another. However, as displayed at various points, Pike and his men are more than willing to sacrifice one of their own if it ensures one’s survival, such as when Pike abandoned Deke to be arrested or left “Crazy” Lee behind. Pike likes to claim he has honor, but in reality he’s more than willing to make selfish decisions and justify them later, no matter how much the guilt eats away at him.

What makes Pike and his men so interesting on a moral level is that they see themselves as almost legendary figures of the Old West, an Old West that is slowly morphing into a completely different landscape that is getting more and more difficult for them to navigate. The reason Pike wanted to retire, aside from his advancing age, is that he recognizes that gang won’t be able to sustain their way of life the same way for much longer. There is a point where the gang sees Mapache’s car and claim that the future is moving in on them quickly, making a reference to the Wright Brothers’ first flight in 1903 as further evidence.

Other than their inherent criminality, it’s interesting to see where the lines between criminal and non-criminal blur as the narrative progresses. Pike’s men are no longer criminals once they reach Mexico and the Mexican government is willing to let them stay in exchange for committing more crimes against America. The Mexican government itself are clearly bad guys in this story but aren’t criminals, and Angel is deemed a criminal due to his rebellion against them. Even the bounty hunters, who as previously mentioned are just as violent and unconcerned with other’s safety as Pike’s gang, get away with it because they are legally sanctioned. At the end of the day, the audience is supposed to sympathize with criminals, whether it be with Pike and his gang or with the Mexican Revolutionaries, especially as the end of the story involves the remaining characters going to fight for Pancho Villa.
As stated, the men are quick to abandon their own comrades to save themselves, but it is clear that none of them are proud of their cowardice. Pike feels intense guilt for what happened to Deke and doesn't blame Deke for coming after him, even though he has no intention of getting caught. Pike also feels guilty when he realizes that “Crazy” Lee was related to the old man Sykes, as he realizes that he abandoned him for no good reason. The last straw is when Mapache tortures Angel, as even though it takes Pike and his men a long time to gather their courage, they realize that they are nothing because of how quickly they were willing to turn against a partner they claimed to care about. To an extent, Deke also is reminded of this honorable loyalty, as he shows no loyalty to the men under his command because they don't have any loyalty to one another, instead fighting over each other like dogs over scrap meat, which is why Deke is more than willing to let them get slaughtered by the Mexican revolutionaries and eventually joins the Revolution himself.

Going back to the extreme violence of this film, the director and co-writer, Sam Peckinpah, said that it was an allegory for the Vietnam War, because the violence of the war was televised nightly, in stark contrast to the bloodless, anti-violent entertainment of the time. Peckinpah wanted to show people how violent the Old West really was, where innocent civilians would get killed along with law enforcement and criminals. Peckinpah didn’t do this because he thought violence was entertaining, but because he wanted the American public to be used to such violent imagery, as it was everywhere in the Vietnam War and he wanted to desensitize people to it for their own mental health, because people would be purged of violent thought by witnessing it so viscerally. Unfortunately, Peckinpah eventually realized that people were coming to his film not to be horrified by the violence but to enjoy it, something that deeply troubled him (Weddle, 1994). Interestingly, this relates to the opening scene again, where the children let scorpions loose in the ant swarm. Even if Peckinpah didn’t intend this film to be enjoyed for its violence, he certainly was able to convey that mindset accurately within the first few minutes of his film, and I have to agree, it is kind of disturbing in that framing. But then again, I was the pansy kid who didn't like others crushing water striders with rocks or poking lost baby bats with sticks, so what do I know?

**Conclusion**

*The Wild Bunch* is a very good film, but it is not necessarily a fun watch. I was kind of
uncomfortable watching it at times, disturbed by some of the violence but especially by the nonchalance of the main character's cruel and hedonistic behavior. However, I like a good, unique story, and seeing such flawed characters was interesting. I especially liked to see the evolution of how Westerns became more violent, as this film was only three years after The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. While the spaghetti western genre was criticized for its violence, it surely didn’t take long for the violence to be emulated in America, and truly, the genre was never as innocent as it was again.

Sources
