360°

Hail Dumbo!

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https://youtu.be/N9v6VJLZ8_I

Our thinking is that most of America is on hold until the Election is over. In other words, half of you are sitting over here fiddling while Rome burns, and the other half are sitting over there, fiddling while Rome burns. Since either way we've got gnashing of teeth with Rome continuing to burn, we thought it timely to go back to another era just before Rome was actually getting ready to be torched. See the video above.

Second, we also want to highlight a few movie clips that could get you reflecting on your own worldview. We will do this today primarily by taking a close look at a movie from two of our favorite movie screenwriters, directors, and producers, Joel and Ethan Coen (the Coen Brothers). Since culture is supposedly upstream from politics, we thought self-reflection before the 2020 Election Apocalypse might be helpful, might inform why we're upstream together in culture without a paddle. These are crazy times!! In any event, fooling around with movies isn't a bad time-sink alternative to fiddling whether you are Yo-Yo Ma, Charlie Daniels, Sarah Chang, or Alison Krauss.

Three of our favorite Coen Brother movies are *The Big Lebowski* (1998, Box Office $47 million), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000, Box Office $72 million), and *Hail Caesar!* (2016, Box Office $64 million). These are terrific worldview films because they're all about regular American characters on zany life journeys with kooky but somehow significant moral character and purpose. Sound familiar? Yep. There is no generally-accepted normal person with the Coens. They allow us to have fun looking at ourselves, where the heroes in every case are regular, well-intended Dudes and Dudettes.

We have featured *The Big Lebowski* several times already; so, if you've been following our blog, you know we have a particular love for the Dude and his best friend, Walter Sobchak, and a particular aversion for worldview nihilists. The bottom line with *Lebowski* is we're still bothered

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by America's worthy adversaries, the Cong, and haven't gotten over the nihilists killing Donny; talk about evil, even if it was an accident. But Walter Sobchak dispensed with them.

Furthermore, in time, we know we'll give *O Brother* at least the same level of attention. For now, however, we'd simply like to warm you up for today's big attraction, *Hail Caesar!*, with *Oh Brother*'s wonderful scene centered around the *Down in the River to Pray* Gospel song (Alison Krauss), where Delmar gets baptized and redeemed. We are all desperate sinners and, as Ulysses says, "Everybody's looking for answers."

We're all on that good ol' journey. Convicts. PC Pirates. Thieves. That's the attitude. That's real America. Let's get on with it. Once cleansed, we can do better. Enjoy!

https://youtu.be/ZCnmYSIzZBc?list=TLGGdY6ByTSmBvEyMjAzMjAyMg

We picked *Hail Caesar!* because we think it has particular relevance in delightfully portraying in a retro way our current ongoing struggle between America's founding principles (we have many such posts discussing them and will always be expanding there), Marxism, and cultural Marxism. (Also, we don't claim to have defined any of these principles or "Ism's" in a definitive way in any of these linked posts, but we know the competition between American and Western cultural worldview principles will be the center of our focus in 2021.)

Hail Caesar! places itself in 1951 during the McCarthy Era in the heart of Hollywood's fictional Capitol Pictures Studios. It was the age of blockbuster Biblical films, and the plot involves the Studio Boss, Eddie Mannix, and his mission to keep productions on task and on budget and pleasing to the American people, in spite of constant studio hijinks from virtually every other character in the film. In *Hail Caesar!*, like the other two Coen films mentioned above, It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963).

Central to *Hail Caesar!*'s plot, the Marxist script writers during the filming of the fictional movie, *Hail Caesar! A Tale of the Christ*, kidnap its lead actor, Baird Whitlock, and hold him for ransom. It's just before the kidnapping that Whitlock gives the speech as the Roman officer below the Cross of Jesus shown in the clip at top. Please watch that 3:06 video and see the trailer linked here for an overview of the movie.

But before we proceed with brief comments on *Hail Caesar!*, we need to explain the *Dumbo* reference in the picture above (and used in our Constant Contact pitch page, which you might have also seen).

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Anyone should be extremely sensitive today to any *Hail Caesar!* reference. It has a strong resemblance to "Heil Hitler!", and it doesn't take much to be accused now of being Hitler or a Nazi. Indeed, to many, if you are white, you are irredeemably a white racist. The origins of the name Caesar are cloudy at best, but the word itself came to mean "leader" in Western history. More specifically, our light research on derivation found there's little certainty about Caesar's meaning prior to Julius and Augustus, but that it just *might* mean "elephant."

Damn! was our reaction. We don't want to be favoring either American political party – an elephant rather than a donkey – knowing that both sides accuse each other of being fascist. There is a great Who's Zoomin' Who? debate over whether fascism is a product of the left or right. We think any Big Government strategy is a product of the Left, but the answer is either extreme can use extreme power for bad purposes. In any case, we would say that the nature of fascism is clearly a *Hail Caesar!* theme, and that all sides get tagged in the movie. Indeed, all human beings get tagged.

In addition, through the movie's mischievous ambiguity, we don't think the Coen Brothers are saying use of power or authority is always bad. In fact, it is quite necessary and assumed in order to live. This is really never been a confusing point until the current era. Only nihilists or confused Christians could come up with such silliness, and, as we know, Walter Sobchak has taken care of that first group.

So, after deciding to play the derivation ball where it lies, we wondered who might be the best known and most likable elephant in American history outside of politics?

Well, the obvious answer? Dumbo.

Finally, returning back to the starting line, we rationalized that Dumbo might be a super lead-in because that baby elephant is one of the most lovable characters in film history. (Not to mention there's the underlying reality that each side – Democrat and Republican – thinks the other side's presidential candidate fits that moniker; at second thought, that would be putting it mildly.)

As we were putting this post together, we realized how well its clips could stimulate thinking about one's own worldview, as promised above in the introduction. To accomplish this, in addition to the *Hail Caesar!* clip up top, we offer a key scene from the 1941 version of *Dumbo* immediately below. It appeared in theaters and was on TV reruns when we were children to everyone's delight. Of course, then, *Dumbo* was a widely beloved film, and few could see how it might create a stir.

But the 1941 version does not receive much attention other than scorn today, along with many other period pieces (all art becomes "period pieces" after a generation, BTW), because it's now politically incorrect. Many with the media talking stick brand *Dumbo* as irredeemably racist, in part, because of the clip offered below. Why? Because the five crows who teach baby Dumbo

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to fly, along with Timothy the mouse, have Southern, African-American voices. In essence, many regard these characters as only blackface caricatures designed to support a system of white supremacy.

Without any more introduction, we suggest that you watch it, and, after doing so, ask yourself why you might dislike or enjoy it. No, let's go further. Would it have been possible for African-Americans in 1941 to watch *Dumbo* and enjoy the movie?

Could they have viewed the crows as heroic figures helping out a baby elephant who, along with his Mom, had just been marginalized by the mean circus organization? Could it have reflected a reality of which they were actually familiar and proud? Could sharecroppers in the South have actually chosen to talk and act the way they did?

Is there a right or wrong answer here? This is about praxis: producing narrative in marrying theory with facts. It's about how we consciously use it and how it influences us.

How would 1940's talk differ from any onscreen jive, rap, or hip-hop language today – even involving comedy or light entertainment? As Viktor Frankl suggests, severely "marginalized" people in German prison camps were still free to choose. No doubt, even in the 1940's, the times in America they were a changin', and most could feel it, though WW II was a great distraction.

Everybody had to make a living, and "the poor" in America have always interacted extensively with the wealthy. There were wealthy African-Americans in Hollywood in 1941. No one would debate that great friendships and love existed between those in each other's lives, no matter how connected, then as now. Without minimizing systemic social changes that became absolutely necessary or any injustices for which all living will feel shame in a good Christian society at any time, those who grew up in the South prior to 1970 know exactly what we are talking about here.

Kinda makes us what to crow, if not cry, with joy and laughter.

Was the good Samaritan perhaps just a crow who had enough in his wallet to pay the innkeeper? In America, it doesn't take a lot of coin to pay Motel 6, yet it makes all the world of difference to fellow travelers from Jerusalem to Jericho.

You make the call, PC viewer.

To address the same question of perspective (see the "Old Lady and the Hag" via the link) from another angle, we would ask the same question concerning the "Christ on the Cross" speech at top. Though it's intentionally corny (as today we see many of the old Biblical blockbusters like *The Ten Commandments*, *Quo Vadis*, *The Robe*, and *Ben-Hur*), are you drawn in as Whitlock goes on like the rest on the set or are you laughing or offended? Do you sympathize with the average American of the 1950's (probably represented in Eddie Mannix) or are you closer to the Baird Whitlocks or the Marxist writers of the world?

We suggest your answer will tell you more about yourself than anything about the rightness or wrongness of the times portrayed or the messages offered. No one is confused that times are very different today. But a great debate is in process on the extent of better or worse America and how.

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https://youtu.be/_v2exWrsGOc

At the risk of spoiling the Coen Brothers movie, we'll run through *Hail Caesar!*'s high spots from here, offering just enough comment to make sense of the video clips presented.

In the next clip the spokesman for the Studio writers, the apparent leader of the underground organization The Future, explains Marxism to the actor Baird Whitlock (a supposed Robert Taylor clone), after he has been kidnapped and "imprisoned" in a beautiful Pacific coast villa outside L.A. We love this clip because the Marxist professor from Stanford gives a huge shout-out to praxis in describing how The Future's actions are accelerating the dialectic of history and the creation of the new man. (Of course, Christians would argue The Future is over 1900 years behind the curve.)

https://youtu.be/8YQZMbgpmIo

After the kidnapping stops *Hail Caesar!*'s production, the movie needs a hero to the rescue. That hero actually turns out to be cowboy actor Hobie Doyle, everybody's All-American young man. He seems a combination of the Lone Ranger, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers all wrapped into one, but with limited acting ability, with his accent making it difficult to transition to other types of roles.

https://youtu.be/rmQ_FXGl8hI

"It's complicated," but lots of 1950's Hollywood nostalgia gives the *Hail Caesar!* plenty of momentum the entire way. On one set at Capitol Pictures there is *Hail Caesar!*, on another there are dancing mermaids, starring Scarlett Johansson as DeeAnna Moran, an Esther Williams-type figure, and on another there are dancing Navy sailors performing the song "No Dames" in a bar before heading out to sea, reminiscent of *New York, New York*.

In the end, it's Hobie Doyle, totally comfortable in his own skin as an American man, unlike some of the dancing sailors, who isn't taken in in the slightest by the stupid Marxist rhetoric and who decides to try to rescue Baird Whitlock from the Marxists hiding out in the ocean villa. Again, Hobie is everybody's good guy and develops a relationship with an actress, Carlotta Valdez (a name taken from *Vertigo*), who is just as comfortable in her female skin. It's a nice combination and one of the few signs of stereotyped 1950's normalcy on CP's Studio grounds.

https://youtu.be/rE6H1Ev0GQU

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The Boss Eddie Mannix is always striving to keep the Studio running on time with authenticity and class, and he shows particular care for the high budget *Hail Caesar!* in the discussion in the clip below about religious worldview. The audience is reminded that religion in its many Western institutional forms is a terrific idea, if it wasn't for human beings who inhabit them. Throughout the movie Mannix fends off offers to leave Capitol Pictures for much higher pay in large corporate America; yet, he is blessed to know the importance of his place as head of the Studio, the social role of film itself, and his unique ability to do his job. It's decidedly un-Marxist of him; Mannix makes for a good father and leader.

https://youtu.be/IVlKsMvVhMo?list=TLGGV93IzeK2pKMyMjAzMjAyMg

After being rescued, Whitlock explains his new Marxist views to Mannix in his office, even down to how the iron laws of Marxist history are dictating affairs at Capitol Pictures. With little time as the blockbuster movie's clock ticks, Mannix then gives Whitlock another point of view – Old School.

https://youtu.be/Rpt-fbpiTU8?list=TLGGWaKOSW2D0yUyMjAzMjAyMg

In the end, we are left wondering who AC/DC is singing about in their song of the same name, "All Hail Caesar" and whether Big Brother in the famous Apple commercial might be Mannix on the Right or the Marxists on the Left. Apparently, 1984 is still in the future, though we today in America in 2020 are sensing a rendezvous with destiny somehow just around the corner.

Pure ideology? One ideology? One cause? We shall prevail? Who is we?

In the end, *Hail Caesar!'s* viewers are left with Eddie Mannix in the confessional realizing it's best to purse the hard right over the easy wrong, and he feels rejuvenated to have his place in life at the Studio brought front of mind by his priest.

https://youtu.be/S64LeYg3Tg4?list=TLGGfUSvvcMmcDkyMjAzMjAyMg

As the Father says, "God wants us to do what's right." This is what one's worldview and the situation determines. It is a matter of conscience (see John Paul II's quote). It's not perfect, but it's all we got without Grace. Eddie Mannix becomes the new man; he receives inner peace; he is elated.

To those of the Millennial and Z Generations, let it be known, if and where confusion reigns, that the 1950's were most certainly not as boring and rigid as the stereotype we hold today.

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Far from it, Friends. It would be better to recognize that what was germinating then seems to have resurrected itself today. The funny thing is what's apparently blooming thirty years after the 1990's paved the way for global freedom is still just as dead as ever: Big Government is always tyrannical and fails, eventually. Our wise Founders had no confusion whatsoever about this timeless principle, continuously proving itself across all of history.

Does *Hail Caesar!* have a moral? Is there a moral to the story?

We doubt the Coen Brothers would allow that luxury. They remain too busy poking fun at us whacky American human beings. Nonetheless, we have to say that sometimes we humans do need a savior, and that they do present themselves every few thousand years or so. As demonstrated in *Hail Caesar!*, he or she can be an authoritative figure or a very average person, indeed.

Even an outcast baby elephant with support from a mouse and five self-assured crows? We be done seen about everything, when we seen an elephant fly.

Come to think of it, next week, once it's over, let's all head Down to the River with Delmar.

PS – This post is dedicated to Andy Burns (1956 – 2020), the best Yankee friend a Rebel could ever have.

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