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Patterns of Bias in Hollywood Movies

John Cones

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Many groups within our multi-cultural society have complained about negative and stereotypical portrayals of their own group members in the movies. Yet, as an expert on the U.S. film industry points out, such complaints have had little impact on these consistent patterns of bias in films. John Cones shows that this lack of diversity at the top in Hollywood results in long-standing patterns of bias in motion picture content, and suggests that the solution could lie in increasing diversity at the highest levels in the U.S. film industry.

This work grew out of the observed frustration of film industry critics who have pointed out examples of bias and stereotyping in specific Hollywood movies over the years only to be rebuffed by the simplistic studio arguments that such films reflect the real world and that moviegoers vote with their pocket books. It can be shown that there is a consistent pattern to the choices Hollywood studio executives make with respect to the movies produced and released and the specific content of those movies, and it becomes obvious that Hollywood is selectively portraying reality. Movie goers only have limited options among all of the possibilities that could be portrayed on the silver screen.

This book differs from other studies touching on bias in motion pictures. Most such books focus on the treatment of a single ethnic, religious, cultural, racial or other readily identifiable interest group, but this study attempts to provide an overview and to identify patterns over time. When the patterns of bias in motion picture content are sufficiently demonstrated and documented, it becomes easier to identify the source of the bias and to explain why such bias exists.

The problem appears to be that most of the people who have green-light authority in the Hollywood-based U.S. film industry— share a common ethnic/religious/cultural background. Thus, the stories of all other ethnic, religious and/or cultural groups in the U.S. (whose members seldom achieve positions of power in Hollywood) are being filtered through the cultural sensibilities of a single group.

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