



# Movies and Culture Report

## More and More Taxing



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# THEATRICAL RELEASES

April 15



***The Conspirator*** (PG-13 for violence) Following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, America experienced one of the most harrowing and intensive manhunts in its history. The hunt for John Wilkes Booth is a story full of intrigue, conflict and suspense. Unfortunately, this isn't about him. James McAvoy, Evan Rachel Wood, Kevin Kline, Robin Wright, Alexis Bledel, Justin Long, Danny Huston, Tom Wilkinson.

This film focuses on Mary Surratt, the lone woman co-conspirator of the Lincoln assassination. She owned the boarding house where the assassins plotted their crime. Why focus on a largely forgotten footnote to a larger, more brilliant story? Two reasons: (1) she's a woman, which plays into our culture's current fixation with portraying all women prior to 1970 as hapless victims, and (2) it's a military tribunal with the United States in a frenzy to blame and execute the assumed guilty—a clear symbolic relationship for exploitation and masked discussion regarding today's prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

Don't believe me? I know this was produced by [The American Film Company](#) (AFC), founded by J. Joe Ricketts—backer of [Sharron Angle](#) and sole financier of the [End Spending Fund](#). He is hardly a leftist. But this is directed by Robert Redford. Ask yourself: Given Redford's persistent, consistent anti-American agenda, why would he be attracted to the story? Because of its historical significance? Again, this is a footnote to a footnote found only in some history books. There must be another reason. Redford's production house, Wildwood Enterprises, partnered with AFC on the project, so Director Redford's influence will be felt. Ultimately, we must wait to see what answers the productions reveals. My guess? Redford's far too old a dog to learn new tricks. Here's to hoping I'm wrong.





## THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



**Scream4** (R for strong violence, language, drinking) Because, like y'know, there were like so many, uh...like unanswered questions from the first three movies. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, David Arquette, Anna Paquin, Kristen Bell, Hayden Panettiere.

Hollywood used to be content with beating a dead horse. Now they're exhuming them.

### *Also*

**Rio** “domesticated macaw from small-town Minnesota meets the fiercely independent Jewel and takes off on an adventure to Rio de Janeiro with this bird of his dreams”; PG; trailers indicate significant amount of sexual innuendo and skin--it is set in Rio de Janeiro

**Henry's Crime** Tagline: “If you've done the time, then do the crime.” Keanue Reeves as a bank robber. R.

**American: The Bill Hicks Story** “Photo-animated feature documentary” on the irreverent comedian, social critic, and satirist; UK production





## THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

April 22



**The Bang Bang Club** (not yet rated - assume violence, language, possibly drug use, and a PG-13 at minimum) Follows the work of a group of photo-journalists during the early '90s South African apartheid conflict (racists vs. communists). ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Ryan Phillippe, Malin Akerman, Taylor Kitsch.

America's love for Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) comes, in my opinion, from white liberal's guilt over racism in America. I could go into how it was the Democratic Party who perpetrated and instituted the racist policies littered throughout our history and how, through supporting the continuing racist policies of the left, our liberal friends still have a lot to feel guilty about, but, why kick a leftist when he's down?

What white liberal's guilt has led to is a total whitewashing (term intentional) of the ANC, its beliefs (strong ties to Communism), and its crimes against humanity. To pick a side in the South African fight of the 1990s is little different than choosing between Nazi Germany and the Russian Reds. Either way, you're wrong.

Productions such as this promote the ANC and ignore historical facts. This may be an interesting film and possibly one worth seeing purely for the storyline about photojournalists (who don't get the credit they deserve). It is important to remember, however, that when history is shown, it is always seen through the lens of those showing it to you. It is rare we get to look at a history in an impartial way.





## THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



**Water for Elephants** (PG-13 for violence and sexual content) A handsome veterinary student joins a circus and falls for the lovely Marlena. The problem? Marlena is married to August. August is the head trainer for the circus and Marlena the main performer. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Robert Pattinson, Reese Witherspoon, Hal Holbrook, Christoph Waltz.

Don't worry. August is an abusive jerk, so we're free to enjoy the budding sexual relationship between Jacob and Marlena. Who cares if she made a vow of faithfulness before the Lord and that their relationship is an abomination? It's just a big ol' sin! And everybody's doing it, right?

Expect plenty of nice lighting, quiet scenes, and awkward symbolic references to the animals of the circus and the budding relationship between the fresh couple who will be going to hell without the forgiveness and grace of God.

### Also

**Tyler Perry's Madea's Big Happy Family** "hilarious twist on financial difficulties, drugs and, most important, family secrets"

**Dumbstruck** documentary on ventriloquism; PG for some language

**The Greatest Movie Ever Sold** "A documentary about branding, advertising and product placement that is financed and made possible by brands, advertising and product placement."; PG-13 for some sexual content and language





## THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

April 29



**Prom** (PG for mild language) Per the [summary on IMDb.com](#): “A group of teenagers get ready for their high school prom.” With a plot description like that, you run the danger of confusing this with *Rashomon* or *Citizen Kane*. Aimee Teegarden, Nicholas Braun, Christine Elise.

*Bottom line:* yet another Disney product celebrating the viciousness of teenage life and made for people who think [this](#) is good stuff.

The dumbing down of teens goes back to the 1950s in our cultural history, but where the white-bread sitcom dolts of the '50s and the beach-bum morons of the '60s at least had morality to contend with, we have reduced our children to no more depth than fashionistas and friendship bracelets.

We get what we expect from our youth.

**Editor’s Note:** If you think the term ‘fashionista’ started with recent T. J. Maxx commercials, check out [this](#).



**Fast Five** (PG-13 for strong violence, graphic language, drug use) Handsome leads and hot chicks use fast cars when they get caught between the machinations of a terrible drug lord and a federal agent with waxed eyebrows. Paul Walker, Vin Diesel, Dwayne Johnson.

Handsome leads, hot chicks, fast cars, and ridiculous action sequences—that about sums up the whole *Fast and Furious* franchise. Actually, it’s less a franchise and more a series of unnecessary flicks that get made because enough people really don’t care what they watch so long as it has, well, handsome leads, hot chicks, fast cars, and ridiculous action sequences.

Notice that the drug lord and the Fed are posed as being the problem and the kinda-a-criminal-kind-a-not characters who play both sides of morality are the good guys.





## THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

### *Also*

**13 Assassins** assassins come together for a suicide mission to kill an evil lord; R; Japanese

**Exporting Raymond** documentary on making the Russian version of the TV sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*; Russian and English

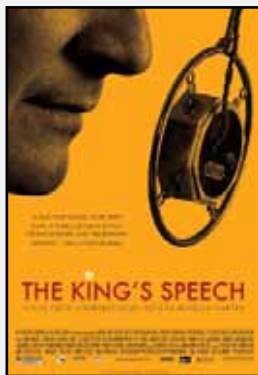
**Sympathy for Delicious** injured radio DJ's experience with the world of faith healing; comedy drama





# DVD RELEASES

April 19



***The King's Speech*** (R for brief strong language) ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Colin Firth, Geoffrey Rush, Helena Bonham Carter.

Winner of Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay and nominated in eight other Academy Award categories, this is the most prominent film from 2010. While an expertly executed production, it is not

one that has expanded the art of cinema or brought anything new to the screen—as one of its Oscar competitors, *Inception*, had done.

I think this film did so well because it is extremely conventional and approachable. Working conventionally does not mean being cheap or drab. It is possible to

create a remarkable film while remaining within well-worn parameters.

I had an issue with the fact we, the audience, are to be cheering for this poor, nervous man as he rises in his profession and needs to confront his personal faults. The issue? HE IS THE KING OF ENGLAND. Even if he had remained a bumbling speechmaker, he would still have been the KING OF ENGLAND—a man who would consider himself to be above chatting with almost everyone who has seen the movie. Then again, I'm a strict anti-monarchist, so there's that.





## DVD RELEASES, continued



**Vision - From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen** (Not rated) Barbara Sukowa, Heino Ferch, Hannah Herzprung. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) German nun Hildegard von Bingen was a remarkable woman by anyone's standards. In her life, the Benedictine abbess was a Christian mystic, writer of medical and botanical texts, philosopher, and composer of liturgical songs. She is an important figure in medieval culture.

So, obviously, she's the perfect character to study in film.

Well, there's that and the fact that her works, in particular her songs and her visions, have been hijacked by the modern New Age movement. Hildegard von Bingen's work contains a strong respect for the earth and has metaphysical qualities open to interpretation. New Age-ers have run with this and made her out to be some ancient, feminist, Mother Earth, tree-hugging Universalist.

Those who venerate her compositions, scientific endeavors, and other works and hold her as a feminist, New Age icon often forget to mention her strict condemnation of homosexuality and masturbation.

Again, when watching history being explained to you, stay wary toward what is left out. Often that will expose the depth of the speaker's agenda (see [Movie Watching Tip](#)).

### Also

**The Way Back** Soviet prisoners escape to India; adventure drama

**Gulliver's Travels** remake with Jack Black; comedy/fantasy

**Somewhere** hard-living Hollywood actor visited by his 11-year-old daughter; drama

**Rabbit Hole** young mother (Nicole Kidman) deals with the loss of a young son; drama





## Culture Links

**M**onsignor Charles Pope (yes, that's his name) of the Archdiocese of Washington has [an interesting look at the cheesy Brendan Fraiser movie \*Blast from the Past\*](#). Culturally, what have we lost over time?

**I**n [this article from 2005](#), *The New York Times* writer John Leland explains the new cultural approach for Christians: write reviews, not protests.



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** on Monday, April 4, Scott Nehring was a guest on Moody Radio's [Chris Fabry Live!](#) radio show. Scott and film producer/director [Dallas Jenkins](#) ([What If...](#) [2010]; son of *Left Behind* author Jerry Jenkins) had [a good discussion on Christianity and film](#) ([listen now!](#)). Scott made the point that,

As Christians, we have been trained to have a very limited view of what film, and the art in general, can and should be doing. ... Until we address film in a more intellectual way, we are not going to get anywhere in the film industry or in any other entertainment or communication industry.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR PRAYER for Scott. His heart to see excellent art done for God's glory was clearly heard. THANK YOU for your support for Scott and for [You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens](#).





## Culture Quote

Part of the fun of this is how much can we drag an incredibly respected comedy actor through the mud, and we do our share of that.

- producer/director Jason Winer  
regarding Dame Helen Mirren and her role in *Arthur*  
([Arthur Set Visit](#). Bryan Reesman. February 7, 2011)





## Movie Watching Tip

# All Filmmakers Have Agendas

Every filmmaker infuses their work with an agenda, something they want to impart. No filmmaker goes through the monumental pain of making a film unless he has something specific to communicate. Even seemingly inane, thoughtless movies like the *Deathwish* series come with a point-of-view.

The term *agenda* seems loaded with ideological intent, and I don't mean to say that every filmmaker is driven by some burning political motive (though many are). Yet each director, each producer comes to a film with a set of values and a way they see the world. They utilize the medium of film to express those values to us, their audience. That is why film is considered an art, not a craft.

The ramification for us as an audience is that we must pay attention to those agendas.

Do they intend to promote vigilantism, for example, as in the *Deathwish* movies?

Do they want to promote a nihilistic worldview, as in *The Ring* (2002) or most of Woody Allen's films?

Do they actually promote a specific political agenda, as seen in *Happy Feet* (2006), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), or the remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004)?

In honor of master filmmaker and cinema genius Sidney Lumet (see [At Rest](#)), let me share some of his thoughts on the art of filmmaking:

There are no minor decisions in moviemaking. ... There are many reasons for accepting a movie. I'm not a believer in waiting for "great" material that will produce a "masterpiece." What's important is that the material involve me personally on some level. ...

continued pg 13





## MOVIE WATCHING TIP, continued

I've been talking about why I decided to do a particular movie. Now comes the most important decision I have to make: What is this movie about? ... What is it about emotionally? What is the theme of the movie, the spine, the arc? What does the movie mean to me? Personalizing the movie is very important. I'm going to be working flat out for the next six, nine, twelve months. The picture had better have some meaning to me.

The question, "What is this movie about?" will be asked over and over again throughout the book. For now, suffice it to say that the theme (the *what* of the movie) is going to determine the style (the *how* of the movie). The theme will decide the specifics of every selection made.... As long as the theme is something I care about at that moment, it's enough for me to start work.

When I first meet with the scriptwriter, I never tell him anything, even if I feel there's a lot to be done. Instead I ask him the same questions I've asked myself: What is this story about? What did you see?

What was your *intention*? Ideally, if we do this well, what do you hope the audience will feel, think, sense? In what mood do you want them to leave the theater? <sup>1</sup>

There are two huge benefits to knowing someone's artistic tendencies and to identifying agendas when you're watching a movie: it softens inappropriate impact upon your soul and lessens the film's ability to manipulate your opinions.

1. Lumet, Sidney. *Making Movies*. 1995 Amjen Entertainment. First Vintage Books Edition, March 1996. pp 7-29. Emphases in original. Roger Ebert said of this book, "I am sometimes asked if there is one book a filmgoer could read to learn more about how movies are made and what to look for while watching them. This is the book" (front cover).





# The Artists' Freedom of Speech and the Audience's Right for Respect

by Scott Nehring

Since the first jerky, black-and-white images were cast onto a screen, film content has been the catalyst for myriad contentious arguments. Early concerns over social corruption led to restrictions on displays of sex and violence in movies. The desire to curb cinema's darker influences led to [the Hays Code](#) (also known as the Production Code), a set of restrictions placed on film content.<sup>2</sup> Filmmakers who sought product distribution were compelled to abide by the Code.

Some might say enforcement of these restraints limited artists' options, but you could also argue that the Code forced artists to develop skills as creative storytellers, or at least become clever problem solvers in the presentation of questionable content.

The Code was in place for nearly four decades, but by the 1960s filmmakers had compelled the pendulum of

acceptable content away from wholesomeness. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), *The Graduate* (1967), and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) delivered controversial content to broad audiences and radically changed public discourse. Social upheavals allowed the entertainment industry to jettison what they considered to be the restrictions of the past.

Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), oversaw development of what we, today, call the Ratings System, launched in November of 1968. Recorded industry discussion of movement away from the Hays Code and to the Ratings System states the move to be a positive development in modern culture. In truth, establishment of the Ratings System enabled an important power shift between those who make films and those who watch them.

The Hays Code protected audiences from harsh displays of violence, drug use, and sexuality and held the filmmakers responsible for the material they included in a film. The new Ratings System allowed filmmakers more freedom of speech (a good thing), but it also transferred responsibility for content awareness from the artists to the audience. The industry transformed into a "buyer beware" relationship and, after years of





limitations on creative desires, filmmakers became unimpeded in their self-expression.

With all stops removed, filmmakers immediately flexed their new muscles and reflected society's new sexual and social mores. *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970) offered mainstream audiences the sexuality and violence impossible to show ten years prior.

Filmmakers' new set of tools were immediately employed. New freedoms forged in the '60s led to an American renaissance in the '70s fronted by a new generation of directors like Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, and Francis Ford Coppola. Conversely, lack of restrictions also led to rougher content from the likes of Wes Craven, George Romero, and Tobe Hooper, who pushed hard against the new envelope to see how far they would be allowed to go.

And things have been taken far—for many people, much too far.

The 1980s brought the VCR and an explosion of video nasties (*I Spit on Your Grave*, *Faces of Death*), rental store gore fests, and teenage sex comedies (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *The Last American Virgin*).

Today there seems to be little, if any, filtering at creative levels. Yes, films are often edited to achieve a lower theatrical release rating, but these same productions are then released for individual viewing in unrated versions or directors' cuts with much of the controversial content reinserted. Material once exclusive to adult entertainment venues on grimy side streets now finds new markets among wide-eyed teens—and too often their younger siblings as well.

During the last half-century, film directors were king (or queen), and we permitted them to push every envelope, to explore every nook and cranny of our imaginations. They're like the cloistered kid who moved out of his parents' house, found himself without rules, and began to binge.

Films wallow in our basest urges and greedily offer everything there is to see. Many young filmmakers thrill to be the next to gross-out or enrage their patrons (or patrons' "parental units"). We have arrived at a place where our culture allows distribution of *The Human Centipede* (an evil doctor surgically attaches three victims, mouth-to-rectum, and forces them to swallow each other's feces—available in Blu-Ray or widescreen DVD at WalMart)—an appropriate





analogy for many of today's artists who encourage their audiences to feast on others' waste.

In a free society, the artist must have freedom of speech; but for a *functional* society, the artist must be held responsible for the speech they produce.

Too often a filmmaker's criterion is what they **can** show not what they **should** show. Many directors, particularly independents, disregard accountability and discount responsibility to their audience (and cast and crew, for that matter).

When a viewer sits through a film, they lend their time to the filmmaker. It is not overstatement to say that audience members entrust the filmmaker with their conscious and subconscious minds. The images seen can remain with them for life. This is a powerful position the filmmaker holds over people he may never meet.

When directors whimsically insert brutal violence, depraved sexuality, or other content distressing to

an audience, it is common for them to respond to criticism with hackneyed retorts such as "because I want to show how violent our society is," "because I want to challenge the audience's perceptions," or "I wanna shock people because I'm immature and am subconsciously striking back at Mommy and Daddy." Such attitudes display disrespect and disregard for society as a whole, and we should shun these works and those who create them.

Filmmakers, take note: Self-management is the best way to undermine arguments for censorship or oversight. It can be a voluntary code of conduct, an awakening of common morality in the industry, or teaching of artistic ethics in film schools.

Hopefully, as society continues to be served the bile of an arts community more interested in degenerating than inspiring their patrons, we—the audience—will swing the pendulum back toward the creative storytelling which builds a solid society. 🍿

2. Contents of the Hays Code with explanations can be found on [the \*You Are What You See\* website](#).



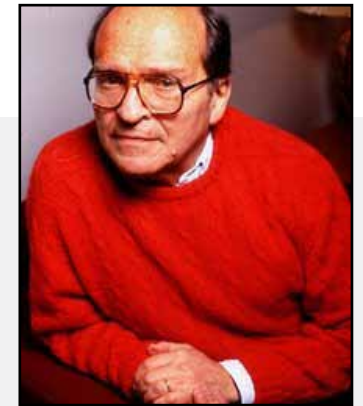


# At Rest

[Daniel 12:13](#)

Sidney Lumet (1924-2011)

Director



Another Hollywood great has passed. ~ Sidney Lumet is considered one of a few master film directors of the twentieth century and one who helped define the language of American cinema. If you do not know the name Sidney Lumet, you most likely know his work and have assuredly been impacted by the influence of his films upon American culture.

Lumet began as an off-Broadway director then moved into the still-developing medium of television where he soon became known as a quick-moving, sharp-minded director who held a strong respect for his actors. His first foray into feature films was *12 Angry Men* (1957) which garnered him a Best Director Oscar nomination. While certainly impressive for a freshman outing, it would be only his first appearance on the Academy's exclusive nominee list. Over his career, Lumet's expansive, impressive resume brought three more nominations: *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), *Network* (1976), and *The Verdict* (1982).

Lumet's detailed work with his casts became one of his calling cards and made him beloved by most professional actors. He aroused this respect by conducting fruitful rehearsals with his actors (something not many directors actually do) and by sharing in the creative process with them. Also a darling of investors and producers for his trademark ability to bring productions in on time and on budget, Lumet carefully planned his shoots to make the most of locations and resources; he had a gift for being amazingly efficient and accurate.

Other high points of his resume include,

*Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1962), *The Pawnbroker* (1964), *Fail-Safe* (1964), *Serpico* (1973), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007).





# Information

Learn more about Story. Buy the book: [YouAreWhatYouSee.com](http://YouAreWhatYouSee.com).

Find Scott Nehring's latest film reviews: [GoodNewsFilmReviews.com](http://GoodNewsFilmReviews.com).

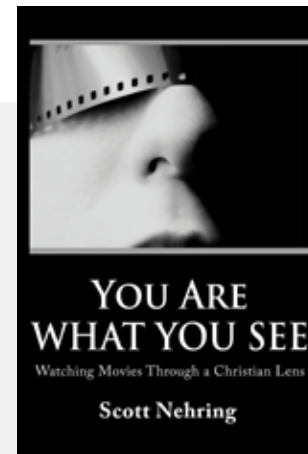
Scott is a film critic whose reviews have been published on a number of websites across the United States, Australia, and India including Reuters.com, USA Today.com, *The Chicago Times*, FoxNews.com, and a variety of local news stations across America.



As a former screenwriter, Scott is focused on balancing his love of story structure and cinema with his Christian faith. He loves to teach film studies to Christians, showing them how to read films and how to deal with the sometimes thorny subject of engaging modern culture.

Scott was a co-founder of the [Catholic Media Review](http://CatholicMediaReview.com). His current reviews can be found at [Good News Film Reviews](http://GoodNewsFilmReviews.com) and at [ChristianCinema.com](http://ChristianCinema.com).

Good News Film Reviews (GNFR) was established in June 2007 to discuss film and culture from a Christian perspective. From the first post onward, Scott has called for Christians to change both the way they view film and how they engage in culture. GNFR fell quiet following a short sabbatical, was re-launched in January 2008, and has been going strong since. GNFR is also home site for the Carnival of Cinema, a bi-weekly collection of film-related posts submitted from around the world. The Carnival of Cinema has been in operation since September 2006.



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