Movie Magic: When Fiction and Facts Collide

by

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What would you think of a movie where the main hero cited ridiculous statistics like “80% of black people are unemployed” or “80% of rapes are committed by minorities,” and no movie character corrected him? That seed of a very negative and detrimental statistical number is now planted in the unsuspecting viewer’s mind. Intentionally misstating facts, even in a fictional movie, has real world consequences.

Night Hunter, a major motion picture released by Paramount Pictures in 2018, reflects mainstream society’s loose affiliation to facts. A vigilante, played by the respectable Sir Ben Kingsley, sets up his own “To Catch A Predator” sting operations using a female minor accomplice to lure on-line sex offenders to meet for illegal trysts. But these interactions don’t end with an embarrassing arrest caught on camera, rather, they end with Kingsley’s character surgically castrating the perpetrator in a hotel room and then blackmailing the new soprano by threatening to give the police the dirty texts if the sex offender goes to the police.

Half-way through the movie, police detective Marshall, played by actor Henry Cavill, finally catches the vigilante. Kingsley’s character happens to be a well-respected retired Judge, and he explains his very rational reasons for hunting down and castrating sex offenders. The detective challenges the Judge, asking him:

“Doesn’t really give you the right to run around hacking people’s nuts off though, does it?”
“If a lion eats someone and you lock it up, and you say ‘don’t do that again,’ then ten years later you let it out, what happens?”

“Not all criminals are animals.”

“Some are wired to be. 80% of sex offenders re-offend. 80%! Yet we knowingly let them back out onto the street. Seven this last month, released within 15 miles of this school. That’s five out of seven active predators. Unless you treat the underlying cause of their instinct to offend – hormones. When you do that, the re-offend rate drops to just five percent.”

The real fact is people who have committed sex offenses actually have the lowest recidivism rates. Numerous studies over the years have consistently shown that the recidivism rate (“re-offend” rate) for sex offenses is between 3-7%. That’s the default rate across the country, without anyone’s nuts being cut off. To have an award winning actor like Sir Kingsley falsely cite a rate of “80%” (not just once, but TWICE) as the recidivism rate for sexual offenses is dangerous negligence, especially coming from a film whose plot is based on vigilante castration.

People who commit sex offenses are real people with mental health issues, who deserve the right to seek treatment and get healthy. Critics argue that “once a sex offender, always a sex offender.” Some alcoholics say while they’re never cured of their desire to have a drink, they can manage and control their addiction and live a normal and productive life. Sexual offending is a mental health issue (both for the perpetrator and the victim) and having a film’s
authority figure citing fake facts about people who commit sex offenses is insidiously prejudicial and inexcusable.

Arguably this movie is a work of fiction, so writer and director David Raymond should be allowed certain dispensations and suspensions of disbelief due to the entertainment value that movies are supposed to provide. But the line blurs when authoritative characters (especially Judges played by knighted actors) erroneously cite cold hard numbers as facts that only serve to promote violence and discrimination against a class of people who are already one of the world’s most hated minority groups.