Kids' Villains — From Terrorists to "Big Oil" in 30 Years

 Being a father of young children, I'll occasionally find myself wrangled into taking my family to the movie theater to catch one of Hollywood's latest *family films*.

Last week, it was the new Muppets movie. I must admit that my expectations for the film weren't all that high. Although I enjoyed the Muppet Show when I was a kid, I've become used to Hollywood botching nearly all attempts to resurrect successful entertainment concepts of the past. This one was no different. The plot and dialogue were lazy, and the musical numbers were hard to listen to. To cap off the unimaginative venture, the writers decided to use the *go to* villain that has sadly become a hallmark of recent children's movies: "Big Oil".

Yes, the Muppets' evil nemesis was a wealthy and greedy oil tycoon whose name was… wait for it… Tex Richman. Get it? "Rich Man". How terribly clever. Richman's dastardly plan was to buy the abandoned Muppet Show theater and turn it into an oil field. Actor Chris Cooper portrayed the part of this cruel CEO who takes great delight in denying Kermit and his poor friends the opportunity to save their old stomping ground.

Coincidentally, the previous children's movie my family saw in the theater together was "Cars 2", which also featured "Big Oil" as the antagonist. In that one, villain Miles Axlerod secretly sabotages race-cars that are using a new clean-burning, organic fuel. His motive? He wants to destroy public faith in *green energy* so that the world's dependence on oil increases, making him a ton of money. No, I'm not joking.

There are plenty of other examples out there as well, but you probably get my point.

Hollywood has a long history of injecting political ideology into their television shows and movies. This is nothing new. But it's particularly annoying when their target is our impressionable youth. Filmmakers often seem to take greater pride in planting ideological seeds in our kids' minds than they do in simply producing quality entertainment. They apparently see it as their public duty to shape the next generation of Americans in their own morally self-righteous mold.

Particularly noticeable is their choice of a villain: Corporate America. To Hollywood liberals, corporations are seen as obvious bad guys who threaten our society with their competitive nature and selfish motivations. Thus, there's nothing controversial or unjust in vilifying them. Never mind that it's corporations that actually finance these movies in the first place and put food on the tables of the people writing these scripts, but hypocrisy has never stood in the way of the Tinseltown elite. Even worse than generic corporations, in their eyes, are oil companies. If a corporation is the villain, an oil company is a super-villain! Not only are they wealthy and greedy, but they're also destroying the planet!

There's a stark contrast between current-day bad guys and the ones I remember as a child. I've recently been reminded of this because my son has taken a liking to the old G.I. Joe cartoon from the early 1980s, which has been airing on an obscure cable channel over the past few months. I used to watch that same cartoon religiously nearly thirty years ago.

In G.I. Joe, the villain is a terrorist organization known as Cobra. They are determined to take over the world, while G.I. Joe fights tirelessly to stop them. The story lines celebrate American patriotism and warn of the dangers of inaction and complacency in the face of those who wish to harm the United States.

For many people these days, the show would probably come across as a politically incorrect, nostalgic relic of an era long passed. Yet, it seems to me that in a post 9/11 world, it doesn't make sense that the de facto villain in children's entertainment is a wealthy old rich guy in a suit, who's looking to increase his bottom line. Here we are, engaged in a very real conflict between Western culture and radical Islam, yet the notion of a terrorist being the villain in a kids' program or movie is unfathomable. It's not even on the radar in Hollywood, while sinister oil barons grow there on trees.

It makes one wonder why we don't see terrorists in the children's genre anymore? The instinctive answer is that terrorism is too mature of a subject for young minds. I don't buy that. Decades ago, Marvel Comics never had any qualms with creating Nazis and other white supremacists as villains for young readers. I blame it on modern day political correctness. Hollywood has been reluctant to portray Islamic terrorists as villains, even to older audiences, primarily due to their sense of moral relativity and silly concerns that they'll inspire some sort of backlash against Muslims. But when it comes to kids, they don't like to use the concept of terrorism in *any* form.

Today's filmmakers and show creators are squeamish about drawing a hardline distinction between good and evil. They'd much rather use conflict as a vehicle for examining our own faults as human beings. Another problem here is that they don't value a sense of patriotism as a noble quality for our youth to have. Think about it for a second. When's the last time any of us have seen a children's show or movie that has incorporated patriotism for a purpose other than mockery? I certainly think there's a market for playing it straight, but it's a tough sell in liberal Hollywood where pride in America is scarce. After all, these are the same people who get bent out of shape over military recruitment tables in our high schools and colleges.

To them, kids aren't supposed to know of a villain that isn't motivated by greed. It's really that simple. And because of that, creators of kids' entertainment have grown content in relying on their own liberal instincts to define what a villain should be, rather than creating a representation of genuine evildoers like terrorists.

Now don't get me wrong… I'm not suggesting that Hollywood adopt a radically more serious tone in children's entertainment. Like most people, I enjoy light-hearted movies with comedic villains who turn over a new leaf by the end of the story. But it's frustrating as a parent that the baseline for what makes a character *bad* has been so distorted by the entertainment world. Economic inequality is not a villain. Financial success is not evil. People who attack the United States… now *they* are bad.

If Hollywood is so eager to send our children home with an ideological lesson, how about occasionally making a couple of those lessons *pride in country* and *the cost of freedom*? They might actually find an even larger audience in the process.