

Hunger Games Review: Are We Living In The Capitol? *Spoilers*

Last week, I posted a blog titled “The Hunger Games’ Teenage Violence Stirs Controversy” that has drawn a lot of interest and many comments. As I said in the post, I had not read the books, which were intended for young adult audiences. Of course, “The Hunger Games” has drawn a crowd of readers much wider than intended, rivaling “Twilight” and “Harry Potter” for eyeballs.

After the blog took off this past week, The Catholic Review asked me to see the film and review it. Judging by “The Hunger Games’ ” opening weekend box office take of \$155 million, many people were excited about it nationwide.

If “The Hunger Games” were just one book or film and not a trilogy, one could say the message of the movie is “By any means necessary.” The film’s premise is dark, twisted and just as violent as I anticipated, even with the PG-13 rating. Right from the very start, we are introduced to the concept of this far off future where the government rules with an iron fist because of an uprising that occurred years before.

As a result, the government created a kill Olympics called “The Hunger Games,” where a boy and a girl are chosen to represent their districts in a human hunt. Only one person is supposed to survive, making them a “champion.” As the games approach, the participants must accumulate sponsors similar to NASCAR. Unlike NASCAR, they aren’t covered in logos, although that would have been interesting.

Sixteen-year-old heroine Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) plays the game and by the rules, giving the crowd what they want, while disappointing the authoritarian government at same time. Resistant at first, she realizes that the people running the games and watching in the dreaded Capitol just want a good story. The standoffish tomboy gives them a beautiful huntress, displays showmanship and cunning bow and arrow skills.

The boy who has a neighborhood crush on Katniss just happens to be chosen for the Games, too, and it always feels throughout the movie that it will come down to Katniss and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson). Whether it actually does is for you to find out.

The Games are brutal. This is teen on teen violence is everywhere. “The Hunger Games” is “The Truman Show” with blood splatter.

The Capitol crowds in the movie revel in the kills and some of the combatants, such as bully Cato, delight in savage murder. Right from the time the 24 “tributes” are released in the wild, they go after the weaker ones and slaughter them. The book, I’m told, is supposed to satire our culture’s insatiable desire to watch violence through pervasive media. The satire, much like “The Truman Show,” comes through in the movie as well.

Watching “The Hunger Games,” I was reminded of a viral video this week from Long Reach High School in Columbia, Maryland, where a student and an adult got into a fight outside the school. Friends stood around and watched the altercation happen and when one of them was knocked out cold on the ground, the kid holding the phone camera offered “That (racial epithet) dead, yo.” Within a day of being posted, the video was viewed 500,000 times. That’s a half a million times. Many have watched it horror and others have watched out of curiosity. Others, though, loved it.

The video’s comment section on WorldStarHipHop.com was filled with snarky and hateful comments underneath the video. The two combatants weren’t people, but mere pawns for us to watch and rewind. You have to worry about a culture where one young teenager can look at another person and not even be horrified by the prospect they might be dead. Instead, he held the camera and kept rolling with the play-by-play commentary. Worse yet, they weren’t a person, but one of the worst racial epithets you can use.

With so many views of the video, we have to ask ourselves, “Are we living in the Capitol now?” Why are so many of us so eager to click rewind a video and watch two people fight? Are we that desensitized to violence that we need to someone knocked out cold?

The man was merely knocked out, by the way. And the fight, reportedly, was over a

french. Yes, a french fry.

Luckily, I found out watching “The Hunger Games” that I’ve still got a little soul. The teenage kills still turned my stomach, even for the underdeveloped characters. I didn’t feel a build toward a championship. I wasn’t looking for The Gladiator. I was looking for a way out for each of the “tributes.” They were people and their humanity needed to be respected. The Capitol doesn’t own their souls.

As I speculated in my previous post, hope does indeed play a large part in “The Hunger Games” movie, but God and religion are nowhere to be seen. The human spirit, devoid of divine influence, is what inspires the hopeless.

“The Hunger Games” has no victor and ends on a rather ominous note that makes all the celebrations hollow. The knowledge that there is more to come leaves me wondering what really needs further needs to be said about our culture’s desire for blood. I don’t need to see any more teens killed in the real or fictional world to find out, though.