Inherit The Wind Essay, Research Paper

The Truth about Stanley Kramer’s Inherit the Wind

History is consistently used in films as a technique to teach the values and morals of events that occurred. But what’s the point in teaching history through films when they are terribly fictional? In films, the director finds the best scheme to intrigue their audience only by changing the actual event to satisfy their interest. This is true for Stanley Kramer when he made the history of John Scopes and his “monkey trial” into a film called Inherit the Wind. Kramer knew the exact stereotypical “Hollywood history” his audience enjoyed. The trial itself had a series of conflicts, the main one being evolution vs. religion. Yet there was also a series of tensions throughout the movie, including the argument between individual vs. society. The same themes from Inherit the Wind can also be seen from the actual “monkey trial” event in Dayton, Tennessee. It is sometimes said that truth is stranger than fiction and according to this film, truth is also stronger than fiction. Inherit the Wind ignored the true dramatic moment, which is essential to the actual trial that happened in Dayton, Tennessee. Kramer even portrayed his own opinion of this trial in this film. The truth was so distorted in the film so now the argument is not individual vs. society or evolution vs. religion but history vs. fiction.

Inherit the Wind is set in the little town of Hillsboro when Bertram Cates (played by), a biology teacher, was thrown into prison for teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution. Two famous lawyers were behind this case, Henry Drummond (played by) as the defender and Mathew Harrison Brady (played by), as the prosecutor. Mathew Harrison Brady who was “voted 3 times for a presidential candidate” was sent to Hillsboro is carry out the job as a prosecutor for this trial. As for Cates, a journalist from Baltimore Herald by the name of E.K. Horrbeck willingly provided a lawyer named Henry Drummond for him. Horrbeck was interested in the Cates, expecting to make big bucks from this big “media” case. The two opposing lawyers, Drummond and Brady, were Kramer’s two main characters, both with different opinions on how humans arrived on earth. Drummond supported the evolution theory, while Brady, the creation theory. In this film, Kramer distorted the facts of the actual trial to make this film more of a drama than a history documentary. He added fictitious characters like Reverend Heremiah Brown (played by) and his daughter Rachel Brown (played by) to bring this drama out. It’s obvious that Rachel is used as icon in Inherit the Wind to make film be seen as more of a drama with the typical love story that directly attracts more audience to his film. Kramer also added Brady’s death in the courtroom. He dramatically died of a heart attack in the chaotic courtroom at the end of the trial after his last speech. Persecuted

The film is far from the truth, the actual trial didn’t happen in quite the same way. The 1925, Dayton, Tennessee went against one of its individual, John Scopes. He just so happened to be substituting for a biology class that was learning about the Darwin’s theory. Similar to the film, the actual lawyers, Darrow and Bryan were also famous in their position of the society. Darrow was the defender, and Bryan, the prosecutor. The characters in this film also had different personalities compared with the actual history figures they are. Take Drummond for example, he was less cynical and biting than Scopes’ actual defender, Darrow. Brady, on the other hand, was portrayed more of a comical fanatic at moments in the courtroom. From this event on, the flaws of this little town began to reveal. The townspeople of Hillsboro were far more frenzied, mean-spirited, and ignorant than the real citizens of Dayton were toward this trial.

From the fictitious characters and the distant differences between the history and film, I can conclude that Kramer was completely biased when he was directing this film. When the actual trial and the film are compared, it’d obvious that Kramer was not only thinking of his audience’s interest but his own. He was biased against a particular class of people and their beliefs. The people who believed in the “miracle recorded in the bible, especially the section in Genesis about God’s creation, were portrayed in a disgraceful uncomplimentary way. However, the people who didn’t believe in the bible were eminently reasonable people who must put on with the threats and ignorance of the fundamentalist Christians around them. The Christian fundamentalists, Bryan being one of them, were consistently lampooned throughout the film while skeptics and agnostics were consistently portrayed as intelligent, rational, and even heroic like Drummond.

Kramer did want to make Inherit the Wind similar to John Scopes’ trial. It can also be seen that Kramer had made the names of the character and the history figure with almost all the same syllables and even some with the same letter of the first letter in their names. Though in attempted to portray this, he let too many things in his path that overcame the importance of the truth. But is the truth always most important? Or rather what we like to think is the truth? It’s a lot simpler when we think that way but in reality it isn’t so using films as a technique to teach history is purposeless.