Mel Essay, Research Paper

Dear Mel

Having read the avalanche of outraged articles in the UK press that preceded the UK launch of “The Patriot”, I readily admit that I was expecting to see a distinctly anti-British Movie. One such headline complains for example about a “blood libel on the British People”.

Some considerable way into the film (which, putting the controversy to one side, was otherwise enjoyable), I found myself questioning whether such criticism was justified. Characters on both sides, including the character you were playing, Benjamin Martin, were portrayed as being responsible for some shameful actions. I really was beginning to question what the fuss was all about.

I then watched the scene where Redcoats are depicted as sadists hanging old people. Later came the chilling episode in the Church, when Redcoat soldiers on the orders of the films main villain, Colonel William Tavington (partly modelled on the real-life Redcoat, Colonel Tarleton), deliberately locked a large number of the Colonials, including women and children, inside, before the Church was set ablaze. It was clear from the following scenes that all of the incarcerated victims were burnt to death in the most horrific circumstances. To say the least, this episode was unfortunate, as in reality, no such incident ever occurred.

Are there not enough grounds for causing bad feeling without inventing atrocities purely for entertainment value? And having said that, I personally, don’t even find the aforementioned scenes entertaining. The Brits are inevitably the first and sometimes the only Country to support America, whatever the circumstances or adversity. It is therefore even more disturbing that the close friendship between two peoples should be potentially damaged purely for commercial purposes.

You always seem to be a decent man whenever I have seen you being interviewed. It may hopefully be the case that if indeed you have received the mega millions quoted for playing the lead role, you were perhaps unaware of the fact that history was being fabricated at the expense of the truth. According to what I have read about the history of that unfortunate period, there was surely enough wrongdoing on both sides, without having to invent such horrific events with the British being portrayed as outright sadists.

I have read a comment attributed to you in a UK film magazine called “Total Film” in which you apparently made the following comment about your character… “it’s based on historical fact but it’s got some stretches in it. You’ve gotta do that for cinema”.

Given the latest news it seems that it was not so much a stretch as a total fabrication. According to Professor James Taylor, an influential academic in South Carolina, where the film was set, the real soldier on which your Benjamin Martin character was based “was a ruthless and cruel person. He took sport in hunting down Indians and killing them. He had slaves and was known to have raped them”. It seems Mel that the Brits are not completely on their own in being tarnished by a cruel disregard for historical fact.

Likewise, that august body, the Smithsonian Institute, may regret their association with “The Patriot” as “technical adviser”. The reputation of the Smithsonian is also likely to be damaged by the unforgivable distortions of history even if, as seems certain, it is totally innocent of providing incorrect information or negligent advice. It may think twice before allowing its name to be associated with another Hollywood project, where integrity, truth, and historical accuracy will be inevitably sacrificed for box office considerations i.e. greed, greed, and often, more greed.

Even the US Ambassador to London, Philip Lader, has recently described “The Patriot” as a ludicrous myth. He says that The Patriot may not have furthered Washington’s relationship with Britain and that Hollywood “rarely let the facts get in the way of stories that the producers think will sell at the box office”. He went on to describe the film as a great deal of mythology and exaggeration.

On BBC Radio, Spike Lee, the American director, said “You guys should be upset, because the British are portrayed like SS storm-troopers”. He went on to say “I despise the film. It is what Hollywood does best: it rewrites history”. He concluded by saying “We’re at the mercy of the Hollywood machine. They could have told the truth and the film would have been just as successful”.

Spike Lee may also have had in mind the recent U-571 adventure – an enthralling film based on the bogus premise that the Americans captured the enigma code machine from the Germans, when in fact it was the Brits.

In America you now enjoy a reputation for being politically correct… Minorities are afforded proper respect and consideration. Is it too much to ask that the same consideration be given to the Country that is so closely aligned with the USA.

Although only 20 years old, I have been lucky enough to visit America several times and love the Country and the People. I am also one of your millions of fans. I mention this so that you know that I harbour no ill will towards you, or the USA.

I know that you are aware that “Braveheart” also attracted a lot of adverse publicity on the same grounds of blatant anti-Brit bias.

Come on Mel, own up, was it all a publicity stunt? Were the fabricated atrocities deliberately included in “The Patriot” to stir up controversy and generate lots of free publicity?

I freely admit that it was unfair to obtain the “melgibson–sucks.com” domain name based solely on the flood of UK press criticism, before I had even seen the movie. I would however like to give you the opportunity to respond to my comments. I will publish, unedited, any authenticated response from you and, after reflecting on your reaction, will decide whether to cease this website or change the domain name to something more positive. According to one article you are not taking seriously the growing rumours that you are anti-British. Given the continuing uproar, you may want to put your position on the record, in your own words?

I guess that the difference between any unfair comments in my open letter is that they can be speedily removed, whereas in comparison, the false history peddled in the “The Patriot” and “Braveheart” will be shown repeatedly for decades to come, probably with the invented atrocities eventually becoming perceived as fact, rather than fiction. Hollywood will have successfully rewritten history to suit its commercial ends. That in my view is morally indefensible.

I await your response with interest and hope that you take the opportunity to put your side of the controversy. My email address is nick@melgibson-sucks.com

Quite frankly Mel, you must be swamped with movie ideas and scripts from every direction. Surely there are enough for you to choose ones that would avoid any possibility of adding to your probably undeserved reputation of being anti-British.

I do apologise for being over-familiar by using your first name, but the letter would have been boring and tedious if I had repeatedly addressed you as Mr. Gibson.

With kindest regards

Nick Gill

(30th July 2000)

P.S. Mel, I have listed some of the relevant headlines plus some extracts from the most recent article in case you missed them: -

THE FILM THAT SAYS WE’RE NAZIS (The Daily Telegraph)

MEL GIBSON’S THE PATRIOT IS A BLOOD LIBEL ON THE BRITISH PEOPLE (The Daily Telegraph)

MAD MEL’S VULGAR BLOODLUST (The Mail on Sunday)

BRAVEHEART MEL’S BACK BRIT-BASHING (Sunday Mirror)

PATRIOT GAMES TAKE LIBERTIES WITH HISTORY (Sunday Express)

MEL TAKES A LIBERTY – TRUTH’S CASUALTY OF FREEDOM-FIGHT EPIC (News of The World)

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PATRIOT BUTCHER (Daily Mail, Saturday 29th July)

Some extracts from the Daily Mail article: -

“The portrayal of a British Army officer as a mass murderer in Mel Gibson’s new film The Patriot has enraged Mail readers. Here we examine what really happened…

The film is based on historical events and it features many real characters who fought in the 1770’s war, including the British commander, General Cornwallis. So when Colonel Tavington orders the entire population of a village – women, children and old people – into a church, padlocks the doors, shutters the windows and burns them all to death, it goes without saying that most audiences who know nothing about the American Revolution save what they learn from this film, will believe this atrocity to be based on fact.

It never happened. Scriptwriter, Robert Rodat based the scene upon a hideous atrocity in World War II when in 1944, the Nazis, in retribution for the killing of an SS officer, herded all the woman and children of the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane into the church and burned it – and the rest of the village – to the ground.

It is true Tarleton was vicious, arrogant and ruthless but, unlike Colonel Tavington in The Patriot, he was neither a coward nor a monster. He did not shoot people in the back as Jason Isaacs’s character does; nor did he burn people alive.

Does any of this matter? To expect authentic history from any Hollywood film is like expecting a barrel-organ to produce Mozart.

But psychologically, too, demonising the British makes sense, because it gives Americans the comforting feeling that all the bad things that happened in the past – wholesale slavery and the genocide of native Americans – were done by the British in America before their Country came of age”.

If any visitors to the site would like me to publish the full text of the various articles, or if you have anything you wish to comment on, please feel free to send me an email at nick@melgibson-sucks.com. If I receive sufficient demand, I will happily add the full articles to the site and any further reports that may be published.

Here is some correspondence with various individuals who have taken the trouble to comment on my Open Letter To Mel. As a simple courtesy I have not published their email addresses. The correspondence file will be enlarged at my discretion as and when further comments are received. I obviously reserve the right not to publish any comments or information that I deem inappropriate.

Letter from Mike Cerny

Letter from Kendall M.

Letter from Sarah LaRee

Letter from Jyak

Letter from Steven Kohlscheen

Letter from Susie Schurtz

Letter from Tammy Marcellino

Letter from Juan Francisco Ortiz

Letter from Kevin Holmes

Letter from Ore-Oluwa Odulana

Letter from Alana

Letter from Marie Robinson

Letter from Sunni Friello

Letter from Kae333