

On Context – Has Journalism Become One-Dimensional?

BY FELICIA PRIDE



*Archetypal Good Guy**

You know what irks me? Movies where the characters are one-dimensional. The bad guys are bad—uh, just because—and the good guys are perfect.

You know what gets me irate? Media (read: journalism or stuff posing as such) that does the same.

I once took a screenwriting workshop where the teacher suggested to all the students that we create a character breakdown before beginning to write the story. This breakdown included details like physical appearance and occupation, but also probed for wants, goals, fears, conflicts and disappointments. She said with her movies, she can tell you exactly why a character does something—and connect that action to something related to the character's personality, upbringing, fears, insecurities, and so on. She wants her characters to be as real as they can possibly be. Human.

I know that these days real is becoming hard to decipher.

But what isn't changing: Humans are complex creatures. We rarely do things just because. We come with history and childhoods and environmental influences that shape who we are, how we think, and the actions that we take.

Still. Let's not sacrifice context for sound bites. Nor paint reality as utopia or hell.

But lately, and maybe it's just a sign of the instant times we live in or our overall propensity towards laziness, you can turn on certain national broadcasts and count how many sloppy good vs. evil snippets that are being offered up as reporting and "getting the story." Which is a shame.

Well, dangerous actually when you think of how many of us take our cues, shape personal perspectives, and vote based on these superficial representations.

Media at its best can be a tool to contextualize. You know, media that highlights a town that is only known as X through popular representations and yet explore and show, that it is also A, B, C, D, E...

Or media that shows that a certain art form is more than just "loud music," and "gangsters" or that a religion's only face is that of a "terrorist."

Great fiction does this. So do wonderful television shows and compelling documentaries, as does expert, thorough reporting. They delve into the story behind the story and explore the complexity of the person, place, or thing and show the layers of environment, background, and history.

Completeness. But I reckon it's becoming harder and harder to be complete in our instant, bite-sized world.

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**Photo from the movie High Noon. 1952, Stanley Kramer Productions.*



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