

Annie, 1982

Feature Film Review

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Hist228 Survey of American History

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Fall 2017

Annie, filmed in 1982 became a hit film for not only children but for most of America. The film's background was very evolutionary as its concept originated from a newspaper strip entitled "Little Orphan Annie, written by Harold Gray in 1924. The plot of the comic strip told stories of adventures of a little girl name Annie who wanders throughout the world which is full of immorality (Rotten Tomato, 2017). The comic strip included her dog Sandy, and her supporter Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks. From this start, Annie became a hit Broadway musical and eventually was adapted in 1982 as a featured film.

The film was scripted and written by Carol Sobieski and directed by John Huston. One of the great things about Annie is its casting lineup. The film included several stars such as Carol Burnett, Albert Finney, Ann Reinking, Tim Curry, Bernadette Peters, Geoffrey Holder, Edward Herrmann, and of course Aileen Quinn as Annie. Monmouth University was chosen as the place of production for filming and it took the crew six weeks to completely finish the project. The film runs at 128 minutes long.

Set in 1933, during The Great Depression, Annie was a young orphan living in the Hudson Street Orphanage in New York City. The orphanage was run by the character, Miss Hannigan who was certainly not a nice lady. Annie's life seems very hopeless. But by the end of the film her situation changes dramatically when she is chosen to spend a week at the residence of Oliver Warbucks who is one of the wealthiest industrialist in the country. Over the week and by the end of her stay, Oliver Warbucks along with the characters Grace Farrall decide they will adopt Annie. However, there is a problem with this plan and it is that the orphanage says she needs to wait for her parents to come back for her.

The movie's primary success can be explained in part by its insight into historical activities during the time in which it was set. Although fictional, the film highlighted and touch

on many points and critical issues of the early 1930's. This story line appealed to adults and dealt with many political and social issues. One key thing was the environmental climate of the Great Depression and the struggle of the people to make a living. It also deals with organized labor, the New Deal, communism, and unethical businessmen.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President in November 1932 and he proposed his New Deal, which many people considered to be government interference in private business. The film *Annie* uses this reference as it provide context into the shadier characteristics of human nature of greed and deceit. It also shows the gap between rich and poor which was a primary theme of the movie as it directly related to the fact that most characteristic of life during the Great Depression was the widening gap between the “haves” and “have-nots.” Unemployment went from 5 million in 1930 to 13 million by the end of 1932 (Etienne, 2013). Companies choose to hire children over adult fathers due to their ability to pay sub-standard wages. In 1930, 2.25 million boys and girls ages 10–18 worked in factories, canneries, mines, and on farms (Etienne, 2013). Children left school to support their families. Additionally, in many cases parents could no longer support their children and children were given over to orphanages.

The orphanage was an important backdrop to Annie's lifestyle. As she was living at the orphanage when she met Mr. Warbucks. During the Great Depression orphanages were very common for children. Orphanages ranged in many sizes. Most weren't big enough to fit all the children. A lot of times there weren't many rooms and places to sleep and therefore there weren't a lot beds so they had to either share or sleep on the floor (Jones, 1989). This awareness can be seen in some of the orphanage scenes shown in the movie. In the year that *Annie* is set, a quarter of the nation's families did not have a single employed wage earner (Jones, 1989). Even those fortunate enough to have jobs suffered drastic pay cuts and lost a lot of hours to work. The

unemployment rate was so high it made it so families couldn't support their children. Their parents didn't have enough money to support them (Jones, 1989). Parents died and no one could support the children. As mentioned, this led to many children being placed as orphans. While at the orphanage the film sought to show visibility into the life of children during those times. Just as the rest of the community was struggling, so was the orphanage. Children did not have much to eat and even the orphanage was very, very poor. Most children would rag that the people at the orphanage sewed together. Other kids would get the opportunity to wear fixed up hand me down clothing.

The film also should visibility into the entertainment life of children as well. In the Great Depression days, most kids would play with their hands and make up creative games. Many of these games included singing and dancing. The kids would make up the rules for these games themselves. In the 1982 rendition of *Annie*, singing and dancing was by far the most memorable aspect of the film itself.

The scene where Mr. Warbucks is talking about the New Deal with Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the most accurate piece of history in the film. This is due to the fact that it showed how FDR was trying to get big business owners to approve of the New Deal. Approving the New Deal would help stabilize the economy and provide jobs and relief to those who were suffering. Although fictional, the film made several references to history. Some examples include, the song "It's a hard knock life". This song showed how life for individuals during the Great Depression was not easy. Another example, included Mr. Carnegie and FDR call Mr. Warbucks. This reference highlighted key figures during the Great Depression. Bolsheviks attempt to assassinate Mr. Warbucks with a bomb. This scene dealt with the socialism is bad and communism is good and capitalism works perspective. When J Edgar Hoover and William Randolph Hearst help find

Annie's parents, the reference to the radio, which was a key innovation during the 1930's was used. Annie meeting FDR, who has Polio, and talks with him about the New Deal was another example. Again, this was a reference to a key historical figure, the President and also reference his health situation.

On a bigger note, the essential message the film Annie brings is one of joy and hope. Having and holding hope and optimism through life's journey, no matter what the circumstances, is what the film Annie is all about, and what the character of Annie symbolizes. Examining Warbucks' life before Annie came along: he was a grumpy and bad-tempered man, and after she arrives eventually he's filled with joy. Also, the popular theme song of the musical, "Tomorrow", is sung by Annie many times in the musical for a reason. It is what the musical is about. These lyrics even motivate the President to start working towards saving the economy. Clearly, Annie represents a contagious amount of hope for the future and certainly if she has the ability to inspire the President of the United States.

Annie also possesses an enormous amount of optimism while she waits for her parents. Even when she was in the brutal orphanage, Annie was hopeful all the time. She never gave up. Despite the fact she was raised in a home for unwanted girls, she possesses important attributes, including common sense and the ability to determine right from wrong. In this way she the film shows how Annie symbolizes justice. Annie's optimistic spirit really pays off for her in the long run. This can be seen when you look at the destitution she experienced at the beginning and how that disappears and Annie does not look back.

So what is the message of this feature film? It is the fact that life is difficult, but "the sun will come out tomorrow" to an improved life for those who remain optimistic. This is a moral we are reminded of every day, but often times life's occurrences (job loss, tragedies, natural

disasters, etc.) make it exceedingly difficult to be hopeful. Scripture even states in Psalms 30:5, that:<sup>1</sup>

5 For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. 6 And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. 7 Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.

This is why Annie is such a timeless film for any one of any age. Even if the political themes were taken out of it, it would still be a great film to see. As we all know, the sun did come out eventually back in the 1930s and '40s in America, leading to a new prosperous era in the late '40s and early '50s. I would certainly recommend this film as one that is informative and that supports family entertainment.

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1 Psalm 30:5-7 (KJV)

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