

The American Old West: How Hollywood Made It “Wild” to Make Money & Advance Gun Control

Hollywood has a clever way of distorting our perspective on history, and a great example of this is Western film – a movie genre we’ve all come to love. Cattle rustlers, guns blazing, outlaws running loose, and vigilantes dishing out vengeance indiscriminately. These scenes have become more synonymous with the American Frontier than Winchester and their “Cartridge That Won the West.” But these fictional tales have produced more than entertainment for over a century; they’ve also contributed to an ongoing, subtle push for gun control, all while making Hollywood millions.

Revisionist history books tell us that the “Wild West” was an anarchic period of time that was not conducive to human prosperity. Images of a Hobbesian nightmare – a life that is brutish and short – are ingrained in our consciousness thanks to decades of public schooling and violent images on the silver screen which are light on actual history and heavy on creative license.

However, individuals who believe in liberty and developing their critical thinking faculties should be skeptical of most mainstream narratives regarding history, especially American history. After all, these narratives by and large have been created by Hollywood, a legacy institution that has historically advanced politically correct content with the support of Washington in order to perpetuate the cultural status quo.

When the curtain of political correctness that’s been draped over this particular period of history is pulled back, we see a much more nuanced picture of the American Frontier. In fact, research by historians such as Peter J. Hill, Richard Shenkman, Roger D. McGrath, Terry Anderson, and W. Eugene Holland shows that this period was rather indicative of a “not so wild, Wild West.”

For the purposes of this article, the Wild West will now be referred to as the Old West. This is by no means a pedantic distinction, but rather an acknowledgment of the fact that this time period was not “wild” by any stretch of the imagination when compared to other chaotic periods in human history. Indeed, the Old West had its fair share of challenges for American settlers. But as we’ll see below, crafty settlers found ways through ingenuity and mutual cooperation – all done with very limited state interference – to create a stable order for generations to come.

So let us delve into the “not so wild, Wild West.”

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