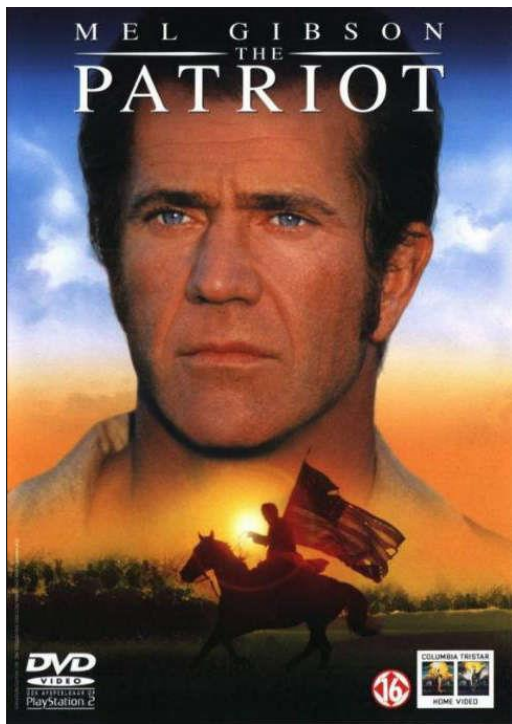


'The Patriot' Teaches Forgotten Lessons the Left doesn't Like

by Sam Francis

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By an amazing coincidence, Mel Gibson's epic about the American Revolution, "The Patriot," just happened to open in theaters on Independence Day weekend. And cynics complain that Americans don't take national holidays seriously anymore! Most viewers may regard the film as one more wallow in fantasy and stale popcorn, but among the nation's literati it's actually incited something resembling thought. Yet, the resemblance is not too close. The immediate reaction to "The Patriot" was denunciation for a scene in which the hero's preteen sons are given flintlock rifles by their dad (Gibson) and spontaneously conscripted to help massacre a contingent of British troops about to hang their brother.



Children aren't supposed to have guns, you see. You are not supposed to have guns either. Even if you do have guns, you're not supposed to give them to kids. And even if you give them to kids, you're supposed to tell them not to shoot anything, especially people, even if they're government troops about to hang your son. What you're supposed to do in situations like this is dial 911 and wait for the cops. The film manages to violate every one of these rules in the space of about ten minutes.

This line of criticism came a cropper when Gibson and the film's producers just refused to change anything in the script, but it should have told them what was in store for them and their movie. Is it too much to ask late 20th century critics to grasp that people who lived 200 years ago did not necessarily harbor quite the same superstitions that we do? Maybe back then they believed in witchcraft and were against premarital sex and all that sort of stuff, but even they didn't believe in gun control. Nevertheless, gun control is exactly what the first line of attack against "The Patriot" demanded the movie preach.

But undoubtedly the dumbest thing said about the film (maybe the dumbest thing ever said about anything) comes from Jonathan Foreman, reviewing "The Patriot" for salon.com. Foreman found it objectionable because "'The Patriot' presents a deeply sentimental cult of the family, casts unusually Aryan-looking heroes and avoids any democratic or political context in its portrayal of the Revolutionary War."

Not only is the cast entirely too Aryan for Foreman but the scene with the preteen sharpshooters is "the equivalent of the Werewolf boy-soldiers that the Third Reich was thought to have recruited from the Hitler Youth to carry out guerrilla attacks against the invading Allies." Well, now, it ought to be clear what Gibson and his "German director Roland Emmerich" are up to. "It's hard not to wonder if the filmmakers have some kind of subconscious agenda," Foreman mutters. "The Patriot" won't win any Academy Awards, but Foreman and his own agenda ought to get a Pulitzer for paranoia.

By now, you are probably catching the drift of the objections leveled at the movie. Not only is it politically incorrect on gun control but also on race (by leaving out all the glorious ethnic diversity of 18th century South Carolina), and other matters as well. There's no sex in the movie and no slavery. Gibson, a prosperous farmer, employs free black laborers.

Actually, even though it's an obvious evasion of the slavery issue, this is not inaccurate. According to Eugene Genovese, the leading historian of American slavery, there were no small number of free black farm laborers in colonial America. Their number dwindled after the Revolution.

But if there aren't any slaves, there isn't any feminism either. The female characters depict strong women, but not as men. They don't shoot people or fight in battles or save the male characters, but they do protect homes and children and face mortal dangers bravely. Religion — meaning Christianity — is also positively portrayed, with characters gathering in churches and a clergyman who actually bears arms against the foe.

A reviewer in National Review complains that Gibson's character "does not fight for principle or country — at least not at first — but for vengeance. The relevant political institution is not South Carolina, but the family. This seems like a pretty serious cop-out for a film called 'The Patriot.'"

But maybe that's the point that few people today (especially at National Review) can catch — that patriotism begins with the family and works its way up, that nobody really fights for abstractions like "democracy" or "human rights" or "equality" but to protect hearth and home, and that when hearth and home are trampled and torched, you take revenge.

A people steeped in those principles probably doesn't need much else, and it won't have many enemies who can conquer it. If Americans have forgotten them, they can now go see "The Patriot" and remember what their forebears really fought for.