

Social Justice for Sale: Capitalism, Progressive Politics, and Children's Culture

This presentation asserts that neoliberalism needs to be addressed in any social justice critique of contemporary Anglo-American children's culture. Capitalism and social justice are strange bedfellows, and we must approach mass-produced culture that is "woke" or "activist" with a certain degree of apprehension. Doing so is not an act of cynicism, but vigilance. Systemic change extends from systemic critique, so doing so allows us to shape and reimagine not only our culture, but our society.

I offer two brief case studies here to examine structural change and evaluate what may be deemed "social progress." The first is Disney Pixar's *Coco* (Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina, 2017), the first US animated feature to offer primarily Latinx protagonists since *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson, 1944). While we can celebrate this production as sign of progress, it is also evidence of shifting audience demographics, both in the US and internationally. We must temper our praise with the industrial realities—that is, an understanding of the economic, political, and social context in which corporations operate and produce culture. Similarly, the second case study focuses on the film adaptation of Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*, directed by George Tillman, Jr. and released in 2018. While partisans on both sides remain divided over the most basic premises and proposals of #BlackLivesMatters, 20th Century Fox's decision to produce a film version of *THUG* deserves our attention, especially since the production company remains a subsidiary of NewsCorp, which also owns Fox News.

Ultimately, I seek to imagine where socially-informed criticism can and may go from here. Drawing on important critical work by bell hooks, Angela McRobbie, and David Harvey, I argue for the need to follow scholars Annette Wannamaker and Stuart C. Aitken in unpacking the troubling intersection of neoliberalism and children's culture. The attention to #WeNeedDiverseBooks hopefully will lead to greater representation, but this alone should not be the end result. Instead, we must think about what a truly inclusive culture industry will look like while being mindful of the implications of the emerging "social justice commodity" we have seen in recent years.