

An Open Letter to Reed Hastings, CEO, Netflix, Inc.

In Defense of *Gone with the Wind*--Why the film should not be banned or censored

Note: Please view my Netflix protest video on my Facebook page (greg hyver)
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=522170627>)

Hattie McDaniel plays **Mammy** in *Gone with the Wind*. Although there are other black characters portrayed in the film, they are minor and unmemorable roles. It's Mammy who fills the screen as the film's leading, black character towards whom the viewers gravitate, which greatly narrows down any analysis of whether negative black stereotypes are a component of the film, and that it should be edited, have additional movie notes or warnings pointing out its "racist" qualities, or outright banning the film from the public. But, is the role of Mammy a negative stereotype of black people in the era of slavery? I argue that it is not. When I recall the film, this is what enters my own mind about Mammy:

- Mammy is someone who is funny, kind, warm and friendly. Mammy shows empathy when Scarlett suffers, and is always there for her, not because she will be punished if she is not, but because Mammy has a good heart, and understands suffering and pain as a slave. Mammy makes me feel good inside, and she is someone who I would want as my neighbor. I lived in Africa (Guinea), working and volunteering there for two years (1992-93) with the Peace Corps. What surprised me the most about the Guineans, was how much they laughed and how much they seemed to enjoy life, in spite of their extreme poverty, sickness and hardships. I wanted to almost shake them and point out to them how unhappy they should be about their condition, just like we do here in America, then I wisely closed my mouth. Africans are strong and courageous people who endure extreme challenges to their lives, but who resist allowing their condition to poison their zest. These are the same people who came to America on slave ships, and Mammy is the embodiment of their spirit. The film's director, possibly even unknowingly, accurately portrayed this, and to say that the film masked the true savagery of slavery (see argument below) by painting the portrait that slaves were not dourly performing their assigned roles is far off base. My advice to the censorship crowd, including BLM activists and woke Democrats, is to live in Africa for a few years before making such judgements.
- Although Mammy is a slave working in the household, her wisdom and advice is respected by the owners, including Scarlett, who often behaves as a spoiled brat that may be seen by some as using her privilege to dictate to an obliging house servant. But, Mammy is a capable black woman who is intelligent and capable of shrugging off Scarlett's almost childlike outbursts and managing her through each of her crises. It is no stretch to believe that Mammy has learned much more about the realities of life than the pampered Scarlet, and thus is able to help Scarlett to better understand and navigate the cataclysmic disruptions to her world.
- Rhet Butler is another leading character who encounters Mammy at various times in the film. Rhet clearly respects Mammy, likes her, listens to her, and jokes with her. Perhaps, this is a relationship that the progressives greatly dislike and challenge. She almost appears to be on the same playing field as Rhet, despite her positions as a slave and as a servant.

Which brings me to my next point: the real call for censorship, by progressives, is that *Gone with the Wind* is minimizing many of the actual hardships experienced by slaves and that it avoids addressing this important topic. Yet, this film was not meant to be seen from the perspective of a black slave, but from the perspective of

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the white, southern elite. The mistreatment of black slaves was meant for future film writers and directors to call out and bear witness to. So, although *Gone with the Wind* was certainly not ahead of its time by not call out slave injustices, and by its portrayal of a harmonious plantation life, the film never advocated for the ownership of another human being, and made the lesson clear to those who still maintained that opinion (and to those paying admission to watch the film)--that those days were over, epitomized by the burning of Atlanta.

Gone with the Wind neither perpetuates racial stereotypes by portraying blacks (Mammy being the symbol) in denigrating fashion nor supports human bondage by ignoring the pain and injustices done to the slaves of this period by creating an image of a harmonious balance on the plantation. It is ludicrous to think that it does. And to attack this film on this basis through various forms of censorship, takes away from all of us the film's core, anti-slavery message, a perspective that was not yet perfected in its day (1940), but existed, nevertheless, as one of the early voices spearheading the evolution towards black equality. In my opinion, this is the equivalent of the black community shooting itself in the foot. To assume that audiences in 1940 did not yet understand the harm and injustices done to black slaves is to belittle the motives of those in the North that inspired them to risk countless white and black lives (Civil War: 1860-1865) to rebel against it. People already knew of the inherent evil of slavery. *Gone with the Wind* was not trying to perpetuate any surviving myths that it wasn't. It was exactly the opposite.

I'll wrap up with this: if someone were to ask a black person "who has the character qualities that you would most want to represent the face of your community for black youths to aspire to, Mammy or Colin Kaepernick, who would you choose? Their answer will be telling of the value system that these black mothers and fathers have in their hearts. Take away the color of Mammy's skin and her forced servitude for a moment, and judge her independently and unbiasedly from it. Mammy is an absolutely wonderful person who all of us, independent of skin color and social status, should aspire to. Now, turn her skin color black again, and she still remains a person we should all aspire to, at least in the world that I desire for my children, and their children.

The loss of Hatti McDaniel from our television screens, the first black actress to win an academy award (1940) for her depiction of Mammy, is a travesty. If Netflix does plan to edit by adding sub-text or pre-film narratives to the film to "educate" its viewers, then I hope you consider views like mine, views from a conservative, who see censorship in the film industry akin to the book burning that was already taking place in Nazi Germany when *Gone with the Wind* was being filmed. Those are the risk we all face in censorship, and it is fringe and dangerous, groupthink ideologies like BLM, whose flaws as an organization are readily apparent, that encourage overthrow and violence in its rhetoric, and that are often the first in line to demand the use of censorship as a tool to best achieve its stated aims.