

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS __ (9.5/10)

Sparse dialog pure poetry for freedom fighters

Novel by James Fenimore Cooper

Adaptation by John L. Balderston

Directed by Michael Mann

Daniel Day-Lewis ... Hawkeye (Nathaniel Poe)

Madeleine Stowe ... Cora Munro

Russell Means ... Chingachgook

Eric Schweig ... Uncas

Jodhi May ... Alice Munro

Steven Waddington ... Maj. Duncan Heyward

Wes Studi ... Magua

Maurice Roëves ... Col. Edmund Munro

Terry Kinney ... John Cameron

Edward Blatchford ... Jack Winthrop

Duncan: And who empowered these colonials to pass judgment on England's policies, and to come and go without so much as a "by your leave"?

Cora Munro: They do not live their lives "by your leave"! They hack it out of the wilderness with their own two hands, bearing their children along the way!

When this movie first appeared, I had an older friend and drinking buddy whose first comment was "Geez, these guys are running at full-tilt boogie all the time; it's like a track meet in the woods. I get tired just watching."

I don't.

As usual, Daniel Day-Lewis (Hawkeye)—not to mention the other "running men:" Eric Schweig playing Hawkeye's half brother Uncas and Russell Means playing Hawkeye's father—throws himself into his role with such athletic authenticity, and the camera work and stirring music are so effective, that a viewer feels as if he's parked smack in the middle of his big-screen HD TV back in the 1750s. In fact, IMHO[1] this is one of the few movies that justifies the expense of the new Blu-ray or other high-definition DVD formats.

Remember back in 1997, the Tom Cruise/Renee Zellweger movie Jerry Maguire was complimented—or accused, depending on one's feelings about the gimmick—for being both a chick flick (with the love story and the cute little kid) and a jock movie (appealing to NFL football junkies)? Well, with Last of the Mohicans, the screenwriters and director Michael Mann create a three-fer: one part romance, one part historical adventure, and one part political thriller. By political thriller I mean conveying exquisitely the rising idea of the natural Rights of Man challenging the Divine Right of Pontificating Royal Assholes.

So many examples from the dialog show that the spirit of the border, of the frontier, was indeed the same American spirit that in the late 18th century animated the taverns of Virginia, the meeting halls of Philadelphia, and the streets of Boston. One of the reasons I selected Mohicans for review this week is because America is coming up on Tax Day 2009, which I feel is one of the more critical decision points in our country's entire 233-year existence.

In this week's commentary, I identify two egregious categories of federal-level state megacrimes: 1) the absolute (bipartisan) takeover of our government by the money power[2] (with an attendant wealth confiscation from Americans of \$3 trillion handed to unknown b/millionaire recipients) and 2) the documented war crimes and treason—not to mention \$trillions of wealth/property/lives—destruction for eight years of the Bush-Cheney administration. The country-critical decision is whether we continue to cooperate by sending "income tax" tribute to these bloodthirsty thieves, liars, and killers in Washington... who posture as legitimate public servants but are in reality an appropriation away from throwing us all in chains and microchips.

Perhaps I overdramatize, but my God, man! If the magnitude of these illegal state actions don't, for you, "evinced a design to reduce us under absolute despotism," then you need to stop drinking the kool aid. I lay out my libertarian message as effectively as I know how in both that column (April 15: What would Jesus do?) and in my review coming in a couple of days (Cracking the Code). Now exiting back to the main program:

As the movie points out, the undefended colonial frontier was the only land available for poor settlers, where they "were beholden to none." Here more than in the cities and towns, the colonists could count less on the protection of the crown... which was clearly more interested in geopolitics than securing the homesteads against (often French-fomented) Indian attacks. A subplot of the story has these settlers, friends of Hawkeye and his father and brother, making a deal with a British military officer that they will help in "their sovereign's" military projects so long as they can return to defend their property from any attacks.

"No rightful authority..."

Hawkeye doesn't agree with his colonial friends' decision, but a sequence of events and choices—a key combination being Hawkeye's developing relationship with Cora Munro (Madeleine Stowe, hubba hubba)—leads him to the same fort his friends are going to help the Brits save. The colonials learn their homes are being attacked. Colonel Munro (Maurice Roëves) won't let them go. The Americans huddle inside the fort, careful the sentries do not hear their talk of disobedience:

Militia Member: Nathaniel, but you weren't ever for bein' here.

Nathaniel: That's right I saw it that way then and I see it that way now. If I had kin in the settlements, hell be damned sure I'd be long gone.

Militia Second in Command: What do we do about being under crown law?

Jack Winthrop (Edward Blatchford), Militia Leader: I believe they set aside their law when and as they wish. Their law no longer has rightful authority over us. All they have over us then is tyranny. And I will not live under that yoke. So I will stay here no longer.

...and other reasons to watch the movie

Sure, the focus I take on almost everything these days is what does it mean in terms of our renewed independence, restoring the republic. And that goes for this movie, too. But the Hawkeye and Cora hookup is as powerful a union as one will ever witness in cinema, bringing to mind one of the sexiest scenes and dialog in history:

Hawkeye: My father's people say that at the birth of the sun and of his brother the moon, their mother died. So the sun gave to the earth her body, from which was to spring all life. And he drew forth from her breast the stars, and the stars he threw into the night sky to remind him of her soul. So there's the Camerons' monument. My folks' too, I guess.

Cora Munro: You are right, Mr. Poe. We do not understand what is happening here. And it's not as I imagined it would be, thinking of it in Boston and in London...

Hawkeye: Sorry to disappoint you.

Cora Munro: No, on the contrary. It is more deeply stirring to my blood than any imagining could possibly have been.

Whole lotta love goin' on. And action, fast-paced, in every other frame. The camera and sound people in this movie are as important as the writers, director, and actors. The recreation of the siege of fort is absolutely breathtaking in its accuracy and dramatic impact.

Finally, as most literary people realize, James Fenimore Cooper was known as a romanticist... not terribly concerned about facts of the day if they got in the way of the actions of the protagonists. Consistent with that is some of the hand-to-hand fighting, especially when Hawkeye and his bro and dad are taking part in it. How they manage to come through all the mayhem unscathed while still dishing out hundreds of pinpoint mortal wounds (on a dead run, no less) strains credulity. But what the heck.

Last of the Mohicans makes me want to be a better American.

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[1] in my humble opinion

[2] My speculation on who these money power folks really are is found in my column: Of Kleptocons and Kings.

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