

Brandon Buchanan

English 1020 – Section 32

Cathy Whaley

March 22, 2006

A Mile Of Travesty

The Green Mile, directed by Frank Darabont, is a very compelling film, and can be seen as a supporter or opposer to the death penalty. The array of diverse characters adds different perspectives to views on the death penalty. However, when one looks at the details from scenes in the movie, one will see that the director shows that the death penalty is wrong.

The character portrayal of Eduard Delacroix (Michael Jeter) shows that people on death row are still people, no matter how bad the crime committed was. Even though Delacroix's crime is not mentioned, it must have been horrible enough that he got a death sentence, however, Delacroix is shown as a caring person, especially for his mouse, Mr. Jingles.

This attitude is not always apparent with inmates on death row. "Wild Bill" (Sam Rockwell) shows through his character that not all inmates on death row are as caring about others or themselves. When "Wild Bill" first comes into the prison, he makes a grand entrance by screaming as loud as he can, all while trying to suffocate one of the guards. Even though some of the inmates may act nice, one must still be weary that these are people that are harmful to society.

Most supporters of the death penalty want to see those who have committed horrible crimes pay for what they did, but many do not want to see those people suffer horribly at the same time. This is apparent in the scene when Percy (Doug Hutchison) does not put the sponge on the head of Delacroix. When the switch is flipped and the execution begins, Delacroix does

not die as soon as the officers expect. Delacroix twitches and screams in agony as electricity passes through him. The execution's audience begins to worry, and when they realize something has gone terribly wrong, they become disgusted and flee the room in terror. This is in comparison to lethal injection today. Lethal injection gives the appearance that the inmate being put to death is not suffering, but in many cases, this is not the case. Inmates may be paralyzed and may not be able to move, but will feel the pain of suffocation as the drugs stop the lungs and heart. Many people want to know the person on death row was put to death, however, many do not want to see the person suffer.

Another problem with the death penalty that the director addresses is innocent people on death row. John Coffey (Michael Clarke Duncan), as we find out later in the movie, is actually innocent. This means that innocent people could very well be put to death, even though they did nothing. If even one innocent person is put to death, then there should be an uproar, quite unlike what happened in regards to the movie. Once Paul Edgecomb (Tom Hanks) saw the vision that John Coffey gave him, he simply did not cause enough of an uproar, even though Coffey wanted to be put to death.

When John Coffey chooses to be put to death, this illustrates that many people on death row would rather die than be locked up for the rest of their lives. Coffey stated that he was too tired and he did not want to be around any of the hatred in the world. Even though Coffey is innocent, it would not be punishment to put an inmate to death that was guilty. The better punishment is to make the inmate serve life in prison, where they have their entire lives to reflect on the bad decisions they chose.

The family that thought John Coffey killed their two daughters did not receive any sort of true consolation because John Coffey did not kill them. It was in fact "Wild Bill" that killed the

two little girls. The father tells the guards to “fry him twice.” This shows how animalistic the urge for another human being to die is, especially when the person you wish killed has actually done nothing wrong.

One of the weaknesses about the Green Mile is that it uses the element of fantasy. In the movie, John Coffey has magical powers and is presented as a miracle worker. This takes away from the seriousness of the death penalty issue. Of course, magical powers are not actually set in reality, which can make it harder to relate some of the magical acts to the issue.

At the same time, this magical power that John holds symbolizes life. John brings Mr. Jingles back to life after Percy crushes the mouse with his foot. He even cures Paul’s infection. The irony of the movie is that Paul Edgecomb did not try to save John Coffey, and when Paul sees the visions of John, he receives some of John’s mysterious powers. This causes Paul to live into old age, in which he must watch his friends and family pass away before he does. The ironic situation is that while working on the Green Mile, Paul could have attempted to save John and let him live, but now, he must watch his loved ones die, and he can do nothing about it.

John Coffey is shown as a supernatural figure, almost as if he is God. John Coffey infects Percy with the disease he takes from Hal Moores’ (James Cromwell) wife. Percy becomes sick and disillusioned, and when “Wild Bill” begins to get rowdy, Percy shoots him multiple times in the chest. Percy does not remember what he does and is sent to a mental hospital. John Coffey says that they were both bad people and he gave them both what they deserved. This scene portrays John Coffey as the “judge, jury, and executioner,” very similar to a portrayal of God.

In conclusion, Frank Darabont had intent to make the movie be against the death penalty. The scenes can be picked apart to show that the death penalty is not the correct punishment for

any prisoner, no matter how horrible the crime was. There are flaws within the justice system and many innocent people may be put on death row, and possibly put to death. If these people are just given a life sentence, then there is always a possibility for freedom once more, but if the person is put to death, then it is over. *The Green Mile* is not just a casual movie, but it is a movie that demands contemplation by the audience on such a serious issue.