

Amazon Prime reverses itself on censorship of poster for *Full Metal Jacket*

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Amazon Prime has restored the original artwork of the poster for the Stanley Kubrick film *Full Metal Jacket*, after a protest voiced by the 1987 film's lead actor, Matthew Modine.

The artwork appears on the web page advertising sale or rental of the film, which is not currently available for live streaming. The original poster shows only the combat helmet worn by Modine's character, with the words "Born to Kill" handwritten on it, next to a peace sign.

As explained by Modine's character in the film, known only as "Joker," when he is challenged by a commanding officer, the conflicting sentiments for peace and gung-ho violence symbolize "the duality of man. The Jungian thing."

In the Amazon Prime version, the words "Born to Kill" have been deleted, although not the peace sign.

Modine called out the apparent political censorship in a tweet on X/Twitter viewed by a wide audience, and displaying both versions of the helmet.

"Who decided to remove 'BORN TO KILL?'" he asked. "Not only did they alter a piece of iconic art by Philip Castle, but they completely misunderstood the point of it being there. Pvt. Joker wears the helmet with 'BORN TO KILL' and the peace button as a statement about 'the duality of man.'"

Amazon Prime did not respond officially, although there were some media accounts derived from corporate insiders claiming that there was no political decision to suppress the words, only a graphical requirement that there be no text when the image was used in online advertising.

This is a not very convincing non-denial, particularly when it proved absolutely possible to restore the words to the image within hours of Modine's protest becoming widely reported.

Full Metal Jacket is not a great film, and certainly does not compare to Kubrick's most remarkable attacks on

war, as in *Dr. Strangelove* and *Paths of Glory*. But it has its strong and disturbing moments.

In the scene referred to above, a colonel confronts Private Joker (Modine):

Colonel: You write "born to kill" on your helmet and you wear a peace button. What's that supposed to be, some kind of sick joke?

Joker: No, Sir.

Colonel: What is it supposed to mean?

Joker: The duality of man. The Jungian thing, sir.

Colonel: Whose side are you on, son?

Joker: Our side, sir.

Colonel : Don't you love your country?

Joker: Yes, sir.

Colonel: Then how about getting with the program? Why don't you jump on the team and come on in for the big win?

Joker: Yes, sir.

Colonel: Son, all I've ever asked of my marines is that they obey my orders as they would the word of God. We are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out. It's a hardball world, son. We've gotta keep our heads until this peace craze blows over.

Joker: Aye-aye, sir.

The film falls into two halves, unequal in intensity and length, and with little connection except that some of the same soldiers appear, first as raw recruits in boot camp, then in battle during the hellish fighting in the ruins of Hue. This was the bloodiest battle during the 1968 Tet Offensive, one of the few times that the Marines and the Vietnamese liberation fighters confronted each other in an

urban environment, rather than in jungle or mountains.

The boot camp sequence is compelling in its depiction of how everyday young men are molded into brutal killers, with the indispensable, caustic presence of Lee Ermey, a retired drill sergeant who began as a technical advisor to Kubrick, but was eventually cast as drill sergeant Hartman in the film itself.

As the review published in the *Bulletin*, US forerunner of the *World Socialist Web Site*, described it:

There are several memorable scenes: in one, the sergeant reminds the raw recruits that the Marines produced marksmen like Charles Whitman, the Texas tower murderer, and Lee Harvey Oswald. “These individuals showed what one Marine and his rifle can do,” Hartman says.

At another point, he tells them, “God has a hard-on for the Marines,” because by killing “we send him so many fresh souls.”

The latter half of the film shifts to Vietnam, where Joker is assigned as a correspondent for *Stars and Stripes*, the military newspaper, and attached to a unit storming the city of Hue. The *Bulletin* review noted:

Again, some of the images created here by Kubrick are memorable, and will stay with the viewer long after seeing the film. As the helicopter takes the journalist to the front, the gunner casually machineguns peasants working in the field below. He boasts that he has killed over 200 people. “Anyone who runs is VC,” he declares, grinning, “and anyone who stands still is a very disciplined VC.”

Hue itself [is] a shattered ruin, more terrifying than any horror film. Death lurks everywhere—behind a pile of rubble, behind a doorway, under each cautious footstep, even in a child’s doll.

But the film’s limitations are similar to those of a whole series of Vietnam War films produced during the 1980s, including *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*. None of these films went beyond the questions posed by the struggle for individual survival in a war depicted as brutal and hellish.

The filmmakers, despite their intentions of criticizing a reactionary and unpopular war, were incapable of carrying out an analysis informed by a political or historical understanding of the long struggle of the Vietnamese people against French colonialism, and Japanese, British and ultimately American imperialism.

As the *Bulletin* review noted:

“War is hell” can be the basis of petty bourgeois pacifism, or individual cowardice, but not a class-conscious approach to the question of war. There are wars which are worth fighting and dying in, for all their horrors, and wars which the working class must resolutely oppose. It depends entirely on the nature of the states and classes which are fighting the war.

As American imperialism escalates its involvement in a series of military conflicts, from the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, to war against Iran and its allies in the Middle East, focused now on the Israeli genocide in Gaza, and the urgent preparations for war against China in the Indo-Pacific region, it is imperative for the US ruling class to block access for its population to any critical approach to imperialist militarism.

That is the context for evaluating the significance of the attempt by Amazon Prime—owned by Jeff Bezos, the world’s richest, or second richest, capitalist—to tone down the antiwar message in the promotion of *Full Metal Jacket*.



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