

Movie Content Controversies



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF THEATRE OWNERS

- Exhibitors make **case-by-case and community-by-community decisions** when selecting films to play in their theaters. Exhibitors can and do reject films deemed unsuitable for their communities.
- NATO as a **trade association**, however, cannot act on demands by individuals or groups regarding the screening of controversial films or trailers. Indeed, it could be illegal for NATO to try to do so.
- Our First Amendment guarantees a robust regard for freedom of expression without fear of censorship. At the core of the First Amendment is the right to poke fun or criticize religion, politics, traditions, etc. There are few, if any, celebrities, statesmen, religions, or political ideologies that have not been the object of cinema satire at some point or another. The First Amendment solution to expression with which protestors disagree is **not suppression of that speech, but more speech**.
- Controversy about the content of a movie can be very **educational**, as contending groups vie to express the controlling narrative about the movie.
- Succumbing to pressure from offended individuals or groups would lead to **chaos** in our industry. If adherents to a deeply felt ideology or tradition could halt expression because they objected to the portrayal of their tradition, then the freedom of expression that allows such protest would become quite meaningless. Again, the response to offending speech is more speech, not suppression of speech.
- In the last few years, a wave of films and documentaries with provocative religious, political and cultural themes have stirred up controversy. Films such as “The Last Temptation of Christ,” “The Passion of the Christ,” “Fahrenheit 9/11,” and “Brokeback Mountain” have galvanized protestors with different interests and agendas. In each case, box office was robust and Americans benefited from an **impassioned national dialogue**.
- The efforts of protestors to encourage people to avoid seeing a particular film often have the **opposite effect of piquing the public’s interest**. In fact, some of the most controversial movies in the last decade, such as those previously mentioned, have experienced critical acclaim and box office success.

Talking Points