

Dr. Robert Oscar Lopez : “Where has Foucault Gone?” Q&A

So after that very rich presentation...

I'm sorry if it went really fast, you can sing the show tunes now if you want, yeah. "Music Man" is my favorite, so....like no business I know, yeah.

We've got just under 15 minutes for questions, songs...

Yeah, interpretive dance.

Yeah, and I'm here to free body, bobby from the podium, so if you have questions now is your opportunity.

I will dance. You know I take Irish dance right? So I can do it, I can do it, yes.

And we'll start over here.

Q: Hi, that was a really uh, interesting presentation. Um, you talked about uh, film as uh, arche..as uh, artifacts of history kind of. I was wondering what you think about the relationship of film as teaching us culturally and whether you think law has a similarity to that, uh, cuz that's sort of what to compare your emphasis with maybe like the what is marriage emphasis law as a teacher, do you feel that uh, artifacts have the same relationship or if law has that relationship.

A: I do, yeah, I mean I think that in some ways, film is more powerful uh, because if you read the work of Roland Barthes, he says mythologies work on us much more powerfully when we don't realize that it's teaching us; whereas the law instructs us very explicitly. So, and I think that's one of the reasons why people had intuitively wanted to defend the family have focused a lot on juridical and legal discourse and they haven't really been able to take mastery of the cultural discourse. So I would say that, that film is actually more powerful and its-it's a testament to that power that on this particular issue on children and their rights to their mother and father, it's been very difficult for people to unearth or excavate the other side of the story which isn't being told, because the side that would naturally defend the traditional family, which is the conservative side, just doesn't seem to have all the strong connection to culture. Their much more strongly connected to the law. Does that make sense?

Question on this side. Yeah. Hi.

Q: Um, so it noticed, um, or I noticed like in like your 70s and 80s film selections they all seemed to talk about um like what's it called; nuclear families having trouble? But there are also like a lot of good programs from those eras that also talked about how great the family was like...

A: It's true the Cosby...

Q: The Cosby Show.

A: I know yeah. It was, I was just...when I rehearsed this I was like I know that there's so much I can't, you know I only have so-so limited time, but yeah, the Cosby Show was...How many people were alive and teenagers or above when the Cosby Show came out. Was that not the biggest phenomenon? I think it was like the Cosby Show and um, what was the other one with Kirk Cameron; "Growing Pains". Those shows and, and, uh, the one with Michael J. Fox; I think that those shows really were in the 1980s almost like oh my god we've had it up to here with hearing how awful the nuclear family is. I want to go home and be, you know, see a mom and a dad with kids and especially with the "Cosby Show" it was a black middle class family in Brooklyn and so um, there was definitely during the 1980s this huge resurgence of films that were incredibly positive and affirming um, the nuclear family and then they just kind of, you know, they couldn't sustain it I guess. You know the siren song from the deconstructive impulse was too powerful for it. Yeah, Yeah, no problem.

Q: Hi, just a quick comment and then my question. I just want to compliment you on your integrity because I think that it must be very difficult for you in your personal situation to be kind of swimming upstream with your thoughts that seem to be so counter culture. So I want to compliment you on that. Um, the second thing I wanted to ask, so if you're using the films of the 50s, 60s and 70s as these artifacts, isn't there a danger that these films really represent the microcosm of Hollywood and not the total population of the country. In other words, Hollywood is super privileged, super rich, super indulgent, super everything; and isn't there a danger that they're not really reflective of the real world?

A: There is a massive danger of that. Um, and I think one of the things that's been hard when people have tried to present counter narratives in Hollywood is you have to play the game to get the movie out there and you have to play to the audience and so it's really hard to know when you're going to have that breakthrough moment like what I would call the "Brady Bunch" where even though at that moment that TV show kind of conflicted with what the general population and the general viewing market was ready for, it just worked. You know, but it made all these compromises at the same time but then led to other problems. So it's a huge problem trying to figure out how do you produce culture in a world where the culture industries do reflect overwhelming the interests of very wealthy people? And that's where I think Michel Foucault was so important because we always have to be critical thinkers. Even as we're making ideology; even as we're producing our own artifacts we always have to be aware that we're erasing things and that we're overlooking things, and you have to constantly be self-examining in order to do this well. Does that answer your question?

Q: Hi Dr. Lopez, I am actually speaking right after you so.

A: Oh okay. Alright.

Q: But I was really struck by how um, related our topics are. Uh, and I have a question that's going to, this is what I'm going to talk about, um, I'm wondering, I mean you cited a lot of um, uh, I guess, you know the book and some of the movies that I guess wear the politics on their sleeve and I guess I wonder in your study of that history whether you think, um the kind of obviousness of a political agenda affects the cultural effectiveness and the impact that films have, cuz that's-that's my instinct as an artist and an art maker is that. So I wonder if you just kind of see that from the prospect of a scholar?

A: You know it's weird because I-I look at something like for instance "Birdcage" which just to me, uh, I as a cultural critic; I loved "La Cage aux Folles" the original French movie. I can't stand "Birdcage" because I feel like it's just one long diatribe against the 1990s religious right. I mean it's like so hamfisted in its politics. And I look at that and I say oh my God everyone else must be able to see this. Everyone else, but the strange thing is that you find that people don't see it; that they actually internalize it and they start to view the political indoctrination as part of the entertainment. You know one of my colleagues in the field of cultural criticism once said it's like moral Ex-Lax. People get addicted to going to movies to get some kind of feel good political message and then they can't wean themselves off of it. If that makes sense, you know? That's, I-I don't know, I wish that I had a greater faith in the population at large to deconstruct the films but I find that they just consistently don't. Yeah. Yes.

Q: Hi, I just want to say thank you. I don't want to get into too much dialogue but I just wanted to get to my question which was; you mentioned at the end, I really, I like your idea of Foucault, his idea of queerness, but I didn't fully understand or grasp what you meant by it and I just wanted maybe, because you ended with the fact that you wanted us to get back to this queer identity that he represented or maybe explain this, so maybe if you could talk about...

A: Well, okay, let me just say straight up front. I am from the generation of queer theorists when everybody was saying, you know, you know, queer people should never want to get married because you're imposing this juridical control on us that is designed for straight people, you're taking away our independence, so there's just a little bit of that left in me, but I would say that Foucault's vision of the queer, of what is queer and what it means to queer something is always; it's based on critical thinking more than it is based on sex. It's not based on what you do with your body, it's based on your constant dedication to deconstructing and not buying it when people try to give you-you know a full package of ideology. When people try to give you some kind of vision of the world or some kind of argument and it looks too good to be true; right? And that's the thing that I wish that the queer movement would come back to because there was that energy. And there still is. If you go to a website called "Against Equality" this is very far left queer thinkers who deconstruct the argument for marriage, the argument for military inclusion, all of these things because they're still keeping alive where the old tradition where to be queer means you question, you criticize, you don't sort of smugly accept an ideology; whether it's from people who are like you or people who are different from you.

Q: I think you kind of answered it but is that the role you feel like to question these things and to bring these-these things to the surface; is that the role that you feel a lot of queer people should take or something like that?

A: I think so. I think that you know, there-there's a need to excavate. I think that right now there is a very powerful gay lobby that has a lot of money and they've become very entrenched and they put out a lot of narratives, a lot of statements about the way the world is and they don't, they overlook or they obscure or they erase so many realities. And I think it's time for us to get back to the point where we go out and find. We have to ask ourselves what are we overlooking. You know. What about all of the people who are still getting infected with HIV. What about the incredibly high rate of domestic violence in same sex relationships. The fact that the HIV infection rate recently went up among boys 13-19. You know, what about, that we still have rampant problems with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, everything; and none of that really has been, there's been no dent made in any of that by marriage. Even in places where marriage passed, quite a while ago. You know the figures coming from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Canada; the problems remain; and I think it's because queer people have to go back to the stage where you're looking for what is it that we overlooked? What is it that we forgot to think about on our rush to this one goal that we have that we're so obsessed with. Does that make sense or?

Q: Helpful for both perspectives if you had.

A: Yeah, yeah.

So as we move towards our break at 2:30, I'd ask if we could take two questions short and to the point together and if you could respond to them both and if needed, um extend the, extend the response in a private discussions at the break if we could wrap up.

Q: Ok so your talk seemed to center a lot on parenting and like the-the children, uh, like you said being told that you don't have a right to a mother and a father; and I in no way want to, like, negate what Ryan Anderson said about marriage and parenting being intrinsically connected. But I'm just wondering from your perspective; especially coming from queer theory and talking about the parenting aspect, do you see the possibility for like, marriage without, I mean do you see I guess the right to get married for gay couples...

A: Without adoption?

Q: Without adoption or um, things like that.

A: I absolutely do. I absolutely do. And I have always supported, and this is going to alienate a lot of the conservatives in the room and I'm really sorry. But I've always supported civil unions and part of that because, became, I was raised by two lesbians and when my mother died there was no legal protection for her partner and I saw her get evicted from the house that we had all been living in and um, and I got evicted right

along with it. So I-I've always believed there has to be some kind of legal protection for it. I supported marriage for a long time but the problem is that the people who have proposed gay marriage have chosen to yoke gay parenting and gay marriage together. After the 2003 decision in Massachusetts, unfortunately the American Civil Liberties Union came out with a statement saying "From here on in when we fight for gay marriage we're fighting for gay parenting". And so that put me in horrible situation where I have to be against gay marriage because it ultimately means that in order to protect the sexual relationship between two adults you have to shatter the relationship between a child and either his father or his mother. So I do definitely, I've always supported civil unions and if I would be a supporter of gay marriage if in fact that had not happened, but unfortunately that is what happened and I think a lot of the people who I might have disagreed with 10 years ago who kept on warning that gay marriage was the portal to new things, unfortunately those people have proved right. That you, gay marriage became this tidal wave that then swept up children; and I always see that the children's perspective. Does that answer your question?

I had assured you we'd fit in your questions, we will if you could be very brief and Bobby if you could give the nutshell version of the response you would like to give.

A: Okay, yes, yeah.

Q: Thanks for your response, uh Dr. Lopez. I was going to ask a similar question to her, but maybe you could expand on what you think of the morality of uh, same gender relationships and monogamous long term relationships among them without taking into respect the uh, children. Like is it moral, is it okay for two same gender people to have sex and have long term relationships?

A: I think that's between them and God. Were, look, were all sinners. So, um, and you know we all work through our issues on our own. I-I'm a firm believer and get people, get government out of people's bedrooms. So, um, uh, I guess I would say, I-I don't really have an answer to it because I think it's an individual question that every individual has to answer for themselves. I think for some individuals there are things that matter to them a lot like their religion or they're already in a marriage to a woman, you know, it's a man whose already in a marriage to a woman and in the context of all those things, they can't really rationalize for themselves having homosexual activity. But I-that's something that's above my pay grade. Does that make sense? You know, um.

And with that, we want to say thank you to Dr. Lopez.