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ABSTRACT

This paper examines critical responses to James Cameron's most recent film, *Avatar*, to suggest that the ways in which critics have ignored its content because of Cameron's innovative use of 3-D technology and effects or praised its content for offering a multicultural paradise are misguided at best and misleading at worst. Instead, what follows is an investigation into *Avatar*'s content, specifically its plot, hero and, ultimately, its indivisible relationships to the Western genre and what I call the New Western genre—Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990) will be representative of the larger genre which has continued to emerge in more recent films like Edward Zwick's *The Last Samurai* (2003). These relationships between, and crossovers within, genres prevent cross-cultural relationships based upon democratic forms of equality, what Costner is moving toward and what Cameron makes a claim for, from coming to fruition. As biological (colonial) and social/historical (imperial) notions of racial superiority and inferiority move across and arise within genres, the brief moments of cross-cultural cooperation and mutual respect within these films are subverted. In fact, Cameron's film very clearly demonstrates how politics can be mobilized, despite a filmmaker's unawareness, through big-budget blockbusters to advocate concrete and damaging political projects—in this case, America's imperial projects around the globe. This paper attempts to do two main things: show how Cameron fails to notice what is a very clear advocacy for American imperialism in his film and display the ways in which a lasting egalitarian model of cross-cultural social organization is never established as a result of this failure.

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