

Dystopia

Dystopian novels and movies have long been broadly popular with teens, young adults and older adults. In my day as a teenager, it was books like *The Handmaid's Tale* (still popular today due to the Netflix series) and movies like *The Running Man*. My son as a teen devoured the *Maze Runner* series while my daughter's nose was frequently buried in the *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* books.

We read these types of stories safe in the belief that they depict fantasy worlds and "it could never happen here". However, many of these novels, in addition to providing entertainment, were also intended to serve as a warning. (Certainly, this was Margaret Atwood's intent).

One element that is common to many of these novels is the depiction of public executions - executions ordered and / or carried out by a corrupt state - in order to either instill fear in the general population (*The Handmaid's Tale*), to keep the masses entertained and distracted (*The Running Man*) or both (*Hunger Games*).

Which brings us to the murder of Tyre Nichols. These killings by corrupt police officers are horrific and happen way too frequently. There is nothing that I can say that others would not have already said. Except that in this particular situation, it struck me that there was a new and frightening twist. The public release of the video showing this murder was hyped by major news organizations - "coming soon!", stay tuned!"

I have not watched this video, and I will not watch it. This young man's final agonizing moments should not be billed as entertainment for the masses and hyped as if it were a sporting event. This was a real murder of a real person with a real family, not the Super Bowl. The coordinated release and advertising by the media brings to mind all of those dystopian novels - for what was this if not a public execution?

I appreciate that others will have an opposing view. I understand why the Nichols family supported the public release of the body cam footage. Similar to how, in the 1950s, Emmitt Till's mother insisted on an open casket, Tyre Nichols' mother wants the public to witness the sickening acts that were inflicted on her son in order to provoke discussion and change. The difference here is the sensationalization surrounding the public release of the footage.

Public executions are not new. They have happened since the beginning of civilization in every culture and country, including the United States (e.g., the public hanging of the Salem witches). They are still commonplace in countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia. We in the United States tend to look at these other places as barbaric, and we think that we are long since past that - that we are more highly civilized. The release and sensationalization of the Tyre Nichols video demonstrates that we are not.

The treatment of this video represents a slippery slope. It dehumanizes us all and brings us one step closer to becoming like the dystopias we so love to read about but never want to become.

About the Author

I am a semi-retired financial services executive and spent the last 24 years working for a well-known Wall Street firm. I am a mother of twins who both attended the Downingtown STEM Academy and are now freshmen in college. I reside in Downingtown, PA. In addition to my twins, I have a husband and two very spoiled retrievers,