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Planet of the Apes: More Women, Less War?

by KATHLEEN J. WU

One of the best movies to come out all year is “Dawn of the Planet of the Apes.” It’s visually stunning, features some incredible primate performances and tells a compelling story. It also does a better job of illustrating why women deserve a seat at the table, both in the legal profession and in seats of power in general, than just about any piece of fiction I’ve seen in the last decade.

DIVERSITY

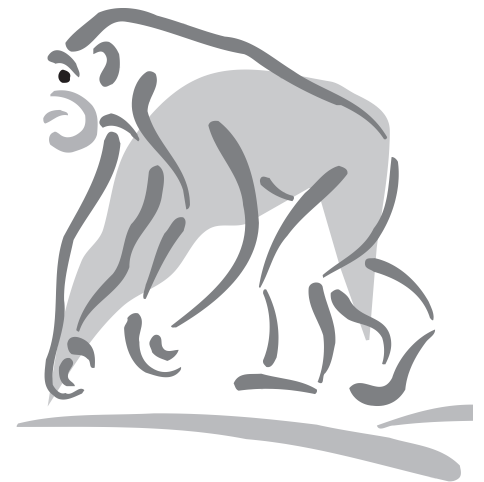
The movie includes only two female characters, neither of whom steps outside her role as wife/girlfriend. Perhaps not coincidentally—and anybody who knows even the slightest bit about the

Apes franchise won’t consider this a spoiler—the viewer knows from the outset that war between the humans and the apes is inevitable. After all, the movie isn’t called “Dawn of the Planet of the Humans.”

The absence of women continued to nag at me after the movie. A few strong females might have injected less war-mongering and more collaboration and problem-solving. Instead of following the script of the 1960s “Planet of the Apes” franchise, this reboot could have rebuilt a world in which humans and apes happily coexist and come up with even more creative snack foods.

Are you listening, Hollywood? Movies can be great and feature meaningful female characters.

I’ve seen very few movie reviewers mention this flaw in “Dawn of



the Planet of the Apes.” That could be because it’s really just a great movie, but (and I haven’t done a census) I imagine most major movie reviewers are male. And that handful of female movie reviewers probably wouldn’t want to bring it up and risk being accused of injecting gender politics into a summer blockbuster. That’s an easy accusation to make if one is

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a member of the gender that has always dominated the big screen.

Having an absence of women in decision-making roles matters. One need only look at those countries where women are marginalized to see the consequences of having a society dominated solely by men. Not only are those societies more violent (with much, but certainly not all, of that violence aimed at women), but the overall standard of living in those countries is much lower than our own.

That difference is visible, too, at the upper ends of the economic spectrum. Two recent studies by Thomson Reuters, *Mining the Metrics of Board Diversity in 2013* and *Women in the Workplace in 2012*,

found that opening opportunities for women at the board and managerial levels is good for shareholders.

The 2013 study showed that companies with mixed-gender boards perform at least as well, if not better, than companies with no women on their boards. The 2012 study found that the companies with higher representation of women in senior positions fare better in a volatile or bearish stock market.

Like the rest of corporate America, the legal profession has been trying to diversify for many years. Unfortunately, we haven't made nearly as much progress as we should. But that just means we need to keep trying new things.

Fortunately, any progress we make lowers the barrier for greater progress. Consider a study published earlier this year in *Administrative Science Quarterly*: "The Implications of Marriage Structure for Men's Workplace Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors toward Women" found that married men whose wives didn't work outside the home tended to "disfavor women in the workplace and are more likely than the average of all married men to make decisions that prevent the advancement of qualified women."

So the more women who stay in the workforce, thus influencing more husbands to have a more gender-equal world view, the better the workforce becomes for other women.

Movies and TV have a role to play, as well. They remain the dominant cultural conditioning of our time, and they have a profound impact on public opinion. Just witness how much American public opinion on homosexuality and same-sex marriage seemingly tracked what TV piped into our living rooms, via "Ellen," "Will & Grace," and "Modern Family."

Characters in TV and movies show us what's possible, what's the norm and what people should expect. Women need to, at the very least, speak out when Hollywood continues to marginalize us and limit our roles to caretakers and mothers.

The real world is filled with complex, smart women who get things done. We need more of them making movies and showing us how to make a better world, with or without a simian apocalypse. **TNL**



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