

A Short Time Ago In the Messaging of Children's Media Very Close By

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Abstract

Most children in the US grow up watching television that tries to teach them some kind of life lesson that they should carry with them as they grow up. The children's show, *Star Wars Rebels*, does something similar but goes a step further to handle topics that would be considered more mature, such as the imperialistic nature of empires. The project looks at what the implications of such messages are. With an overview of studies that show how well children understand what they're watching and an examination of why the themes in this show are overlooked, the project seeks to prove that *Rebels* can show children how the past and present empirical behavior of the US has caused so much harm. In order to create a better future, they must learn from the country's past mistakes and reshape it to become a place that is truly free and safe for all.

Most people in the US can recall watching TV as a kid. If asked, they could probably name at least one show they used to watch during their childhood. Regardless of what children's show it was, many of them follow a similar pattern where some kind of lesson is taught; a character does something bad, they have to learn the consequences of their actions, and how they should have acted in the first place. In other words, it is trying to convey a message to children and a pretty obvious one at that. What kids may not have picked up on is any implicit messaging that the show may have contained, trying to teach them more complex ideas beyond "treat your friends nicely." They instead delve into topics that adults may consider too mature for children, such as politics or social injustice, but depending on how these topics are addressed in the show, it can lay the foundation for understanding these complicated topics at an earlier age.

One such show that does this is *Star Wars Rebels*. In it, imperialistic themes are shown through propaganda and the indoctrination of the Empire's beliefs, as well as the violent lengths the Empire is willing to go to in order to maintain their power. Considering this is a show marketed towards six-to-eight-year-old boys in the US, viewers see how some children's media contains messages that, in this case, warn of the consequences these actions can lead to and the cruel nature of empires in general. In turn, this helps kids recognize imperialistic behaviors in the world around them and hopefully influence them to act against them, creating a future where imperialistic behavior is not a problem.

Other research currently surrounding this show have viewed it and its themes in a religious sense, using feminist theory, and analyzing its reflection of political society in

the US today. However, I am considering the audience that the show is meant for and the meaning behind the inclusion of political themes once that audience is taken into account. To do this, I will be using post-colonialist theory to show how these themes are prevalent and how it can affect the viewpoint of the audience. Part of post-colonialism focuses on the effects of colonization and the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, which is the nature of the main setting in the show. I will also be visually and textually close-reading the first season of *Rebels*, as I want to establish that the show has included imperial themes from the beginning. The first season in particular has met criticism for being too childish, so I want to show that the more mature themes have been there the whole time, not just in the later seasons. I will also be comparing the wrongdoings of the Empire to those of the US government by providing brief overviews of historical events. Alongside this, I will be studying the messaging system of children's media and looking at studies that show how well children understand messaging, whether it is implicit, meaning information that media implies, or explicit, meaning information that is clearly stated. In other words, how does the messaging included in *Rebels* affect the way children may come to view the world?

Messaging in children's media is certainly not a new concept. In one study on whether or not children understood the messages in an animated movie upon watching it more than once, it was found that the kids were more likely to spot implicit information in a piece of media better with only one viewing rather than multiple. In fact, they understood implicit information better than explicit information in one viewing. (Skouteris, et al. 104) In a similar study, where kids watched an animated clip while a distraction was played, it was concluded that any distractors do not take away from the

kids' understanding of implicit information, but significantly reduces their understanding of the explicit information. (Danling, et al.) Besides this, in a study about children's understanding of advertisements, the researchers found that "children seem to start developing a progressive process of understanding the nature of the persuasive actions from about the age 8." (Uribe & Fuentes-García 931) The paper also mentions that children in the US start to understand the purpose of advertisements at the earliest age, as young as six-years-old, of all groups examined in the past. While this study talks about when children begin to understand the persuasive point of advertisements, it can be applied to a TV show as well to further show that kids understand what the messaging is persuading them to do. Whether or not they choose to act on it is still up for debate. Despite this, an assumption can be made that because actions in TV shows are performed by protagonists that kids can connect to, rather than a nameless character in an advertisement, kids are more likely to be persuaded by the show instead of the ad.

While my focus is on kids' perspectives of media, it's important to note how adults react to messaging as well since they are the ones who usually screen a show to determine if it's appropriate for their child. Because kids are likely to understand the messages being presented to them, this provides evidence to support the argument that parents should be concerned about what their kids are watching. However, do the adults pick up on the same messages as the kids, and what is their opinion of the messaging? Studies have shown that adults at least pick up on the explicit messages in children's media. For example, when parents watched clips from *Toy Story* that demonstrate traits related to leadership, the majority agreed that their children can learn

a good lesson from watching the movie. On the other hand, another study, where prospective preschool teachers watched 46 clips from popular children's cartoons, the conclusion drawn was that the content of most shows needs to be changed. The researchers believe that "violence, evil, harm and aggression are combined with positive characteristic features and prosocial behaviors to imply they were sympathetic." (Atabey 106) While there is disagreement between whether or not cartoons have a positive or negative impact on children, it is agreed that there is some kind of impact and that kids do understand on some level what message a show is trying to convey to them. However, it seems as though the adults are not picking up on the implicit messaging like the kids do. None of the research talks about how adults understand implicit information in children's media, leading to my conclusion that it is an overlooked element in this genre. My research intends to contribute to the proof that cartoons can have a positive impact on children by showing how *Rebels* advocates against imperialism through a simple setup of good vs. evil.

That's not to say that the original *Star Wars* didn't have this setup either. However, because movies have less time to give its story to the audience, it does not have a chance to fully flesh out the atrocities committed by the Empire and allow the meaning of them to sink in and hit the audience as hard. In a similar vein, there is less time for the audience to connect to the characters and allow them to become true influence. The *Star Wars* franchise started back in 1977 when George Lucas released the first movie, which was simply entitled *Star Wars*, later renamed *A New Hope*. It was about a galaxy under the control of a dictatorship called the Empire and the rebels trying to take them down. One rebel, Princess Leia, is captured by the Empire, sending a

group of unlikely heroes on a quest to save her. Along with this, the main protagonist, Luke, discovers his ability to control a mysterious power called the Force and is guided by an old master from an order that uses the Force to do good called the Jedi as he learns how to use his power. The Empire, the Force, and the Jedi all became key elements that show up in most, if not all, *Star Wars* media.

While Lucas himself expected the movie to be a failure, it was a hit and led to many more pieces of media being developed as part of the universe. That said, the original includes the Empire blowing up a whole planet, which is the definition of genocide, a topic many would assume is not meant for kids. However, after this occurs, it is never mentioned again in the other two movies in the trilogy, even though it seems like something that would provide character motivation for Leia since it was her planet that blew up. Unlike the original trilogy of movies, *Rebels* remembers all the terrible doings of the Empire and makes sure the audience understands the full extent of the effects they have on other characters.

Rebels follows the six rebel crew members of the ship called the *Ghost*. It includes the ship's pilot, Hera, her sassy droid, Chopper, explosives expert, Sabine, ex-military captain, Zeb, Jedi-in-hiding, Kanan, and his apprentice, Ezra. They are from many different backgrounds, but have come together to go on missions that cause problems for the Empire while creating financial gain for themselves, the Rebellion, and help those in need. All the while, they are also avoiding the antithesis of the Jedi, the Sith, as they hunt down the last remaining Jedi, such as Kanan and Ezra. This is because the Empire believes the Jedi are the only people who have a chance at defeating them.

The creation of *Rebels* was partially influenced by the channel Disney XD looking to gain more viewership of its channel from young boys ages six-to-eight-years-old. The channel itself “was intended to boost revenues for the organization’s cable division by “draw[ing] more advertising for boy-focused products like video games and action figure toys” (Garner 112) However, this strategy wasn’t working, as the channel was getting less than 50,000 views per day, a small number in comparison to other children’s networks. Therefore, the executives decided to use the recently-acquired *Star Wars* franchise, a piece of media known for its male audience, to make a new show aimed at their desired demographic. This would also help to bring in older fans of *Star Wars* who want to keep up with the franchise, and, in turn, more viewership.

While the channel got the viewership numbers initially, the reviews were not the best. Many older *Star Wars* fans were still bitter about the preceding show to *Rebels*, *The Clone Wars*, being canceled and Disney acquisition of *Star Wars* in general. This hatred was furthered by Disney declaring that the extended universe of *Star Wars*, which includes anything that Lucasfilm licensed that wasn’t the original six movies or *Clone Wars*, was now considered non-canon. They complained about the different animation style, which changed due to the lower budget for *Rebels*, how the Empire does not seem to be a credible threat, and that it is a childish show in comparison. These fans completely miss the point; *Star Wars* has always been for kids. The creator of *Rebels* even said when criticized about this, “I would say to them ‘when did you first watch Star Wars?’ My whole goal is never to take that experience away from kids.” (Smith)

Keeping this in mind, adult fans may perceive a new version of *Star Wars* as an attack on their childhood memories, instead of realizing it's the next generation's iteration of the franchise. As an analysis of fan behavior states, "part of the fan base's hostile reaction has more to do with the personal meaning that this franchise holds for them rather than any other reason." (Arouh 71) While the opinion of older fans may not seem like it matters, it actually does have an effect on why *Rebels* is still undervalued. Considering the age of the main demographic for *Rebels*, the kids are still young enough that parents do have some control over what they watch. If these kids are coming from older fans, then they are going to discourage their children from watching the show because it isn't "true" *Star Wars*. They will probably still be exposed to older iterations of *Star Wars* by their parents, and some kids may decide to watch *Rebels* on their own later on, but it will forever have that negative connotation to others.

Therefore, the mere announcement of the show, as well as the trailer, were enough for many fans to decide not to watch the show after making their initial criticisms of it. The viewership numbers drastically dropped after only the first two episodes; it went from about 2.75 million views for its first episode down to 0.58 million views by its fourth. (Pucci) This alone shows that their view of the show was tainted because they were already going into it with the preconceived notion that it would not have any mature themes and thought that bias was confirmed after only three episodes. To be fair, this is the youngest target audience that *Star Wars* has ever gone for. George Lucas himself stated that his target audience for both the movies and *Clone Wars* were 12-year-olds. (Breznican) However, these fans forget that the show still exists in the same universe as the rest of the canon; it has to keep certain established elements in

order to not seem out of place within the universe. This means keeping the imperialistic themes seen in other iterations. It's now just a little hidden underneath the mask of bright and colorful animation.

Because so many people missed out on *Rebels*, it does not get credited as the first piece of *Star Wars* media to do a deep dive into the inner workings of the Empire and their horrid acts. The fanbase has wanted a show exploring this because it would make the universe seem more realistic and grittier. In other words, it would be a show meant for adults as the intended audience instead of kids for once, and adult fans finally thought they got all this when the show *Andor* came out in 2022. It focused heavily on the unjust arrests and convictions made by the Empire, their seizure of land belonging to natives of a planet, and their destruction of culture. It all serves to show how the Empire is made up of fascists. However, these are all aspects of *Rebels* that will be discussed later. It is interesting to note how *Andor* is considered to be the darkest *Star Wars* media that Disney has made to date because of its themes, but *Rebels* is considered to be one of the most puerile ones, despite having the same themes.

The reason for this contradiction is because *Andor* was live-action instead of animated. People almost immediately assume that if something is a cartoon, then it is aimed towards kids, especially in the US since the early animators, like Walt Disney, are well-known for making movies that were marketed towards children. In the early days when animation was starting to grow, the Hays Code came into being, which prohibited mature themes in any movies, meaning everything had to be family-friendly. Therefore, animators decided that the most lucrative choice would be to focus on children as the main audience, making animation the first genre to have children as the target

demographic. (Meyer) Despite adult animation now being a more popular genre in today's media, it is easy to see why animation has never escaped its association with kids since it has a long history with them.

It's clear from the example that adults can spot the imperialistic themes in a show aimed at them, so that brings back the question of how kids pick up on the themes in *Rebels* that adults aren't. For one, they are more open at this age to messaging. Even though *Rebels* and *Andor* have the same themes, any adults that did not like the messages in *Andor* did not like the show because they saw it as an attack on their beliefs. That was because the show was really overt about what it was saying, while *Rebels* is toned down in comparison. However, kids don't really have a sense of politics yet. They are still young and learning about who they are. It's easier for experiences, like watching TV shows, to have a bigger impact on them because they don't have as much real-world experience yet. When they come across a show at a young age that they like, then it will have a greater influence than an adult discovering a show they like because adults already have a concrete sense of who they are. Children also have a simpler understanding of the show; the rebels are the good guys, and the imperials are the bad guys. Therefore, when they see the Empire doing basically anything, they can assume it is wrong.

By the age of six, kids already have a pretty good sense of right from wrong and understand fairness. They also understand the idea of a group having a status quo and know there are consequences for going against it. Therefore, they are more likely to do what the majority of the group wants to do because they don't want to be ostracized. By the age of ten, this tendency disappears almost completely. A similar result happens

when kids start to understand inequality. They may first believe that one group has more advantages than another because they've worked harder; therefore, they deserve to be rewarded. However, they come to realize that the group that has fewer resources needs more help, so it's equal. (Dahl & Killen 1215)

With this explanation, it is easy to conclude that children would understand the inequality the Empire causes. One of the traits of any empire is the obsession with maintaining control. As Philip Pomper explains in his article about the nature of empires, the formal definition of an empire includes the:

seizure and distribution of assets by imperial authorities to landowners and settlers; imperial projects, strategies, and designs continuously pursued by regimes that call themselves empires; proudly displayed imperial symbols, and imperial institutions; imperial elites that educate their children to assume command, but also inspire imitators in other classes, and that find it expedient to recruit administrators and soldiers among the conquered in order to rule effectively; and an imperial club whose elites sometimes cooperate and design the partitions of desirable and conquerable territories, and who sometimes double-cross each other in cutthroat competitions. (Pomper 2)

The effect of this is to take away power from everyone else, so that they are the only means of providing resources. It is hard to fight a force that holds all the cards, and when that is the case with an empire, it means it makes the rules. It constantly reminds people of its presence because they don't want them to forget who they should be grateful to for giving them resources, no matter how little, to help them survive. This is ignoring the fact that they take more than they give, but because they push people into

poverty, it makes those people more desperate to gain any resources, forcing them to rely on an empire. Plus, when the next generation comes around, they won't experience how life was better before an empire, convincing them that the empire is good.

All this to say they will go to any length to do this, and the Empire in *Star Wars Rebels* is no exception. At their best, they are arresting a merchant for making a treasonous statement. At their worst, they are committing genocide of a whole planet because the people stood against them. This also makes it hard to believe that this is a juvenile show like many people claim it is. It deals in serious topics, like genocide, within the first season of the show. However, none of the reviews have ever criticized the show for being too violent. It's hard to imagine how this is possible, considering the amount of guns fired and ships blown up per episode, but perhaps, once again, the innocent appearance of bright animation removes any sense of reality and allows people to excuse the violence since it is only a part of a fantasy world.

To break down how the Empire asserts its control, there are two ways they do this. First, there are the "soft" ways, which are how the Empire reminds people of their control without the use of violence or physicality. This includes the media, propaganda, and schools. The media is primarily shown through the news. There is only one news source, and the Empire requires by law that places like bars to have it playing at all times, even though no one wants it on. The broadcasts can be boiled down to two categories: advertising how great and mighty the Empire is, or reporting on the crimes of the rebels. However, it's important to note that when they report on crimes, they are twisting it to make themselves look like the good guys, protecting the people. One specific example is when some farmers were arrested for not selling their land, and

Ezra and Zeb saved them using a TIE fighter. The news reports, “The stolen TIE fighter was later used to attack a transport full of innocent workers.” (*Star Wars Rebels*) Along with being blatantly false, it also serves to demonize the rebels and presents them as people committing senseless violence. The broadcasts also get hijacked throughout the first season by a rebel senator. However, it is revealed that he works for the Empire and uses his broadcasts to lure rebels in and make them have “accidents.” Even when it looks like the Empire’s power isn’t omnipotent, it’s reasserted that it is.

The media could also be considered a category of propaganda. Propaganda is present throughout the show through posters and murals on the walls, messages playing over loudspeakers, and military parades. All of them serve to deliver one message: join the Empire. On the posters, it advertises all the ways people can help the Empire, and the opportunities that the Empire can give them. For example, one of the posters talks about having the opportunity to see the world with the Empire. While people can’t always be motivated by a sense of patriotism, they have other desires, and both governments recognize that fact and cater their advertising towards them. This is one way that they maintain their power: by trying to gain as many soldiers as possible to discourage people from going against them. The military parades shown in the show occur on the anniversary of when the Empire was created. All citizens are required to attend, as soldiers and their machines all process down one of the main streets, and the finale includes the unveiling of a new fighter ship. Imperials are spread throughout the crowd to make sure people are enthusiastic enough about the celebration. It’s all a performance to display their power and warn the citizens of what they are up against, should they choose to rebel.

The most prevalent form of the news in the US is the internet, and it was used to a similar end that the Empire used their platforms by the ruling party. This is most reminiscent of Donald Trump's presidential campaign during 2016. Anyone who dared to criticize him and his goals was met with backlash by his supporters. Besides this, right-wing politicians in the US were seeking to oversaturate every corner of the internet with their messages, as Dan Golding mentions in his book about Disney's iterations of *Star Wars*. He goes on to mention that *Rebels* (as well as the movie *Rogue One*) were released amongst the turmoil of the 2016 election, pointing out that the themes they have could be motivated by the political environment at the time. Besides that, he says how the politics of the Empire were eerily similar to those of the Republicans; no criticism is allowed.

Using the internet, the army of supporters attacked and discredited Trump's opponent, Hilary Clinton, to no end. It was hard to differentiate what was true and what was not, and those reposting did not care if the information was false. As long as it appealed to their ego by telling them their opinion was right, they shared it. In a study done on the false news circulating during the 2016 election, it was found that the amount of fake news going around had increased, over 60% of it was in support of Trump and against Clinton, and could have possibly affected the whole outcome of the election itself. Many people get their news from social media, and on Facebook alone, the fake articles that the study used were shared 38 million times. (Allcott & Gentzkow 227) While many kids probably did not know much about the election at the time, misinformation is still a huge problem that continues to this day, which is why *Rebels*

shows that it is important to fact-check your information because it could be false or from a heavily biased source.

A good school would emphasize this important lesson, but this is clearly discouraged in the show. There are schools throughout the galaxy that train kids to become soldiers for the Empire. In *Rebels'* episode 6, "Breaking Ranks," the whole episode is centered around one of these schools. The first observation that can be made is how the episode is visually drained of color. From the buildings to the uniforms, everything is black, white, and gray. It is a stark contrast of the typical colorful environment that viewers are used to seeing within the show. Color is heavily associated with characters, and each of the main cast has one specific to them. With this interpretation, it points to the consuming nature of the Empire. It does not care for the individual spirit of people; only how well they can conform to the Empire's standards. When the costumes for the Empire were first conceived back when *A New Hope* was made, the designer was told to make them "totalitarian, fascist" (Golding 157) because Lucas based the Empire off of the Nazis. It was meant to show the audience how rigid they were, as well as instill a sense of unease because of how individuality is stripped away. It directly contrasts to the rebels by taking away the freedom they have in everything, down to their appearance.

This episode focuses on Ezra going undercover at the Imperial Academy to steal information needed for a mission. The Imperial Academy is just like what it sounds; it is where children are sent to learn how to become soldiers for the Empire. Ezra himself blends in so well that viewers don't know he is one of the cadets until he takes his helmet off, revealing his face. The episode continues with a test for the cadets. They

descend into a pit and have to climb out by jumping on moving platforms. If they place in the top three, they will be rewarded with getting to deliver packages around headquarters. If they lose, they will serve under the taskmaster and “wished they stayed at the bottom of that well.” The second time they do this test, the kids who lost are more vicious about winning, to the point where they are shoving kids off platforms or shooting them with the gun they now have to use to activate the moving platforms. They are now willing to cause physical injury to win since they’ve seen the consequences of losing. This is the perfect way for the Empire to try and ensure that their rule will continue. They are indoctrinating children into becoming the best soldier they can by pitting them against each other and making them better themselves for the Empire. However, even if they didn’t want to participate in this activity, they have no choice in the matter. They are at the will of the trainers, who will punish them harshly if they fail. It’s a clear abuse of power, but sadly, there’s not much the cadets can do about it.

For some kids, these stakes might already be all too real. If they are a part of a marginalized community in the US, then they have some awareness of how those in power abuse it. For example, many black people, including children, have to be worried about a police officer killing them for “suspicious behavior.” Tamir Rice was only twelve when he was killed by the police, while playing with an airsoft toy gun, and he was only one of many. There were no repercussions for the officers who shot him, a frighteningly familiar story to many. However, so many adults felt the officers were justified. People who defend the officers are those who are privileged and don’t know what it’s like to be oppressed. They view the officers as protectors because they aren’t the ones suffering from the abuse of power. If the police are equated to the imperial soldiers, then these

are the same people who would support what the Empire is doing because they are in the inner circle of the regime and gain more resources when they are taken away from other groups of people. However, if this comparison was proposed to them, they would say that the Empire is evil, and nothing like the police, despite them serving the same purpose. *Rebels* can break this cycle of the privileged not caring about those who suffer from abusive powers. For children who have more privilege than others, *Rebels* can help foster this empathy for others who are oppressed and teach them that oppressors should not be defended.

Showing this lesson further, the main group is made up of characters that come from many different backgrounds. However, all of their homes have been colonized by the Empire, driving them to start fighting back against them. Hera's and Zeb's characters in particular face more discrimination because they are non-human. Hera's species is shown to be one that is often forced into slavery. In one scene, a smuggler tries to sell her in exchange for some goods, and she is seen as merely "acceptable" because there are so many of her kind enslaved already. For Zeb, he is even less human in appearance than Hera. He is called a "monster" and a "beast" by a couple imperials as they talk about bringing him in for questioning because he seems suspicious. However, the show still portrays them as strong characters who don't let themselves be stopped by stereotypes, and the other human characters listen and learn how they can best support their non-human friends when they are facing discrimination.

It may seem like a weak way to teach kids this lesson when there are so many other modes of learning besides a TV show, but for some, this is one of the few ways they might come to understand how power is abused since they don't have to worry

about experiencing it first-hand. There is no guarantee that their parents will teach them about the oppression that others experience because they might believe in the oppression or that there isn't any happening. Most children pick up on these biases and will share their parents' beliefs. In a study done to assess this, it was found that children ages six-to-seven share their parents' explicit prejudice more than children younger and older than them. (Pirchio, et al. 6) This then leads to questioning if schools will teach kids about the oppression others have suffered. There has been constant conflict over what parts of history are taught in US schools today, especially when it comes to topics like the history of racism in the country. In recent years, a group called the 1619 project has been advocating for this topic to be covered in K-12 schools. In response to this, Trump decided to create his own committee called the 1776 Commission that sought to ban teaching critical race theory in the classroom. (Jamnah & Zimmerman) While Trump's initiative has since been disbanded, the censorship of history is quite reminiscent of the behavior of the Empire in *Star Wars*. They always cover up the atrocities they commit by rewriting the narrative to make it look like they were doing the right thing, or they erase that part of history entirely.

That leads to the violent ways that the Empire asserts its power. There are three ways that this is seen in *Rebels*: arresting people for treason, and taking land from people, and genocide. To the Empire, treason is anything from talking about how the Empire is terrible, to the acts of rebellion that the main crew performs. As briefly mentioned before, a merchant is about to be arrested in the first episode for saying, "I remember what it was like before your ships showed up, before you Imperials ruined Lothal like the rest of the galaxy." (*Star Wars Rebels*) The only reason he isn't is

because Ezra distracts the Imperials by stealing their communication device and calling in a code red in another section of the town. It shows how little it takes for the Empire to condemn someone as a traitor to the Empire. This example in particular shows the abuse of power. The imperials were already annoyed by the merchant not having his trade registered with the Empire, so at that point, they were looking for any excuse to arrest him. He was an old man just trying to make a living; he was no threat to the Empire, but to the Empire, they can't afford anyone doubting their greatness.

This directly ties in with the Empire stealing people's land. In the first episode, the Rebels steal six crates from the Empire, half full of weapons to sell and the other half full of food that they then take to a town living in poverty. This town is made up of farmers who got kicked off their land because the Empire wanted it. If they resisted, they were arrested for treason. The town is made up of small buildings that look like they were built out of scraps. These people lost their method of income and their food source, so now they are struggling to survive. Later on, many of these farmers are forced to work in the Empire's factories. Sometimes, it's not even about getting someone else's land. Even though the show takes place fourteen years after the Empire came into power and overthrew the old government, the Republic, they still arrest beings that were known to be heavy supporters of the Republic, despite them not openly doing so now. In particular, they arrested a bunch of non-human Republic soldiers and sent them to be slaves in a mine that kills anyone working there within months. This further shows how the Empire only cares about how people and resources can further their agenda of galactic-wide control.

This is also really reminiscent of how the US stole land from Native Americans. In the 1830s, the president at the time, Andrew Jackson, signed the Removal Act into law, which forced Native Americans off their land and made them move to the west. It was dressed up with promises that the government would help them resettle and provide plenty of resources, but when the Native Americans refused, they were met with violence. They were either threatened to hand over their land or outright killed, the most famous example being the Trail of Tears. For those that managed to survive, they still had to face the Homestead Act a few decades later that gave away their new land to new settlers, where the response of violence was given when they didn't want to move. ("Removing Native Americans from Their Land.") Even to this day, Native Americans have never truly recovered from the events of the past, as they have "the lowest income, least education, and highest poverty level of any group...and the lowest life expectancy of any other population in the United States." (Brown-Rice)

What they experienced isn't far off from the final way an empire shows its power: genocide. It's important to note that this particular term is not used in describing what happened. The first mentioning of a genocide is in relation with Zeb's species and is explained as follows: "...it's what the Imperials used on his people when they cleared his home world. Very few Lasats survived. And none remain on Lasan." (*Star Wars Rebels*) While not using the word "genocide," it is still clear that it is what happened to the Lasat. The reason that the Lasat people were massacred was because they resisted the Empire's takeover of their planet. This shows the extreme lengths that the Empire will go to in order to protect its rule.

This is not the first time that the Empire has done this either. One of the recurring genocides brought up across *Star Wars* media is Order 66, which called for the execution of all Jedi because they would oppose the Empire. However, what *Rebels* shows for the first time is the effects that Order 66 had on the Jedi who survived the execution. One of these characters is Kanan, who was only fourteen-years-old when the Order was given. He watched as his teacher was murdered after she told him to run and save himself. It is clear throughout the show that he is deeply traumatized by this event and feels guilty for running away. This event is even used against him by the Sith when they capture him and are torturing him for information. During this scene, viewers see Kanan shudder in fear when being forced to recall what happened. His face is half in the light and half concealed in shadow, which seems to represent his future and his past, respectively. Order 66 has made him reluctant to teach Ezra about the Jedi and the Force because he does not want to face his past. This prevents both of them from reaching their full potential as Jedi and becoming an even more powerful asset to the Rebellion. However, in order to continue the legacy of the Jedi and give people hope that the Empire can be defeated, he needs to overcome his fears and his past.

For most children in the US today, they have not experienced the horrors of genocide and hopefully never will. However, the United States' past is riddled with the killing of certain groups of people in order to wipe them out, usually during wars. For example, the Philippine-American War, which started because the Filipinos wanted independence instead of the US ruling over them since they were about to get the islands as part of a settlement with the Spanish, involved a US general telling his troops that anyone over the age of ten presented a threat and should therefore be killed. The

US took few casualties but killed so many Filipinos in return. (Clem 5) Another more recent case was the No Gun Ri massacre during the Korean War. US soldiers were ordered to kill a large group of Korean refugees who were doing nothing wrong. What was worse was how it was covered up by the government. (Williams) In both of these cases, little to no repercussions were given to those who committed these heinous acts, and these are hardly the only two genocides that have occurred. This is not a pattern that can continue, and it is up to the next generation that inherits this country to stop it.

Evidence has shown how children truly understand the ideas that a piece of media includes, and it is also clear how *Star Wars Rebels* drew parallels to both the present and the past and showed the mistakes that those in power have made. However, the children of now don't need to follow in the footsteps of those that came before them. They will be the ones to inherit this country, and they can change it for the better; make it truly a place where people don't have to worry about being discriminated against or being forced to conform to one opinion. They can be free to discover themselves without fearing for their safety. Similarly, they can learn about others who are different from themselves and coexist with them peacefully. The future is still uncertain, however, and I cannot say whether or not shows like this will truly make a change. However, they still are able to point children in the right direction by providing what lessons and messages they can. Dan Golding put it best when he said, "From the first episode to the last, the series tells a story of disparate and disconnected groups of individuals linking up and continually growing as a substantial threat to their shared enemy: the Empire," (Golding 169) and that should be the goal of children against the imperialistic government that we live in today.

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