



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on June 9, 2010

Robin Hood: The Movie, the Critics, and the Tea Party

Moviegoers worldwide have enthusiastically rewarded Robin Hood since its opening in May with gross ticket sales of more than a quarter of a billion dollars, and the film is well in the black for Universal Pictures and its producer Ridley Scott. Predictably, liberal reviewers have taken significant verbal umbrage at the underlying theme of the film: lower taxes and less government.



The [story](#), loosely connected with 12th-century England just before the signing of the Magna Carta, pits Robin Longstride (who later assumes the name Robin Hood) against King John, the young, arrogant King who “shows no remorse to his poor kingdom and demands harsh taxes to be paid, sending [his sheriff] Sir Godfrey off ... with the task of raising revenue.” In a role reversal from previous Robin Hood movies, Russell Crowe as Robin, actively defends the townsfolk/taxpayers, standing up to King John’s tyranny and injustice, rather than merely targeting the wayward rich. In a review of Robin Hood, [here](#), the writer “could not help but draw parallels between the oppressive King John and our federal government. King John robs from the poor to enrich himself and [his] elites through the power of taxation.... King John insists that his power is a ‘Divine Right’ [whereas] the oppressed English insist that they are endowed by God with rights and that the King is answerable to them. The similarities to America today are uncanny.”

Cathy Young, writing for [Reason.com](#) clarifies that the standard line of Robin Hood “taking from the rich and giving to the poor” is false.

As scholars have noted, the earliest Robin Hood ballads, which date back to the 13th or 14th century, contain no mention of robbing the rich to give to the poor. The one person Robin assists financially is a knight who is about to lose his lands to the machinations of greedy and unscrupulous monks at an abbey. (Corrupt clerics using the political power of the Church are among Robin Hood's frequent targets in the ballads.) The Sheriff of Nottingham is Robin's chief opponent; at the time, it was the sheriffs' role as tax collectors in particular that made them



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objects of loathing by peasants and commoners. Robin Hood is also frequently shown helping men who face barbaric punishments for hunting in the royal forests, a pursuit permitted to nobles and strictly forbidden to the lower classes in medieval England; in other words, he is opposing privilege bestowed by political power, not earned wealth.

The original Robin Hood, while he has many different faces [in history], is above all a fighter for freedom from tyranny — and that's what made him a legend.

Critics of the movie, such as Michael O'Sullivan in the [Washington Post](#), disparage such a premise: "Dark and polemic, [the film] feels like a political attack ad paid for by the tea party movement, circa 1199." O'Sullivan, undoubtedly like many other critics, would rather have seen the usual socialist slant: "There is precious little of the socialist stuff that we normally associate with [Robin Hood]." Instead, "It's a story of a people who are being taxed to death by a corrupt government, under an upstart ruler who's running the country into the ground. It asks: What's a man of principle to do?"

O. A. Scott, a [New York Times](#) movie critic, also complains about the missing socialist story line so loved by the elitists. "This Robin is no socialist bandit practicing freelance wealth redistribution, but rather a manly libertarian rebel striking out against high taxes and a big government scheme to trample the ancient liberties of property owners and provincial nobles. Don't tread on him!" Scott suggests that the financial success of the film can be explained this way: Robin Hood is about "the fight of ragged warriors against sniveling and sadistic tyrants [which] appeals across [all] tastes and ideologies.... We are all embattled underdogs standing up for our rights against a bunch of overprivileged jerks who won't leave us alone.... The idea that an ordinary, anonymous person can have a big impact on world events is an attractively democratic notion."

Village Voice issues angst [in its review](#), claiming that Crowe "plays ... the title character, whose ability to mobilize commoners with empty, anti-government rhetoric equating taxation with slavery, is posited as a virtue ... [and who] preaches about 'liberty' and the rights of the individual as he wanders a countryside populated chiefly by Englishpersons bled dry by government greed."

The review from [Boston.com](#) says the film is "hamstrung by a shrill political agenda — endless fake-populist harping on the evils of taxation.... Robin Hood ... is like a chronically irate, not-very-bright guest who ruins a cookout on an otherwise perfect day with his rants about how his sacred freedoms have been infringed by agents of the new world order who require him to pay taxes and register his guns."

In sum, then, one learns that the establishment press understands the Tea Party principles and positions quite well and that they harbor a holier-than-thou, I'm-smarter-than-you-are, grow-up-and-quit-complaining mindset. Op-Ed columnist Gail Collins wrote in a revealing [editorial](#), "There's no reason not to show the taxpayers a little love. Paying a lot of taxes should be a badge of honor. It proves you made it into the league of big money-makers.... If [only] the IRS had been doing its marketing properly, little kids would dream of growing up to become really big taxpayers."

In concluding a review of Robin Hood, David Boaz of the [Cato Institute](#) says, "The reviewers are indeed tapping into [the] real theme of Robin Hood. As Marian tells the sheriff, 'You have stripped our wealth to pay for foreign adventures.' And Robin himself tells King John that the people want a charter to guarantee that every man be 'safe from eviction without cause or prison without charge ... and [be] free to work, eat, and live merry as he may on the sweat of his own brow.... What we ask for is liberty, by law.'"



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Imagine an America that actually operates according to the rules of the Constitution and the claims of the Declaration of Independence: “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” This is what horrifies the liberal reviewers.



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