

DIRTY HARRY, AT IT AGAIN

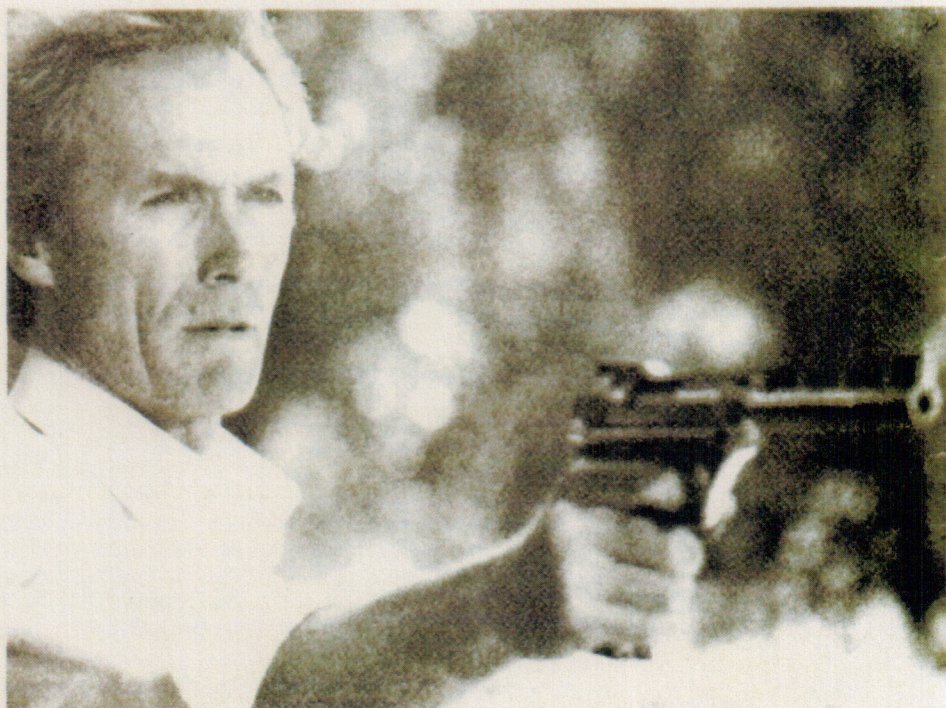
Ignoring liberal hysteria, movie-goers cheer Eastwood's smoking indictment of the American Criminal Justice system

By DOUG RICHARDSON

On December ninth of this past year, Clint Eastwood exploded into fifteen hundred American movie houses, threatening box office records. The first week's box office take was an amazing 9.6 million dollars. As audiences lined up at ticket windows, movie critics lined up to voice their obligatory anti-violence, anti-Clint Eastwood, *Dirty Harry* views. Warner Brothers studio heads lunched in the glow of their bulging bank accounts while the Christmas time competition began adding up their 1983 losses. Yes indeed. *Dirty Harry* is at it again.

Nothing new here. Clint Eastwood has been a motion picture presence for nearly twenty years and his *Dirty Harry* Callahan character has been around for twelve. *Sudden Impact* is the fourth installment of the popular series and its success is no surprise, given the movie industry's sequel-mania craze. As movie lore goes, *Dirty Harry* can often be mentioned in the same breath with other famous continuation characters like Rocky Balboa, Luke Skywalker, and Inspector Clouseau. So, what's the big deal?

Well, Luke Skywalker doesn't cause the hair to rise on the backs of well known, socially liberal critics. Rocky Balboa doesn't trigger gun sales to increase. And though Inspector Clouseau is a detective, he's never tried to point out the inadequacies in our criminal justice system, at least in the brutal fashion of a Harry Callahan.



Dirty Harry makes little pretense about his social message. "I know that you're thinking, did he fire six shots, or only five? Well, frankly in all the excitement I've kinda forgotten myself—but bein' this is a forty-four magnum and can blow your head clean off, you gotta ask yourself one question—Do I feel lucky? Well, do you punk?" — Harry Callahan to a bank robber in "Dirty Harry", 1971.

Dirty Harry burst onto the movie screens in 1971 in a way that motion picture historians probably will never forget. The character (originally created in a novel by Harry Julian Fink and R.M. Fink) was something of a

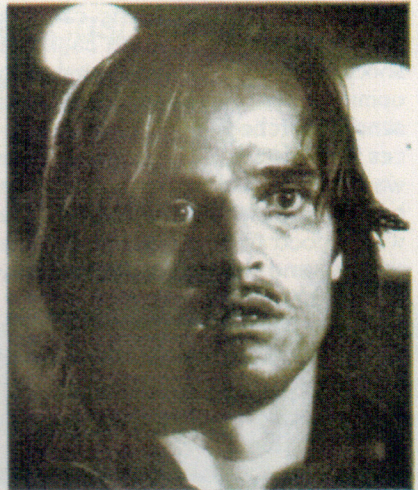
phenomenon. He strolled through the city of San Francisco like a cowboy out of the old west — like Matt Dillon in Dodge City. He was a nineteenth century lawman in a city which was easily considered (or considered itself) as the most socially progressive in the country. The time was of Viet Nam and Kent State tragedies. A time when enlightened senses and flower power were heady issues. The well-attended movies that year were of the Easy Rider ilk.

And then came *Dirty Harry*, followed by hordes of people queuing up at the box office to see Clint Eastwood dishing out *Dirty Harry*'s style of justice with his .44 magnum Smith and Wesson. The critics screamed



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unlike Magnum Force, The Enforcer has room to press onward and bluntly face the inadequacies of the criminal justice system. The Enforcer looked beyond the judges who set criminals free on technicalities and shook a guilty finger at those who appoint the judges — and those who are more worried about political careers than the life and limb of the electorate.

As required, The Enforcer has bad guys. This time, Dirty Harry finds himself pitted against urban terrorists. These terrorists were pulled directly from newspaper headlines, complete with hostages and demands for their release. With Dirty Harry's mounting frustration with the politicians who chose to negotiate with the terrorists, the audience can't help but be reminded of terrorist activity in the 1976 Summer Olympics, the airline hijacking which led to the heroic Israeli assault on Entebbe, and a homefront kidnapping of a wealthy newspaper publisher's granddaughter, Patty Hearst. Again, the character of Dirty Harry is tapping into American audiences and the fears which corrupt everyday existence. He points out both the terrorists and the parasites who strike deals with them.

With help from his female partner, a L.A.W.S. rocket, and the now famous Smith and Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum, Dirty Harry gives terrorists what they deserve and also finds a

moment to hand several politicians some just humiliation. More applause and more big dollars spent at movie house ticket windows, and Dirty Harry is three for three.

One more note concerning The Enforcer: Magnum Force had received criticism of the character's sexism. Various women's groups charged that Dirty Harry suffered from a false sense of machismo, thus little female contact and the need to carry around a very large gun to make up for sexual inadequacies — a problem solved in The Enforcer with the introduction of a female partner (played by Tyne Daly) and humorous moments of sexual banter and innuendo between the two.

"Everybody wants results, but nobody is willing to do what's necessary to get them done!" — Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry in a conversation with actress Sondra Locke in Sudden Impact. 1983.

After six years many feared that Dirty Harry's apparent anger with the system had caused a sudden retirement. Though there has always been box office appeal, not until now has Dirty Harry felt call to make his ominous presence known. In Sudden Impact, he returns to reclaim old territory and inflict justice on the style of criminal prevalent in today's society — the deadly, cancerous, home

grown type.

Sudden Impact delivers a Dirty Harry twelve years older — and a Dirty Harry twelve years colder, tougher, and more anesthetized to the darkness around him. At the film's introduction, audiences find a judge releasing an obviously dangerous and guilty criminal on a technicality and, just like in the 1971 Dirty Harry, our hero being reprimanded and chastised for his evidence gathering techniques. As the criminal is freed, the shackles of contemporary justice are once again clamped on to Dirty Harry rather than the law breaking felon.

A District Attorney character tells Harry to "get out of the game." That he's a "dinosaur."

"Funny, I never really thought of it as a game," responds Dirty Harry, as a possible reminder of the truths behind the analogies so often given by officials with "asses shaped to the form of their chairs!"

As the black hat body count in Sudden Impact rises, so does the frequent bursts of cheers and applause. The amount of justifiable shootings by Dirty Harry in this most recent episode may be overkill, but the deathrate can be used as a barometer for the times. A

scale could be drawn, having to do with *justice needed versus justice dealt* ala Dirty Harry. With new firepower (the magnificent AMT Auto Mag .44 Magnum Pistol, covered elsewhere in this issue), Dirty Harry does away with a remarkable number of murderers and the like. A new record, for sure.

There's a somewhat disturbing note, though, in *Sudden Impact*. Something which was scarcely evident in the first of the series, and now in what may be the last. Hard to believe as it may be, it is an extreme rarity to find Dirty Harry acting *outside* of the written law. Despite how they may aggravate the audience and the character, laws are what makes a civil society and they must be abided by. In a small moment at the picture's end, Dirty Harry acts as judge and jury by the manipulation of evidence. Because his trust in the system has betrayed him so many times before, this moment is one that Dirty Harry will not leave to chance. Despite audience approval, his badge becomes slightly tarnished with a decision which bears traces of vigilantism.

In the twelve years since the character's introduction there has been no apparent change for the better in the way the criminal justice system hands down verdicts. Crime rate barometers indicate the system has worsened. If audience reaction is any kind of scale, society feels more threatened than ever. This can be proven by the lines at the box office and the continued investment by the movie's producers going public in the Dirty Harry series.

But, let's keep things in perspective. Dirty Harry, Magnum Force, The Enforcer, and *Sudden Impact* are only movies primarily made for entertainment. The degree of impact motion

pictures have on American audiences, beyond their entertainment value, is an arguable point. The ability, though, of a movie to mirror ideologies or raise pertinent social issues is indisputable. A film which makes any kind of financial profit, if observed beyond the basic story line, can give sobering answers to what may be exciting or frightening to the movie-goer.

When the box office receipts are counted, it will be no surprise to find that Clint Eastwood and his four Dirty Harry movies will have amassed over two hundred million dollars in gross box office revenues (*Sudden Impact* made over \$40 million dollars in the first four weeks!). If one notes the clear social message in these pictures and the money invested by the public to see them, interesting questions might surface.

- *Why would Americans spend 200 million dollars on motion picture series like Dirty Harry?*
- *What sort of impact could just a portion of 200 million dollars have if invested politically? Could the Dirty Harry audience be tapped for a percentage of that money?*
- *What can be said about an industry which is known for its politically liberal attitudes, yet will embrace a motion picture series which glorifies guns and their use in the delivery of justice?*

The motion picture business is an industry filled with many ambiguities and contradictions. One year a studio will release a film that seems to advocate a political position considered liberal or leftist, and the next season, produce one that leans in a more conservative direction. More often than not, detectable "slants" are purely accidental. The point of view is only

arrived at in search of a more entertaining product and a reasonable profit by the time the picture is released to cable TV.

Dirty Harry's political views are anything but accidental. They are based on his simple assumption that wrong doing should not go unpunished.

Looking down the barrel of Dirty Harry's .44 magnum, the squirming criminal who is tempted to escape should know that Harry is deadly serious when he hisses, "Go ahead — make my day!"



with horror at the film's social message while the movie studio squealed with glee over the picture's megadollar returns.

Dirty Harry was making his mark. His open frustration with a criminal justice system that allowed criminal's rights to take precedent over victim's rights, touched an electric cable in American audiences which caused a shocking backlash in contemporary opinion. Headlines about enlightened senses switched to lightened sentences for rapists and murderers. Where was justice dealt? Americans were beginning to feel that the only place where good truly reigned was in the theater, and the only judge and jury worth the money was Dirty Harry.

The acceptance of Dirty Harry was hardly unanimous. Liberal critics and social activists accused Dirty Harry of vigilante style justice which, of course, only leads to anarchy and, well, a lawless society. Instead of a frustrated cop who only fires his gun in self-defense or when another's life is threatened, Dirty Harry was, in their eyes, a threat to our culture and an insult to America's intelligence.

But still, to Dirty Harry, it was simple. The system was pandering to the guilty and there was something horribly wrong about that.

"A man's just got to know his limitations." — Dirty Harry to Capt. Briggs in *Magnum Force*. 1974.

The year is 1974 and three years have passed since Dirty Harry first came into our movie-consciousness. It's also been three years since the critical uproar the picture created. All seems to be forgotten or forgiven. There is only anticipation now as it is rumored that Dirty Harry is returning in a sequel titled *Magnum Force*. What issues, if any, will the famous S.F. P.D. detective address this time? Questions, questions. The critics wait with daggers poised.

After 1971's original Dirty Harry release, there had been time for digestion, it seemed. A period where the accolades and criticism could be sifted through and clear conclusions arrived upon. When all was said and done, some residue remained, perhaps an actual tarnish on the characters image, some inescapable criticism which required an answer. And thus the issues of *Magnum Force*.

To many, Dirty Harry was a racist vigilante with a badge to hide behind. People who were overly sensitive to the issues of racism and vigilante justice had to be peeled from their theater seats after original screenings of Dirty Harry. With *Magnum Force*, Dirty Harry decided to educate these same people. Dirty Harry was neither racist nor vigilante. *Magnum Force* would be Dirty Harry's redemption.

In this episode, Dirty Harry would take on a Black partner and an Asian girlfriend. Each would be admired and trusted by Dirty Harry and, as we know by the first film, trust and admiration were rarely handed out by the character. But Dirty Harry also needed some bad guys — *real* vigilante cops. Looked like a good recipe. These weren't men just frustrated by the law, these cops acted as judge, jury and executioners — from the organized crime bosses down to the lowly pimps. They were lawless and reigned terror over the criminal community.

Upon Dirty Harry's discovery of this clan, he is asked to join. "You are with us or you are against us," One vigilante policeman states.

Dirty Harry returns, "I guess you've misjudged me."

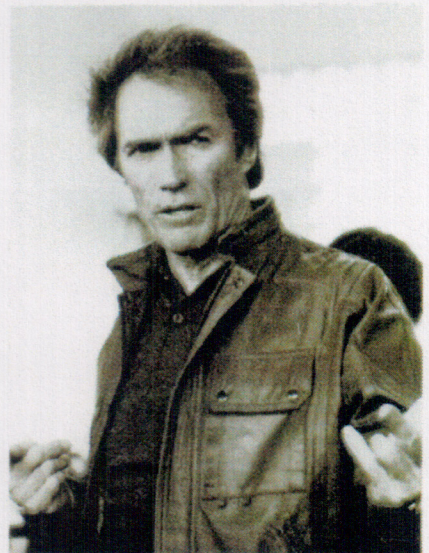
These lines of dialogue seem pointedly aimed elsewhere — away from the movie screen and at certain points of view, which suddenly seem rather ignorant.

Soon, Dirty Harry had dispensed with the bad cops in a highly climactic fashion. The credits roll. The audiences applaud. Once again Dirty Harry has proven himself at both the box office and debating platforms.

"No, you don't give up that easily. Huh uh. Not You." Actress Tyne Daly to Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry in the *Enforcer*. 1977.

The *Enforcer* was the next installment in the Dirty Harry series, released in 1977. Three years have moved since *Magnum Force* and it appears necessary that our hero return. Unlike other great cinema series, and their characters, the Eastwood-driven Dirty Harry pictures arrive more from some sort of urgent calling, than a time when the box office seemed ripe for picking. Like the previous films, there are criticisms which deserve argument, but

continued



Eastwood directs a scene in *Sudden Impact*.