



\$30 Million *Waco* Gets the Boot From the Texas Film Commission

In a surprising twist of events, a film that is entirely based on events that happened inside the borders of the great state of Texas will not actually be filmed here. Wait, we guess that is not so surprising—in fact, we're pretty sure this sort of thing happens all of the time—but it appears that some people have gotten their culottes in a wad over the reasoning behind such a location shift. In fact they are even throwing around the "C" word: Censorship.

The big-for-an-indie-budget-action-film *Waco*, based, of course, on the horrifically bungled 1993 raid of everyone's favorite cult religious sect compound, was formally trotted out into the public eye last week at the Cannes Film Festival, and was purportedly slated to be filmed in Texas proper. However, not a week later, Charles Ealy reported on Austin360.com that the film would in fact not be shot in Texas, seeing as the Texas Film Commission had decided to not recommend film incentives due to objections from an "unnamed senator."



As it turns out, some poor senator was probably taking a beating for something that s/he had absolutely no say in. According to the Austin360 blog, the person pulling the incentive funding from the production was none other than TFC director, Bob Hudgins. From Chris Garcia's piece:

We spoke to Hudgins today, and here's some of what he said:

"It's not censorship at all. There's a program that's giving state money as an incentive to filmmaking and there was criteria put in the statute for that money. That criteria states that anything that shows an inaccurate portrayal of actual events (in Texas) and comes down to that narrow definition."

After reading the "*Waco*" script, "I did some fact checking and I feel very confident in the checking I did. I talked to people, law enforcement and journalists, who were actually involved in the whole incident. This was not something that was done lightly at all. We've been given this incentive program and we have to live within its constraints. This project steps outside an accurate portrayal of those events."

Hudgins declined to elaborate about what's inaccurate, though he did say that the people he talked to said the script was off-base. "My job is to define if things are not accurately portrayed. They're purporting to be a factual film about Texas and they don't meet the mark. Living within the structure of the statute, I have to make this decision."

"I would love to have not had to make this call, because I realize the direct cost to Texas in jobs and income. That's what makes the decision so difficult. I'm here to promote as much production activity in the state as possible, but I also have to live within the confines of the statute."

Unfortunately, that "criteria" in the \$22 Million Film Incentive Bill signed by Governor Rick Perry in June of 2007 did indeed include language that specified that all incentives would be revoked if the film/video game/commercial/etc. portrays the state in a negative light (which we suppose an "inaccurate portrayal of actual events" could do, had everyone in the world not seen the grainy video of the massacre a million times, and if the ATF, a federal entity, weren't the ones to blame). Nevermind the fact that even at that time, Governor Perry was not prepared to answer questions regarding that specific clause at the signing ceremony and instead opted to "not split hairs" on the matter, preferring to steamroll a possibly imperfect bill through congress.

It appears that those unsplit hairs may have become ingrown. Of course, we would not be able to make a clear judgment on Hudgins' decision without reading the full script of Waco, but considering that it is being produced by William Gazecki, the director of the Oscar Nominated and Emmy Award winning documentary Waco: The Rules of Engagement (btw, the Emmy was for Outstanding Investigative Journalism....so, yeah) we find it hard to believe that the script could have contained anything that was egregiously inaccurate. Let's not even bring up the fact that the statute barring any negative portrayal of our beloved state was the first of its kind in the U.S., and in our opinion, kind of stupid. Really, if the Governor himself can erupt a national debate about our loyalty to the union (even if he denies it), we should at least be able to leave jokes about the Lone Star State in films that need them for entertainment value.

What do you think, Austin? What should and should not be allowed in films that receive incentive money from the Texas Film Commission? Is any denial of monies tantamount to censorship, or do you agree with the statute?