

How TMNT Created A Panic

There's been many animated incarnations of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles over the years, but the very original series came out in 1987. This was a smash hit, exploding in merchandise and a brand recognised even today. So naturally it was shown in other countries, after that's how I saw it here in Eng-Ger-Land. However, the version we got in the UK was weirdly different. [1] They weren't Ninja Turtles, they were Hero Turtles. But why?

The short answer is British media censored the word "Ninja", but that strikes me as being too short. Like why? [2] What series of events lead to the UK being so scared of ninjas. **And the reason behind it turned out to be something of a rabbit hole. Or a turtle hole.**

[Intro]

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3y0a8sUJk>

[2] Have "British media censored the word "Ninja"" appear as text]

Chapter 1: MARY WHITEHOUSE AND HER NASTIES

Starting in the 1960s, British school teacher Mary Whitehouse campaigned against the perceived rise of bad language, violence and sex on TV. [0a] There was a general view by the right wing in the 1960s that Britain was becoming a permissive society, marking the death of a *moral* and *respectable* Britain. [1] **Good. Then Perish.** So the Queen Of Clean set out on a moral crusade to save our souls by fighting... Dr Who?

Yeah, so among the many things she rallied against, she called Dr Who, "teatime brutality for tots" [2] and that one episode "contained some of the sickest and most horrific material seen on children's television". Wow, what episode was that? The Brain Of Morbius, [3] god that guy just can't catch a break, can he? But Mary Whitehouse's persistence was working. Her complaints led to episodes being re-edited, the series being moved to a later time slot and subsequent episodes were explicitly instructed to tone down the violence. [4] Oh look, it's a piece of media intended for younger viewers being permanently altered because of a moral outcry. I wonder if this'll come up again later?

She may have been a figure of ridicule but... she was winning. And the impact that media had on children was the subject of growing public concern for conservative leaning people. Such as the Video Nasties. [5]

In the 1970s, the VCR was introduced to the UK and films were released on VHS without age rating, so anyone could buy any movie at any age. The exception to this was erotic films which fell under the Obscene Publications Act which banned videos that "tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it". Video hire shops were often raided to seize these obscene videos, including The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas, a Dolly Parton musical that was definitely not a porn movie. [6] The problem was this description of what defines an *Obscene* video was really vague, and Mary Whitehouse took full advantage of this as she pushed for more and more videos to also be seized, not for being pornographic, but for being obscene.

This included:

Night of the Living Dead

(1968) (Passed with cuts for cinema. Released uncut in 1987. Downgraded to a 15 certificate in 2007.)

Dawn Of The Dead

(1978) (Originally passed with heavy cuts for cinema. Passed with cuts for video in 1989 and 1997. Released uncut in 2003.)

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre

(1974) (Refused a cinema certificate in 1975. Passed uncut in 1999.)

Scanners

(1981) (Passed uncut for cinema. Also passed uncut for video in 1987.)

Rosemary's Killer

(1981) (Passed with cuts for cinema. Released uncut in 2007.)

Friday the 13th

(1980) (The R-rated version was released without cuts in 1987. The full unrated version (previously released for cinema) was released uncut in 2003.)

Friday the 13th Part 2

(1981) (The R-rated version was passed uncut in 1987. Downgraded to an uncut 15 certificate in 2008.)

The Thing

(1982) (Passed uncut for cinema. Also passed uncut for video in 1987.)

And Mary's No.1 Nasty:

The Evil Dead

(1981) (Originally passed with cuts for cinema. Released with approximately 2 minutes cut in 1990. Re-released uncut in 2001.)

[With each movie title, show their release year and the notes for each one]

Don't have The Thing video file so a random clip from YT will do

These weren't technically banned, but police could seize them at their discretion, all to generally discourage video dealers to not bother going through the trouble of selling them. But this still created a frenzy in the tabloids. [6a] This would eventually change thanks to the Video Recordings Act 1984, which would now add an age rating system to video releases, just like cinema releases. Now, I don't think this is such a bad thing, protecting really young kids from accidentally seeing a film they're not ready for is a pretty solid reason for age rating systems on videos. And obviously I've seen movies rated 18 when I was under 18, we all have. But I like that there's at least some guidance of what to expect and I'd rather have a film rated for adults instead of being banned just because a teenager's head got a little bit removed. But that's the thing, the goal of this war on Video Nasties wasn't to protect the children, it was to get these movies taken away from everyone. [7] And these are some of the most important movies in the history of horror, further cementing just how out of touch the attitude towards them were. Which she never watched in the first place. [8]

In 1973, Stanley Kubrick insisted on removing A Clockwork Orange in just England [9a], after his family received threats of violence while he was being accused the film would inspire acts of violence. Huh. Indeed, there were a lot of real life murders and massacres that would be blamed on the influence of violent movies. [10]

Wait, did he say dogs or adults? [repeat end of clip] Dogs? [repeat dogs from clip] Dogs.

So yeah, they got the blame based on studies that were often just made-up. Like a survey done to see if children have watched these video nasties, a study used by many political figures in arguments against them, except: [11]

I think this unprovable speculation about videos influencing real world violence is more gross than anything these films showed, because, just like blaming heavy metal music or video games, it just lets mass murderers get away with being merely innocent victims who were just under a bad influence. Society will always want to blame others because it cannot blame itself for making the monster. [12]

I don't deny the effectiveness of these films, I knew someone who stopped taking baths after seeing Nightmare In Elm Street. [13] Obviously media has an effect on your behaviour, [14] that's how advertising works, get SurfShark today. But a film toying with your emotions can't just uncharacteristically alter you to do things you weren't already inclined to.

As Kubrick said: *To attribute powerful suggestive qualities to a film is at odds with the scientifically accepted view that, even after deep hypnosis, in a posthypnotic state, people cannot be made to do things which are at odds with their natures.* [15]

Basically if a movie, a game or a song was gonna make them do it, they were probably gonna do it anyway.

This is a classic example of a moral panic. A moral panic is a means to drum up fear that some evil is a threat to society and it's a tool that politicians LOVE to use.

Because you not only get to invent a problem, but you also get to solve it, and win a lot of votes in the process. And it worked for Margeret Thatcher. [16]

FOLDER: WHITEHOUSE

[0 Banned The Mary Whitehouse Story S01E01 14:00, noting it was renamed "National Viewers' and Listeners' Association" in 1965 and then "Mediawatch-UK" in 2001]

[0a Give it a bit of a Family Guy Theme flavour]

[1 https://assets.pearsonschool.com/asset_mgr/versions/2012-04/0DE211A5466A0677593B5DEA44BAA053.pdf page 3 of pdf, paragraph under Legal Context]

2

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121106091547/http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/david-maloney-411226.html>

3 pg62 Doctor_Who_Magazine_508_2017_3_covers_digital_Minutemen-Bookworm_(newcomic.info) <http://www.shannonsullivan.com/drwho/serials/4k.html>

4 pg6 Doctor Who - In-Vision 045 - Season 17 Overview

[5 Video Nasties BBC News 1994 - Michael Howard.mp4 0:01 "Video Nasties" to "ban them altogether"]

6 <https://classiccountrymusic.com/7-facts-about-the-best-little-whorehouse-in-texas/>

[6a newspaper headlines in folder]

7

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130314004331/https://www.bbc.co.uk/education-resources/education-news/video-nasties>

[8 Mary Whitehouse on the Video Nasties.mp4 0:00 "I have never seen a video nasty" / 0:20 "I don't need to see visually what I know is in this film"]

9 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/case-studies/exorcist>

9a [Dear Censor - BBFC Documentary - Video Nasties.mp4 35:42 for visuals]

[10 'Suitable For Viewing In The Home ' (Video Censorship & Video Nasties Documentary) 19:03 "research is taking place and it will show" to "affects dogs as well"]

[11 'Suitable For Viewing In The Home ' (Video Censorship & Video Nasties Documentary) 13:16 "what we did was made up film titles" to "claimed they'd seen films that didn't exist" trim down]

[12 'Suitable For Viewing In The Home ' (Video Censorship & Video Nasties Documentary) 8:43 "there is a rise in violence" to "lets blame it on that" trim down]

[13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gef3B3yqSM>]

[14 Incredibles 2 45:11 the screenslaver part]

[15 Kubrick.jpg (Source: Stanley Kubrick: The Complete Films by Paul Duncan)]

[16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzNRthP0POM> 0:54 holding up manifesto / split screen with cover from Cons Mfo 1983.pdf, then jumping to page 19 of PDF doc, focusing on the bullet point about public concern over obscene video cassettes / on "it worked" put up Landslide.jpg]

[b-roll of videos/vhs in Video Nasties Documentary / Video Nasties Bill, Ireland 1986 / Video Nasties BBC News 1994 - Michael Howard / Video Nasties - Banned in the UK etc]

[b-roll of government https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKLnK_2rzz0/

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lSldJlSHQQ/> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dDHVoAy58A>]

Chapter 2: BRUCE LEE VERSUS MAGGIE THATCHER

James Ferman, Director of the BBFC at the time, was pretty lenient when it came to film classifications. One infamous example is *Salò or The 120 Days Of Sodom*, a film known for its extreme violence, [censor beep], [censor beep] and eating [censor beep]. Despite worldwide bans, Ferman allowed it exclusively for private club cinemas, even though the police would still seize it. James Ferman seemed to really understand the artistic intent, even in extreme examples like this. [3] However,

[1]

In 1987, Michael Ryan shot 31 people, killing 16 of them, including his own mother, and then himself. The Hungerford Massacre remains one of the UK's deadliest mass shootings. No motive was ever confirmed, but people blamed violent movies, such as *Rambo*. [2]

The events in Hungerford clearly shook James Ferman, as he's the guy in charge of certifying films. He's basically something of an arbiter of British culture, so he must have felt some partial responsibility for what happened. Because following this, coupled with the ongoing tabloid pressure of video nasties, he clamped down hard on violence and weapons, despite artistic intent. Such as rating *Rambo 3* with an 18, despite it really being a 15, even with cuts. [4] Which is just sad.

This coincided well with the policies of Margaret Thatcher [5]. She was seen as the solution for the permissive society and led with the hard line policies of law and order. Especially against deadly weapons. [6]

You see, when *Enter The Dragon* came out in 1973, it was a worldwide sensation. Bruce Lee's posthumous masterpiece became one of the most influential films of all time. Sparking a trend of other martial arts movies and TV shows to follow [7] and the British press once again had a moral panic about it. [7a]

This follows from a high-profile case in the 60s after a kitchen-hand learned karate from a book and used it to murder his colleague, [8]. This brought into question the safety of this *karate* suggesting a potential full ban on the practice. And now here's more martial arts, this time with weapons and they're being sold in shops. [8a] They were even available by mail order. [8b] But like with the video nasties, the angle became what if a child got hold of a throwing star. [8c] Like obviously that's bad, but by positioning the story in such a biased way, it becomes impossible to argue against. Oh what, you want little babies playing with ninja stars, little ninja babies? What's wrong with you? But once again, the plan was to ban it for everyone. Home Office Minister John Patten said "*They have no part to play in civilised society, no civilised person could wish to possess them*" [9] **But I thought everyone was kung-fu fighting?**

So ok, were there any high profile cases of an attack in the UK using ninja weapons?

Not that I could find. I found articles about confiscating weapons and suspected weapons [10], and while I don't doubt someone probably attacked someone with a weapon at some point [11], it hardly seemed to be as wide-spread as the press suggested. [12] The Home Office's public crime record of "possession of weapons" only starts from 1998 due to changes on how the crimes were counted. [13] Crime statistics do show a general increase in the 80s and 90s, [14] that's of all crimes with or without weapons. And while we don't exactly want a kid to be killed by a throwing star to only then actually act upon it [15], other

than sensationalist articles, [16] I'm not finding much to actually support the paranoia of ninja weapons.

What did happen, however, were riots. [17] Lots and lots of riots.

With the hard line on law and order, police were allowed to do random stop and searches, and by random I mean mostly black people, called the "Sus Law". [18] This was a thing. So the growing mistrust of the police saw the rising tension become riots in Brixton in 1981. Then again in 1985. And the Miners Strike. [19] Basically Thatcher was very good at pissing off a lot of people.

So I think a motivating factor of the Offensive Weapons Act in 1988, with the inclusion of ninja weapons, [20] was to try and undermine the fighting power of the rioters - just before the poll tax riots kicked off. [21]

Similarly, Thatcher had a heavy handed approach when it came to football hooliganism, [22] and how they were allegedly bringing ninja throwing stars to football matches. [23]

Hooliganism was such a huge concern for Thatcher, that the increased police powers to control the violence, resulted in one of the deadliest footballing events ever. The Hillsborough Disaster of 1989 in which Liverpool supporters were crushed by overcrowding, resulting in 97 deaths [24]. Despite this being proven to be caused by the actions of the police, [25] the right wing press was quick to put the blame on the victims. [26] This is so demonstrably untrue, that The Sun newspaper continues to be boycotted in Liverpool to this day. [27]

Many were clutching their pearls, worried about these unruly mobs of rural rioters. So just as there was a ban on these weapons in the real world, there were also bans on these weapons in movies and TV and James Ferman was taking a stance against nunchucks, When Enter The Dragon had a 1988 VHS release, Bruce Lee's iconic nunchuck scene was cut

[28], the cover had to be altered. [29] That just looks like a baguette.

And even this scene with a poster of Bruce Lee just holding nunchucks had to be cut! [30]

So for ninja weapons, despite having no real inciting moment beyond the popularity of Bruce Lee, a moral panic was once again created, one that created laws and legislation that made the Thatcher government look good, because they were firm and unwavering, all in the name of keeping the peace and saving the children.

And unfortunately this was sorry state of Britain when the Turtles hit our shores.

FOLDER: THATCHER

[1 Dear Censor - BBFC Documentary - Video Nasties.mp4 51:30 "the headlines at 6 o'clock" to "are injured"]

[2 Dear Censor - BBFC Documentary - Video Nasties.mp4 51:39 "my impression" to "Rambo"]

[3 Dear Censor - BBFC Documentary - Video Nasties.mp4 45:07 onwards for visuals. Goes without saying I think, but lets avoid the shit-eating!]

[4 Dear Censor - BBFC Documentary - Video Nasties.mp4 52:27 onwards for visuals. Esp. kid playing with knife at 54:57]

[5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZPqBNC4wmw/> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9gFoe64cz8>]

[6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGrBlwt1YMg>]

[7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUGkNNMt1fE> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhteFxAJJU> /

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWJ6XnwdSmc> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKni-Vx-Zfc> / include I Was So Close To Becoming The Ultimate Ninja!.mp4]

[7a ExZpO_7VIAAr0nX.png / Newspaper-KungFuCraze1.pdf /]

[8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbIEHy4V0/sI> 35:25 "apparently within three seconds he killed the man stone dead" - this doc also provides a lot of useful b-roll]

[8a Newspaper-Museum.pdf - "lethal weapons kids can buy" / Newspaper-OneShop.pdf - bottom right "Children can buy lethal weapons" - also the "Mail Order" folder is useful for whole section]

[8b Newspaper-WeaponsForSale.pdf / Newspaper-Magazine.pdf]

[8c Newspaper-ThrowingStar.pdf / https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SdpjexsU7M avoid showing the Butter reveal, although animated it may be too graphic, maybe it can be visual with the article over it, thus blocking the gorier stuff]

[9 Newspapers-Chop.pdf - top right highlight quote]

[10 Newspaper-AirportSeize.pdf - "Taser Gun" headline / Newspaper-NoNunchuck.pdf - bottom left in the "Confused Evidence" article, under the "Trouble" subheader, 4th paragraph "Asked by Judge if he saw nun-chucks"]

[11 Newspaper-KungFuWeapon.pdf - bottom right, second to last column from "the saw was only part of his instruments"]

[12 Newspaper-SwordTerror.pdf - zoom in on "It's only a matter of time before a child is killed"]

[13 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/historical-crime-data>]

[14

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/apr/24/statistics-in-england-and-wales-how-significant-is-the-decline>]

[15 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRolsrSzapo> crop watermark]

[16 Newspaper-WeaponsIncrease.pdf / Newspaper-IncreaseCrime.pdf - headlines]

[17 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nISp6VB4cPg> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdyo16VMhIQ> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzzxURJ4Ya0> / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhiz51h45NQ>]

[18 00129878.jpg & SusLaw.jpg / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRbcFNhDFeA> (b-roll)]

[19 Brixton 1981 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGrBlwt1YMg> / Brixton 1985

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLDxdPaOXOU> / Miners Strike

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGeICaYnuo8>]

[20 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1988/2019/made>]

[21 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leFS6S06w8c>]

[22

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-s-government-thought-football-fans-so-violent-she-set-up-a-war-cabinet-a6883226.html> headline / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOp9d9ITeq0> (b-roll)]

[23 Newspaper-Savages.pdf]

[24 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNS26Oj9B4o>]

[25 Taylor Interim Report.pdf page 57 of PDF, point 278, highlight last line "the main reason for the disaster was the failure of police control."]

[26

<https://images.theconversation.com/files/120351/original/image-20160427-30950-10ckm6.jpg?ixlib=rb-1.1.0&q=45&auto=format&w=1000&fit=clip>]

[27

<https://theconversation.com/hillsborough-liverpool-fc-has-got-rid-of-the-sun-but-it-cannot-rid-the-sun-of-liverpool-fc-72927> / Don't_Buy_the_Sun_sticker.jpg / Don't_Buy_the_Sun_sticker (2).jpg]

[28 <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/education/case-studies/enter-the-dragon>]

[29 Compare https://images.tedim.co/uploads/0820_dragonposter.jpg with

https://images.tedim.co/uploads/0820_dragon.jpg]

[martial arts b-roll <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ho3QqJ-JkI> / Ninja Extreme Weapons (i.e. 1:25:48 - catches shuriken star) / Dragnet has nunchucks thrown in the bin around 54:10]

[30 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIRoZyxEng> 13:17 "One day, I'm gonna be just like him" with extract from <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/education/timeline> under 1986 "Sight of a poster featuring Bruce Lee holding nunchaku is cut from No Retreat, No Surrender."]