

Dr. Ed's Movie Reviews 2017

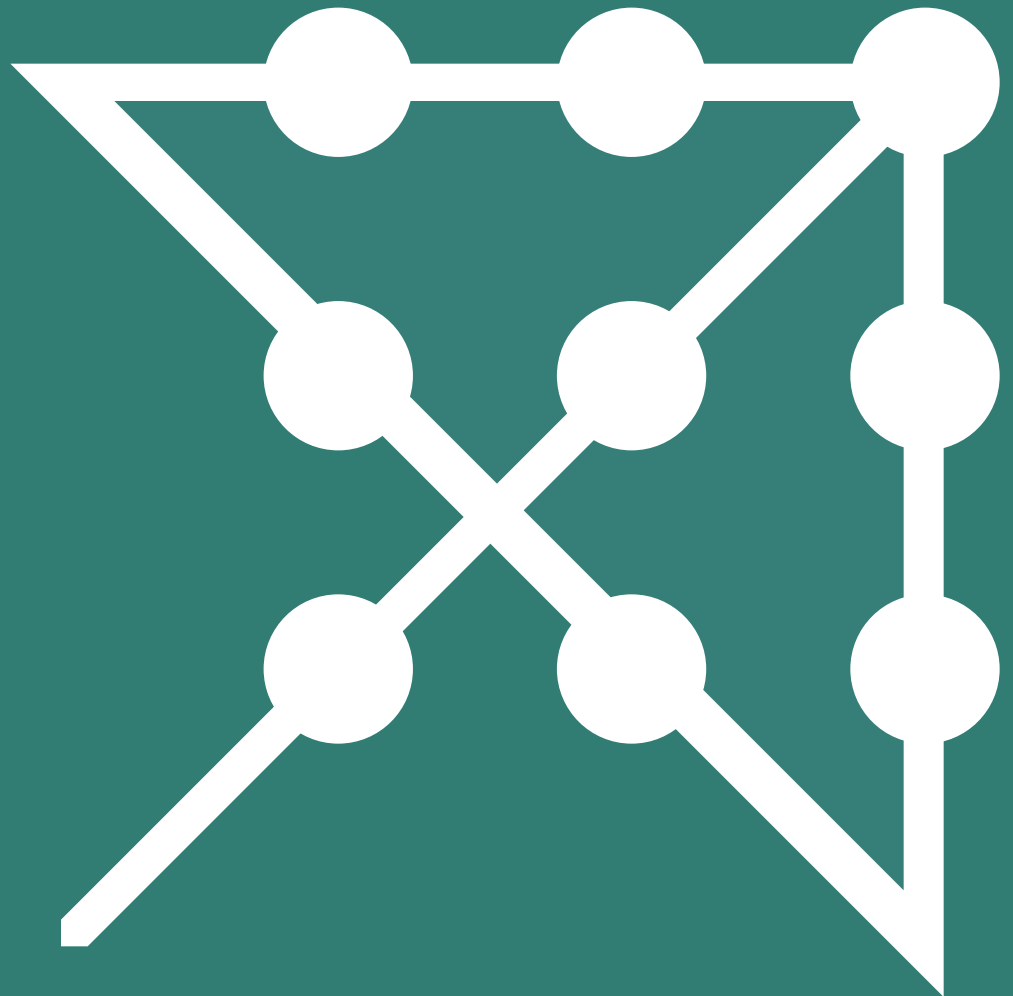
Yardeni Research, Inc.

Dr. Edward Yardeni

516-972-7683

eyardeni@yardeni.com

Please visit our sites at
www.yardeni.com
blog.yardeni.com



thinking outside the box

A Dog's Purpose (+ +) is a movie for dog lovers. Our family includes a Cocker Spaniel and two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. So my wife and I really enjoyed the film very much. It confirms the age-old adage that if you want a true friend for life, get a dog. President Harry Truman reportedly said that about Washington, though there is no proof that he ever did say so. Nevertheless, it applies to Washington more than ever. Maybe if all our red and blue politicians got dogs, they finally would have something in common. After all, there are no red dogs or blue dogs.

American Made (+ + +) is loosely based on the true story of Barry Seal, who worked as a TWA pilot for a short stint before finding gainful employment as a drug runner, money launderer, and gun trafficker. He was employed (often at the same time) by the Columbian drug cartels, the CIA, the Sandinistas, the DEA, the Contras, and the Reagan White House. It's fun watching Tom Cruise have fun playing Seal. It's just another side of the bizarre and disturbing drug-infested relationship between the US and some Latin American countries, which also is entertainingly depicted in the Netflix docudrama "Narcos."

Atomic Blonde (+) features Charlize Theron playing a spy working for M16 British intelligence just as the Berlin Wall is coming down. The movie is intentionally campy with lots of pop hits from the late 1980s. Charlize leaves a long trail of dead bad guys as the one-woman death squad mercilessly pursues her mission impossible. This could be the beginning of a new spy thriller series. After all, James Bond must be ready for the nursing home of retired spies by now. The movie starts slow, but the pace of mayhem speeds up along the way.

Bitter Harvest (- -) is a badly executed movie about a very important tragic historical event that has received all too little attention and is particularly relevant today. Millions of Ukrainians died during a 1932-33 famine that was exacerbated by the collectivist policies of Stalin's Soviet regime. Ukraine has a long history of suffering from imperialist intervention by its Russian neighbor. Ukraine gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Yet Russia under Putin annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and has been using military force in eastern Ukraine. History continues to rhyme.

Blade Runner 2049 (+) is a sequel to the 1982 flick starring Harrison Ford. This one stars Ryan Gosling. In both movies, the world is full of "replicants," which are biorobotic androids. They are virtually identical to adult humans, but are stronger, speedier, more agile, and more resilient. They come in different models with varying degrees of intelligence. The only way to recognize them is by their lack of emotional responsiveness. Yet, just as I found myself rooting for the apes in the "Planet of the Apes" movies, I found myself rooting for the replicants.

Cézanne et Moi (+) is a French film about the close relationship between Paul Cézanne and Émile Zola. They were boyhood best friends growing up in Aix-en-Provence. Cézanne came from a wealthy family. In elementary school, he protected Zola, who was a poor outsider from Italy. Later, the roles reversed. Zola, the writer, became successful and prosperous, while the painter rarely sold a canvas. After Cézanne's father cut his allowance, Zola subsidized his friend. Their break came when Cézanne accused Zola of depicting his life in his 1886 novel, *The Masterpiece*. Not mentioned in the film is Zola's famous J'accuse newspaper letter in defense of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, the French Jewish officer wrongly convicted of treason. Cézanne's work formed a bridge between 19th-century impressionism and the 20th century cubism of Matisse and Picasso.

Detroit (+ +) is a very intense movie about intense racial tensions that flared up in major riots in Detroit, and elsewhere around the country, during the mid-1960s. It starts out in a documentary fashion chronicling the turmoil that engulfed Detroit and turns into a docudrama about one harrowing incident one night when a couple of cops entrapped several law-abiding African-American citizens and behaved more like murderous vigilantes than officers of the law. A great deal of progress has been made in race relations since then, though clearly not enough.

Dunkirk (+ + +) is one of the best-made war movies I've seen because it depicts the brutal intensity of war with no time for frivolous banter. It certainly shows how, for Britain, World War II was from the start about fighting first for survival, then for victory on the beaches, on the seas, and in the air, just as Winston Churchill proclaimed on May 13, 1940. There are plenty of British heroes, particularly the owners of small boats and ferries who participated in evacuating more than 330,000 mostly British and French soldiers in about 11 days from the beaches of Dunkirk before Hitler's forces could annihilate them.

Fences (+ +) is about a working-class African-American man struggling to support his family in the 1950s. He missed out on becoming a great baseball star, and works in Pittsburgh's sanitation department. He talks a good game about how much he loves his wife and provides for her and their son. However, he cuts some corners along the way. Like the rest of us, he is only human. The movie, which features Oscar-nominated performances by Denzel Washington and Viola Davis, is based on a play, and has that feel. It is somewhat reminiscent of "Death of a Salesman" and "A View from the Bridge."

Get Out (+) is not explicitly about the stock market. However, it is a movie worth watching as a cautionary tale. Sometimes, it is just so obvious that it's time to go. For example, if you are meeting your girlfriend's parents in their rural home for the first time, and you notice something odd about the maid and the caretaker...get out. Or, if her psychologist mom hypnotizes you involuntarily...get out. Or, if a bunch of old couples show up for a Sunday cocktail party to admire your physique...get out. We may be starting to see similar clues in the stock market. So why are we all still staying?

Hidden Figures (+ +) is a film based on a true story about three remarkable African-American women who worked at NASA at the start of the space program during the early 1960s. One of them was an extraordinary mathematician, who made John Glenn's orbit around the earth possible. Another supervised the space agency's use of its first IBM mainframe computer. The third was an accomplished aeronautical engineer. They performed their jobs with amazing tenacity and dignity despite lots of obstacles they faced because of their color. It is truly a great American story.

Kong: Skull Island (- -) is the latest King Kong movie confirming that the original can't be beat, no matter how hard the Kong wannabes beat their furry chests. The original premiered in 1933 as a remake of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale, and featured Kong climbing the Empire State Building, which was completed in early 1931. In the first version, Beauty killed the Beast. In this one, Beauty saves the Beast. The movie was beautifully filmed, mostly in Vietnam, with the action taking place during 1973. It actually seems more like a remake of "Apocalypse Now," except the battle scenes are between Kong and big ugly lizards.

Lady Bird (+ +) is a really fine movie about a 17-year-old girl growing up in Sacramento. She is from the wrong side of the tracks, but overcomes her economic disadvantages

with poise and smarts. It's more universal than a typical coming-of-age movie about some confused teenager. It's all about learning to live in your own skin and being happy about it.

LBJ (+ + +) is a very well crafted movie about Lyndon B. Johnson before and after John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Woody Harrelson provides a great performance as LBJ, who had a great need to be loved but was certainly hated by Bobbie Kennedy. Director Rob Reiner is one of Hollywood's more liberal denizens, so the movie focuses on LBJ's achievement in passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 rather than his role in widening the war in Vietnam.

Lion (+ + +) is a really wonderful movie about five-year-old Saroo, an Indian boy who falls asleep on an empty train that finally stops in Calcutta, more than a thousand miles from his home. He is lost in this big city and struggles to survive. He is eventually adopted by an Australian couple. However, he continues to feel lost and 25 years later seeks to find his home and family with the help of Google Earth. It is all based on a remarkable true story.

Moonlight (- -) is an Oscar contender for Best Motion Picture. I'm not sure why. It is a very slow-paced movie about a sensitive African-American kid doing the best he can to stay out of trouble while growing up in a poor neighborhood infested with drug dealers. Even his mother is an addict. He finds a safe haven with a very nice fellow and his girlfriend, but leaves when he finds out that his mother has been buying drugs from his new friend. I suppose the movie is about coming of age. However, the characters are totally uninteresting and don't seem to learn much as they come of age. Much more interesting are the stories of the director and screenwriter, who both grew up and out of that same neighborhood, and had mothers who were crack addicts. Someone should make a movie about their lives.

My Cousin Rachel (+) is based on a novel by the late English author Dame Daphne du Maurier. She wrote romances that rarely had conventional happy endings. At least Romeo and Juliet had a few good moments together before they met their tragic end. For the romantic couples in Daphne's novels, there are fewer happy moments before it all ends badly. Her novels have been described as "moody." She spent much of her life in Cornwall, where most of her works are set. This movie, starring Rachel Weisz as the moody "Rachel" of the title, is also set in Cornwall, and has an unsettling beginning, middle, and ending too. It reminds me of our relationship with politicians these days: We want to love them, but they always let us down. Let's hope they don't kill us.

Rogue One (-) was really dull because it is the seventh movie in the "Star Wars" series of flicks about the never-ending wars between the freedom-loving rebels and their totalitarian adversaries, who rule the Empire. I didn't give it my worst rating out of respect for the passing away of Carrie Fisher. She was Princess Leia in the original three films. She makes a digitally recreated appearance in this film, as does Peter Cushing, who died in 1994, after playing the nefarious ally of Darth Vader and the commander of the Death Star. In the future, movie studios will save lots of money by casting digitally recreated dead stars in their movies. My wife, who is a fan of the intergalactic series, also pressured me to raise my rating, observing that fans appreciate how this prequel set the stage for the very first movie.

The Beguiled (- - -) is a dark movie directed by Sofia Coppola and starring Colin Farrell and Nicole Kidman. Most of it was filmed at night by candle light, so bring a flash light. It is a remake of a 1971 movie featuring Clint Eastwood and Geraldine Page, and set in an

all-girl boarding school in the rural South during the American Civil War. The movie is very slow moving, and all too predictable. There is a subliminal message for stock investors: Beware of a wounded bull that seems to be recovering, only to turn on you.

The Big Sick (+) is a funny movie about a young Pakistani-American stand-up comedian, who is also an Uber driver. He falls in love with an American girl from the South. She loves him too, but his parents insist on arranging his marriage to a Pakistani girl. Will love conquer all? It often does in the movies. In the real world, we are reminded by the violence in Charlottesville that hate remains a very destructive force in our society.

The Dinner (- -), starring Richard Gere, is about two couples getting together for a family dinner at an haute-cuisine French restaurant. Don't go before dinner because it will make you very hungry. Yet the wonderful six-course meal goes to waste because the four dinner companions are so busy shouting at one another and leaving the table that they don't get to enjoy it. The acting is good, but interrupted by the film's jerky editing, with flashbacks to Gettysburg and an ATM machine. If you weren't hungry in the first place, you'll leave the theatre hungry at least for a good, less depressing movie. Skip "The Dinner" and just go out to dinner at a good restaurant instead.

The Florida Project (+ +) is a movie that all rich people should see, especially if they are depressed by what the GOP is planning to do to them under TCJA. The film is about Moonee, a precocious and mischievous six-year-old girl growing up with a single mom in a welfare motel, which is next to Disney World. She certainly makes the best of tough living conditions. Perhaps the rich would feel better about paying more in taxes if they actually benefited kids like Moonee.

The Foreigner (+ +) is an action-packed thriller produced by and starring Jackie Chan, who is a movie producer and a martial arts actor. He has appeared in over 150 films. However, this is the first of his work that I've seen, and I really enjoyed it. The movie is set mostly in London, where a small cell of terrorists is trying to revive the IRA despite the opposition of one of their elders, played by Pierce Brosnan, who has turned from terrorist to statesman. Chan, seeking revenge for the death of his daughter resulting from the terrorists' bombing of a bank, plays a one-man special forces unit.

The Founder (+ + +) is a great biopic about Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's. He was a remarkable entrepreneur. One of his more famous quotes was: "Nothing in the world can take the place of Persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." The only problem was that he lifted it verbatim from Calvin Coolidge. He also bamboozled the McDonald brothers to sell him their rights to the company including their name. His genius was the ability to take other people's great ideas and turn them into an extremely profitable business.

The Lost City of Z (- -) is a somewhat interesting story about a rather uninteresting British explorer obsessed with finding a lost city in the jungles of Amazonia during the early 1900s. He is a controversial member of the Royal Geographical Society, who is derided for believing in El Dorado, the mythical hidden city of immense wealth. The film is loosely based on the true-life drama of Col. Percival Fawcett, who disappeared during his last foray into the steamy forest on his ill-fated quest. It's a good movie to catch up on some Zs.

The Zookeeper's Wife (+ +) is a big-screen adaptation of the book of the same name about the remarkable story of an incredibly heroic married Polish couple, Antonina and Jan Żabiński, who owned and operated the Warsaw Zoo before World War II. They lost all their animals when the Nazi's invaded Poland, but kept the zoo as a pig farm during the war. At the same time, the Christian couple secretly saved about 300 Jews from certain death at great risk to their family. Jan was also a leader of the Polish resistance. The Żabińskis reopened the zoo after the war. The world certainly needs more decent people like them.

Three Billboards (+) is a quirky movie with quirky characters. It's a bit like a Coen Brothers movie, and stars Frances McDormand, who is married to one of the brothers and has appeared in lots of their movies. Like a Coen-made movie, this one takes place in a rural town with lots of goofy characters caught in tenuous positions of committing, hiding, or dealing with a murder in their midst. Also playing an interesting part is Woody Harrelson.

Tulip Fever (- - -) is a very disappointing film. It has an all-star cast of very fine actors. The fundamental flaw is with the convoluted story, which is set in Amsterdam during the tulip bubble, which burst in 1637. During such manias, people tend to lose their minds. In this film, they've lost their minds while pursuing love, lust, and revenge. My wife and I left before it ended, and before the crash in the tulip market's bubble. I hope I do as well exiting markets before the next bubble that forms suddenly bursts.

Viceroy's House (+ + +) is the kind of movie my wife and I especially enjoy. It is based on remarkable historical events and personalities with a remarkable cast, direction, and cinematography. This one is about the final Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, who is tasked with overseeing the transition of British India to independence. The challenge is to accomplish it as quickly and smoothly as possible. It happens all too quickly, but not too smoothly. The situation spirals out of control, resulting in a mass migration between India and Pakistan that turns into a human tragedy of epic proportions.

Wind River (+ +) is a murder mystery set in an Indian reservation in Wyoming. It's well written. It is also well paced, taking the time to develop the lead character, who is well played by Jeremy Renner. It was filmed during the winter, and clearly demonstrates why Fed officials schedule their annual meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming late in August.

Wonder Woman (+ +) is one of the better action hero flicks. That's partly because it isn't all carnage all the time. There is actually some dialogue. Most of it is hokey, but some of it is mildly amusing. In any event, it was good to see Wonder Woman coming around to realize that utopian visions of peace on Earth can't be achieved simply by killing the God of War. However, she does conclude that love conquers all, which may work in bilateral relationships but is less reliable otherwise.