



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 16, 2014

Movie Review: “The Giver” Warns Against Gov’t Solutions

“When people have the freedom to choose, they choose wrong.” At least, that’s what the Elders believe in the world of Jonas — in the latest futuristic movie thriller, *The Giver*.

The Elders in this dark and colorless world of conformity believe they have finally found a solution to their vast problems: simply remove the people’s emotions, their choices, the uniqueness that makes each of them human and special in his own way.



In this tyrannical society, there is no more war, religion, impoliteness, prejudice, or even bad weather — just impossible courtesy, injections, curfews, mandatory “precision of language,” and Big Brother to be sure the subjects do not break any of the Elders’ vast number of rules. Almost all distinctions among the people have been erased. The new world is ultimately gray.

How do the Elders keep the people from rising up and demanding a return to the world that once was? They erase their memories to such an extent that the people are no longer able to recall even the simplest things such as color, love, affection — even a kiss. This dystopian community bans almost any human behavior, including any terminology related to love or family. In fact, women no longer even give birth to their own offspring; instead, families receive children from the community birthers and nurturers. Apparently there are no sexual relations.

In this dark world, one person is selected to be the “Receiver of Memory” — an individual who provides necessary guidance to the Elders about events in the past. A person known as the Giver will impart to this Receiver the secret knowledge of how the world once was — its pain, as well as its joy and beauty: a difficult position to hold in the present world of sameness and conformity.

For Jonas (Brenton Thwaites) and for the people of that community, all of whom know nothing of the real world, the present world seems to be a good one. That is, until Jonas reaches his 18th birthday — one that is of primary importance in this society. When the young people reach that age, the government assigns the jobs that they will have for the remainder of their lives — until they become too old and are sent to be “released to elsewhere.”

On that important birthday, Jonas learns that he has been selected to be the next Receiver of Memory. He must now work with the Giver (Jeff Bridges), who will do his best to prepare Jonas for the shock of all he will learn.

What transpires between the Giver and the Receiver is both beautiful and tragic. All at once, the Giver displays to him all the previous world’s beauty, as well as its drama and pain. And although the initial instinct of Jonas is to reject the past because of its wars, harshness, and sadness, he is drawn to what else the world once held: love, family, happiness, Christmas celebrations, snow, and so much more. Suddenly, he is acutely aware of all that he has missed — most of all, love.

Jonas also learns from the Giver that the “release” for the elderly in his world is just the Elders’ euphemism for their murder. Because this is a secret unknown by the rest of the people, he begins to worry about the older citizens, as well as the babies who are deemed too unhealthy to be given to a



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family. Moviegoers will find it enthralling to follow his attempts to return his world to what it once had been.

The Giver is a profound and beautiful story that differs in several aspects from other dystopic young adult stories of recent years in literature and movies. With only mild action, the film's focus is on the politics of the present dystopia and its impact on the citizens. The irony is that while the Elders had wished to save humanity, they rather destroyed it. There is very little "humanness" remaining in the world of Jonas.

Jeff Bridges is inspiring in his title role as the Giver, truly bearing the weight of his world on his shoulders. Though he knows many facts from the past, he is forbidden from sharing them with anyone but the Receiver. The longing in his eyes, and his tangible desperation to recover what his world has lost, well portray a man who is full of love and knowledge but is obligated to keep it all a secret from everyone but Jonas.

As Jonas, Brenton Thwaites delivers a remarkable portrayal of an initially naïve young man who gradually becomes aware of what the Elders of his colorless world have stolen from him. Seeing that the Elders have not eliminated the horrors of death — but rather have simply renamed it and drugged the remaining people so that they do not feel the pain of loss — Jonas becomes determined to take back all that has been erased from the people's lives.

Though *The Giver* was written by Lois Lowry in 1993, it took 31 years for the story to come to the big screen. Like other books and films in this genre, *The Giver* provides a valuable lesson for its younger readers and moviegoers: An overreaching government is not the solution; it is the problem — a truth all too evident in our own world as well.

Left, Jeff Bridges in the title role, and Brenton Thwaites as Jonas.



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