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Rate This Commercial Strictly Pre-K

A new 12-minute film designed to promote tourism throughout New York State has just received the first "Pre-K" rating ever awarded to a government-financed infomercial. The film contains no obscene language, nudity, violence or erotic music, nor even a coherent theme or prominent star - just shots of Niagara Falls, the Erie Canal, the Adirondack Mountains, Saratoga Springs, the sandy beaches of Long Island and, of course, the Manhattan skyline, the Statue of Liberty and Radio City Music Hall. The Pre-K rating, an abbreviation for pre-kindergarten, refers to the intellectual capacity required both to create and view this 1995 version of the "I Love NY" campaign.

The commercial, to be shown to tour operators and travel agents, is the centerpiece of a new campaign to attract visitors to the Empire State. Although images of New York City account for more than three minutes of the film, the spot's main goal is to get people living in the city and nearby states to spend their disposable income upstate, by highlighting activities such as apple-picking, bobsledding, boating and viewing the fall foliage.

Despite testimonials by New Yorkers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, this film is intrinsically anti-urban. State officials, working under both Democratic and Republican governors, have ignored New York City's powerful attractions, such as Broadway theaters and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, despite the facts that the Met attracts 4.6 million visitors a year (including one million from abroad) and one of every seven Broadway theater tickets is sold to an international tourist. Although one Broadway marquee is depicted in the film, there is no hint of a current show such as "Phantom of the Opera" or "Sunset Boulevard" that might resonate with potential sightseers.

The state's department of economic development, which produced this film, managed to bypass homegrown filmmakers such as Spike Lee, Sidney Lumet and Martin Scorsese, and to ignore New York composers such as Leonard Bernstein, Duke Ellington and George Gershwin. Even geo-centric songs such as "Shuffle Off to Buffalo," "Take the A Train," "New York, New York" and Simon and Garfunkel's "The 59th Street Bridge Song" are missing from the score, which is predominantly Muzak.

Other important tourist attractions are omitted as well. Cooperstown, the home of the Baseball Hall of Fame, is not mentioned in the film, nor is the state's only professional football team, the Buffalo Bills. Naturally, the Knicks, Rangers and Madison Square Garden are also invisible.

What the film lacks most is the picture or voice of any nationally recognized New Yorker,

except our new governor, George Pataki. And Pataki, who talks mostly about Theodore Roosevelt's commitment to conservation, neglects to mention that Roosevelt was the only president of the United States born in this city.

The music and script are just part of a larger problem: The film's message is flawed. Tourism is important because visitors create jobs by spending money on food, lodging, transportation, culture and clothing. And the biggest spenders are foreign sightseers, who prefer New York City to any other spot in the Empire State. A survey by the U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration indicated that the city attracts 92 percent of the overseas visitors to the state, while Niagara Falls pulls in only 2 percent.

To stimulate tourism, one must first promote New York City and then find a way to lure visitors upstate. This commercial violates the first rule of tourism: No one with brains or money goes north of Bear Mountain without first passing through Manhattan. There is no better way to undermine this city's vibrant tourism industry than to show this film outside of Albany's Empire State Mall.

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