



CHAPTER 9

War and Cinema

A WORLD OF EXTREMES

Film producer, writer, director, and World War II veteran Samuel Fuller, appearing as himself in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965), declares that "film is like a battleground: love, hate, action, violence, death . . . in a word, emotion." If film is like a battleground, then the war movie is potentially the ultimate form of the cinema, creating conditions in which extreme expressions of love, hate, action, violence, and death can find representation. If the cinema is, in part, a medium well suited for the depiction of spectacle, the war film is uniquely capable of maximizing that spectacle: marshaling thousands of troops in battle formation; blowing up bridges, battleships, ammunition dumps, airfields, towns, and cities; and laying waste to not only individual armies but entire nations as well.

Much as the musical provides cathartic release from the mundane sphere of its narrative through escapist flight into a more fantastic world of song and

dance, the war film has its own “production numbers” in the form of explosive

action sequences, superhuman feats of bravery, and spectacular displays of mass destruction. But while characters in musicals leap into a more perfect, utopian world of harmony, energy, intensity, and abundance, characters in war films cautiously enter a hellish no-man’s-land of violence and death in which life is not ideal. Rather, life in the state of war is, as Thomas Hobbes once wrote of life in the state of nature, “nasty, brutish, and short.”

The war movie plunges its characters into a world of extremes where the slightest action (or even inaction) results in death—their own or that of their comrades. One of the images that best conveys the absolutist, either/or nature of human existence in the genre is that of the GI who inadvertently steps on an enemy land mine he knows will explode if he makes a move (see *Fixed Bayonets*, 1951; *The Boys in Company C*, 1978). His life, as well as that of the man standing next to him, depends on his self-control. He is forced to remain perfectly motionless while a comrade attempts to disarm the mine. Then he and his buddies carefully retrace their steps out of the minefield. Life (if you can call it that) is lived moment by moment. Each step becomes a nightmarish choice between life and death—a choice in which there is no real choice, only luck. Michael Cimino, the director of *The Deer Hunter* (1978), set forth a somewhat similar image, though one that proved to be more appropriate to the Vietnam War than the traditional us versus them concept of the GI in a minefield. For Cimino, the Vietnam War was intentionally self-destructive; it was like a game of Russian roulette.

BREAKING RULES

A Suspension of Morality

The battlefield is a world in which the laws, beliefs, behavior, and morality of civilization are suspended. It is not merely permitted for one man to kill another; it is imperative for him to do so. War rewrites civil and criminal law. To charge a soldier who kills the enemy with murder is, as Capt. Willard (Martin Sheen) reminds us in *Apocalypse Now* (1979), “like giving out speeding tickets at the Indy 500.” There are, of course, rules of war, established by the Geneva Convention. And with the notable exception of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), American soldiers in World War II films attempt, for the most part, to observe them. But, in the Vietnam War film, even those rules are honored as much in the breach as in the observance. Expediency governs morality; might makes right; the ends justify the means.

Although the difference between right and wrong is somewhat obscured and thus no longer absolute in the war film, relative moral distinctions remain. The good guys (usually us) fight fair and the bad guys (usually them) do not. Our enemies are shown not only torturing captured soldiers but also killing

innocent civilians. In *The Heart of Humanity* (1918), Erich von Stroheim's Prussian officer, distracted from his attempted rape of a Red Cross nurse by the screams of an infant, picks the child up out of its cradle and tosses it out of a second-story window to its death. In *Bataan* (1943), the Japanese mutilate a Filipino soldier, fire on a Red Cross ambulance, and strafe a column of refugees, killing women and children. In *The North Star* (1943), a Nazi doctor first orders the children of a captured Ukrainian village to be fed, then forces them to give blood transfusions for German wounded; one child dies when too much blood is drained out of his body.

Even the good guys break the rules on occasion, though they are generally seen as motivated by either moral outrage, expediency, or compassion. And their violations of official codes of conduct generally take place in the Korean and Vietnam wars in which America's moral status is not as clearly delineated as it was in World War II. In *The Steel Helmet* (1951), an American sergeant deliberately shoots a North Korean prisoner of war in retaliation for his callous response to the death of a young Korean boy. In *Apocalypse Now*, Willard shoots a dying Vietnamese girl rather than let his hypocritical comrades, who originally wounded her, delay his mission by taking her to a place where she might obtain medical assistance. At the end of *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), a Marine known as "Joker" complies with the pleas of a wounded female Vietcong sniper, who is writhing on the floor in pain, and kills her.

The fact that soldiers commanded by Capt. Miller (Tom Hanks) in *Saving Private Ryan* repeatedly shoot surrendering German soldiers marks the film as a post-Vietnam, revisionist account of Allied behavior in the Second World War. Much as the film acknowledges in grisly detail the incredible violence of combat, it also depicts the immediate aftermath of combat as a moral lacuna in which the laws of war are put on hiatus, and men traumatized by the experience of combat seek catharsis in brutal acts of retribution against the enemy.

Deviant Narratives: From Individual to Group Goals

As an ultimate form of the cinema, the war film is empowered to suspend even the laws of classical narrative construction. Traditional Hollywood films center on the individual, whose goals and desires drive the story line and whose psychological complexity becomes the focus of narrative exposition. In war films, the needs of the individual frequently give way to those of the group. The exceptional circumstances of the battlefield force individuals to place their own needs beneath those of the platoon, squadron, division, battalion, fleet, army, and nation.

Air Force (1943) details the transformation of assorted individual characters into a cohesive fighting unit whose own identities are subsumed in the larger identity of "Mary Ann," the B-17 bomber on which they serve during the first few days of World War II. *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949) tells a similar story of a flight commander who transforms a ragged collection of bomber pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and gunners into a precision fighting unit of 21 B-17s, which are drilled to fly together in tight formation, drop bombs in unison on their target,



Courtesy of Warner Bros.

The crew in *Air Force* (1943) functions as a multicultural group: the Polish Winocki (John Garfield, *left*), the WASP crew chief (Harry Carey), the Jewish Weinstein (George Tobias), and the Swedish Peterson (Ward Wood).

and protect one another from attacking enemy fighters. In *Saving Private Ryan*, the chaotic slaughter of American troops on Omaha Beach is presented in terms of a series of vignettes in which individual soldiers are randomly maimed or killed. It is only when Capt. Miller gathers the survivors together and forms a combat *team* that the men fight as a unit, destroy an enemy pillbox, make a hole in the Germans' defenses, and win the day. From a somewhat different perspective, the theme of *Black Hawk Down* (2002), a film about the American humanitarian mission in Somalia in 1993, is "leave no man behind." The mission on which the men are sent may not exactly make sense, but the Army Rangers and Delta Force specialists know what they're fighting for: "It's about the men next to you. That's all it is." The group becomes all-important.

Indeed, individual heroism is often represented in the war film as a form of self-indulgence, and thus as counterproductive to the accomplishment of the collective goals of the group. Tension between the desires of the individual and the needs of the group is regularly worked out through an educational process during which the individual (such as John Garfield's Winocki in *Air Force*) learns how crucial his cooperation is to the survival of the team. Or it is resolved through the individualistic outsider's ritualistic, sacrificial death.

In both *The War Lover* and *Hell Is for Heroes* (1962), Steve McQueen played alienated loners whose heroic actions come in direct violation of orders.

Unwilling or unable to function as a member of a combat team, the loner's recklessness endangers his comrades. He ultimately harnesses his heroism in the form of a self-destructive energy. He then uses this energy to save his crew or to transform himself into a suicidal weapon, which he then directs against the enemy. Thus, in the former film, the loner holds his damaged plane on course, sacrificing himself so that his crew can have time to bail out. In the latter film, he straps himself with explosives, charges an enemy pillbox, and blows himself up in an attempt to destroy it. He does all of this in order to put an end to the battle that continues, however, to be waged after his death.

Even in a film such as *Sergeant York* (1941), which celebrates the individual real-life exploits of one of World War I's most famous combat heroes, Alvin York (Gary Cooper) attributes his killing of 25 German soldiers and his singlehanded capture of 132 others to a desire to protect his buddies, who are pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire. The only place for individual heroism in war films is in service to the larger needs of the group.

SEXUAL COMBAT: MASCULINITY IN THE WAR FILM

Oedipal Battles

Typical Hollywood plots hinge on love triangles, trace the vicissitudes of starcrossed lovers, and conclude with the last-minute embrace of the hero and heroine. In war films, the absence of women—and even their marginal presence—results in an entirely different set of sexual dynamics. Headstrong recruits engage in oedipal romance or warfare (or in both, as in *Platoon*, 1986) with their top sergeants. Oedipal rivalry becomes a means of proving their courage and manhood to these older, more experienced, father figures.

In *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), a sensitive young Marine comes to terms with his dead father through an oedipal conflict with a tough, no-nonsense sergeant (John Wayne), who served with and idolized the boy's father. In *Apocalypse Now*, Willard's similarly oedipal relationship with Col. Kurtz (Marlon Brando) is crystallized for us on a figurative level when he finds the letter Kurtz wrote to his son in Kurtz's dossier and reads it, implicitly identifying, as its reader, with the person to whom it is addressed. It is finalized for us literally when, at the end, the would-be son kills Kurtz and takes his place. Willard becomes Kurtz's emissary to the world, bringing the latter's knowledge of the horror of war back with him to explain to Kurtz's son and to all others who need to understand the essential nature of war in general and that of the Vietnam War in particular.

Conventional Homoeroticism

When women enter this predominantly male world, they are often the shared objects of desire of two or more soldiers, who compete with one another for

their affection. This romantic rivalry provides the chief dramatic structure for

both versions of *What Price Glory?* (1926, remade in 1952), the World War I comedy in which Capt. Flagg battles Sgt. Quirt over the affections of a French innkeeper's daughter, Charmaine. The reappearance of this motif in *Hot Shots!* (1991), in which the hero (Charlie Sheen) and his nemesis both court the same girl, testifies to its status as a timeworn genre convention.

In enjoying sexual relations with the same women, the men enjoy what psychoanalysts describe as a displaced homoerotic or homosocial relationship with one another in which their rivalry becomes a form not of sexual competition but of exchange. The abduction and gang rape of a Vietnamese girl by several members of an American army patrol in *Casualties of War* (1989) provides a more brutal example of the rather complex way in which the male relationships in war films are bound up with notions of homosexual desire. Here, as in so many other instances of gang rape, the rape victim serves as a means of sexual exchange among men—as a bond that they all share and that solidifies their ties to one another.

Masculine/Feminine

Women pose a variety of threats to men in war films. The mere appearance of a wife onscreen introduces an emotional element that is often realized in terms of the man's essential vulnerability. Thus, in *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944), the syrupy scenes between Capt. Ted Lawson (Van Johnson) and his wife (Phyllis Thaxter) presage his injury and the subsequent amputation of his leg. At the beginning of *Air Force*, the farewell scene between Capt. Quincannon (John Ridgely) and his wife makes him one of the most likely candidates among the crew to die before the film reaches its conclusion. The pervasive familiarity of the convention is brought home in *Hot Shots!* when one of its scenes parodies an airman's farewell to his wife just before his comic crash. The implicit message of this motif is that relations with a woman suggest a vulnerability in the hero to that which lies outside the masculine world of war—to the feminine—and this vulnerability will eventually destroy him.

If every human psyche consists of masculine and feminine elements, the psyche of the male soldier must be reshaped to repress the feminine—to transform him into a ruthless, unemotional, fighting machine. In every war film, masculinity is put in crisis; the toughness of the hero becomes an issue crucial to both his survival and that of his fellow soldiers. Drill sergeants in Marine boot camps repeatedly refer to young recruits as "ladies" (*Boys in Company C*, 1978; *Full Metal Jacket*, 1987; *Heartbreak Ridge*, 1986). Sgt. Zack in *Steel Helmet* draws on a similar tactic, referring to his untested troops as "ballerinas." This explicit challenge to the manhood of the recruits is designed to force them to overcome that which is considered weak or feminine in their nature and become hardened Marines—that is, to become men.

In *Full Metal Jacket*, boot camp becomes a course of instruction in masculinity, including a series of exercises in which the men are forced to

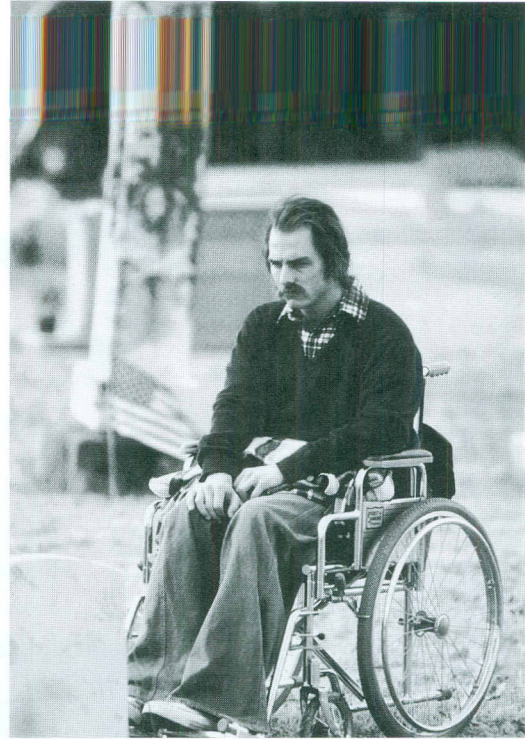


Courtesy of Warner Bros.

The drill instructor (Lee Ermye) turns basic training into a course in masculinity in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

train while holding onto their own genitals, as if monitoring the development of their own manhood. Director Stanley Kubrick's broadly satirical gesture in *Jacket* emerges as a purely physical rendering of a process of masculinization that takes place on a more emotional level in other war films. In *Twelve O'Clock High*, Gen. Savage (Gregory Peck) represses all emotion in his handling of his airmen, arguing that his predecessor has made them emotionally dependent on him by treating them as children rather than as men. When he collapses before a mission and the entire squadron successfully carries it off without him, the fliers finally prove to him that they have grown from children into men.

The archetypal Hollywood combat soldier is a caricature of masculinity; his cartoonlike toughness is epitomized in Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo*. This character is itself a compilation of action heroes found in comic books such as *Terry and the Pirates*, *G.I. Joe*, *G.I. Combat*, *Sgt. Rock*, *Steve Canyon*, and *The 'Nam*, as well as *Captain America*, *Wonder Woman*, and other comic book series that feature quasi-militaristic action figures who began their careers fighting Nazis in World War II but have rarely, if ever, worn a uniform. Though this notion of machismo is presented as essential to the success of a soldier on the battlefield, it is often revealed as out of place in the more domestic sphere of traditional sexual relationships. In *Heartbreak Ridge*, as Tania Modleski points out, Clint Eastwood's Sgt. Tom Highway, whose wife divorced him because "marriage and the Marine Corps weren't too compatible," reads women's magazines in an attempt to regain a



Courtesy of Universal

Crippled by war, returning Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) visits the grave of the victim of his friendly fire in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989).

sensitivity that his Marine training has deliberately repressed. He also seems to realize that if he is to have any kind of normal relationship with women, he needs to learn to speak their language instead of his own.

Back from the Front

In the war film, the normal world—the world of family, wives, and children—remains an alien world that both the soldier and the returning war veteran have difficulty reentering. Willard tells us that when he went home, he wanted to be back in Vietnam and that he hardly said a word to his wife until he said yes to a divorce. The difficulty of the adjustment of veterans to the peacetime world of wives and children has become a familiar motif in films that deal with returning veterans. For veterans of World War II, like those in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), reintegration, though difficult, is at least possible. But for those vets returning from Vietnam, as seen in *Rolling Thunder* (1977), *Coming Home* (1978), *First Blood* (1982), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), homecoming is decidedly more traumatic and assimilation less successful. War's overmasculinization of the men (in this latter group of films, at least) has made them unfit for the traditional social order; that is, they have become masculine in excess, uncontrollable in their potential for rage or violence.

Successful reentry into society demands that they undergo a process of demasculinization. In certain instances (*Coming Home*, *Fourth of July*), the returning soldier is presented as a cripple, who has been feminized or made passive in combat and who must come to terms with his paralysis through a

psychic healing process in which his initial rage at his misfortune is channeled into socially acceptable behavior. He evolves from embittered warrior into participant in the peace movement. In other instances (*Thunder, First Blood*), returning veterans refuse to accept the passive status imposed on them and direct their bottled-up violence toward domestic enemies, re-creating battle situations at home. If the veterans resist feminization, their excessive masculinity either destroys them or forces them to become outlaws or social outcasts, as in the case of Rambo in *First Blood*.

CROSSOVERS: WAR AND GENRE

The bizarre sexual dynamics found in the war film reflect its status as a genre that occupies the extreme edges of the familiar terrain of classical Hollywood cinema. In other words, the excesses of the war film function to define, through a process of transgression, the norms of conventional cinema. The war film, however, is not entirely the loose cannon of all Hollywood genres that the above description of the combat film might lead us to suspect. The all-male world of the combat film with its wall-to-wall battle and action sequences is not the sum total of the war film. It merely stands at one end of a spectrum that includes a broad variety of perspectives on war. Much as war permeates every aspect of a society engaged in it, so the war film crosses over other genres. There are war comedies such as Charlie Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* (1918), in which Charlie mocks the authoritarian discipline of boot camp and the conditions of trench warfare at the front before capturing the Kaiser. Or *M*A*S*H* (1970), in which wisecracking battlefield surgeons engage in comic repartee in an attempt to cope with the bleak futility of war and the tragic waste of human life that accompanies it.

There are even war musicals (of a sort), ranging from narratives dealing with the entertainment of the troops, such as *Stage Door Canteen* (1943) and *For the Boys* (1991), to love stories with wartime settings, such as *South Pacific* (1958) and *The Sound of Music* (1965).

The existence of war comedies and war musicals has forced critics to reconsider any narrow definition of the war film. The genre has tended to be identified as a whole with one of its subgenres (the combat film), with a single historical period (the twentieth century), and with a handful of global conflicts—World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the 1991 Gulf War. But the war film extends beyond the precise borders of the combat film, and it looks both backward and forward in time to eras other than our own. To a certain extent, every film that depicts or refers to war, as well as every film made during a war, functions as a war film.

From this perspective, the musical melodrama *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), set in turn-of-the-twentieth-century America, can even be seen as a war film, celebrating home and family—traditional values for which World War II was



Courtesy of Warner Bros.

At the end of *Casablanca*, Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart, *right*) and Capt. Louis Renault (Claude Rains) walk off together to join the Free French forces at Brazzaville.

then being fought. *Casablanca* (1942), based on an unproduced play set in North Africa prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and American involvement in the Second World War, functions as a metaphor for American isolationism and the need to take sides in this new global conflict. Filmed in the spring of 1942, the story focuses on Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), an expatriate American who is described by Capt. Renault (Claude Rains) as “completely neutral about everything . . . including women.” When an acquaintance of his, Ugate (Peter Lorre), is fleeing from the Vichy police and appeals to him for help, Rick does nothing, explaining, “I stick my neck out for nobody.” But by the end of the film, Rick does take sides, joining the Free French to continue the fight against the German Third Reich.

More explicitly, Westerns made during the Vietnam War, such as *Ulzana’s Raid* (1972), are war films, refiguring the Vietcong as Indians. However, the war film could be more usefully defined as a representation of war from the points of view of those whose lives it touches. At the heart of this definition lies the combat film, which focuses primarily on men in war, and in which combat sequences occupy a large percentage of the overall running time of the film itself, as is the case with films such as *Bataan* (1943) and *Battleground* (1949). The war film genre, however, also includes films about the military in which combat occupies only a small fraction of the story line, as in *From Here to Eternity* (1953), *The Wings of Eagles* (1957), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *Dances With Wolves* (1990), as well as films set outside the narrow world of the military in

which there is no combat at all and war provides a background against which certain war-related dramatic conflicts are set.

Films in which involvement in a war is debated, such as *Casablanca* (1942), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *Alice's Restaurant* (1969), and *Hair* (1979), serve as one parameter of the genre, whereas films that celebrate the efforts of those left behind to maintain the home front, such as *Since You Went Away* (1944), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), and *Swing Shift* (1984), serve as another.

War can be seen not only from the perspective of civilians and the American or Allied fighting forces, but also from that of the enemy, as in *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) or *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1958). On occasion, it can even be seen from both sides of a conflict, as in the case of *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), a Japanese and American coproduction that tells the story of the attack on Pearl Harbor from both points of view.

THE BATTLE FOR PUBLIC OPINION: PROPAGANDA AND THE COMBAT FILM

Preaching War and Peace

The nature of its subject matter has made the war film a crucial weapon in the shaping of public opinion about individual wars and war in general. The genre has become a battleground on which different political factions have fought with one another over the hearts and minds of American moviegoers. One of the first war films, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* (1897), which consisted of a single shot of a hand ("the hand of righteous destiny") tearing down a Spanish flag, mobilized audiences in support of the recently declared war on Spain.

Antiwar films manipulated isolationist sentiment to keep America out of World War I. Thomas Ince's *Civilization* (1914), for example, argued for the inhumanity of war through an allegorical story in which the hero, a submarine commander, refuses to fire on an ocean liner, sinks his own ship, dies, and is resurrected by Christ, who sends him forth to preach for peace on earth.

Shortly after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, J. Stuart Blackton led the prowar, anti-German cause with *Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), in which American advocates of national disarmament and peace are revealed to be dupes of foreign spies who mastermind an invasion of New York City that leaves it in ruins. Finally, in April 1917, after the sinking of four American merchant ships by German submarines, Woodrow Wilson, recently reelected on the basis of the slogan, "He Kept Us Out of War," asked Congress to declare war on Germany, prompting a stream of prowar films and terminating isolationist filmmaking activities.

Prowar feeling was so predominant that one pacifist film producer, Robert Goldstein, was sentenced to ten years in jail for making an anti-British film, *The Spirit of '76* (1917), which was released just prior to America's entry into the

war on the British side. Anti-German sentiment dominated *The Kaiser, Beast of*

Berlin and *To Hell with the Kaiser* (both 1917); in the latter, the Kaiser is presented as a tool of Satan, who encourages the German emperor to sink unarmed passenger ships, engage in chemical warfare, and blow up Red Cross hospitals. Even D. W. Griffith, whose *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916) depict the horrors of war and end with heavenly images of world peace, joined the prowar bandwagon (at the request of the British government), directing *Hearts of the World* (1918), a war melodrama in which the Huns play the villains.

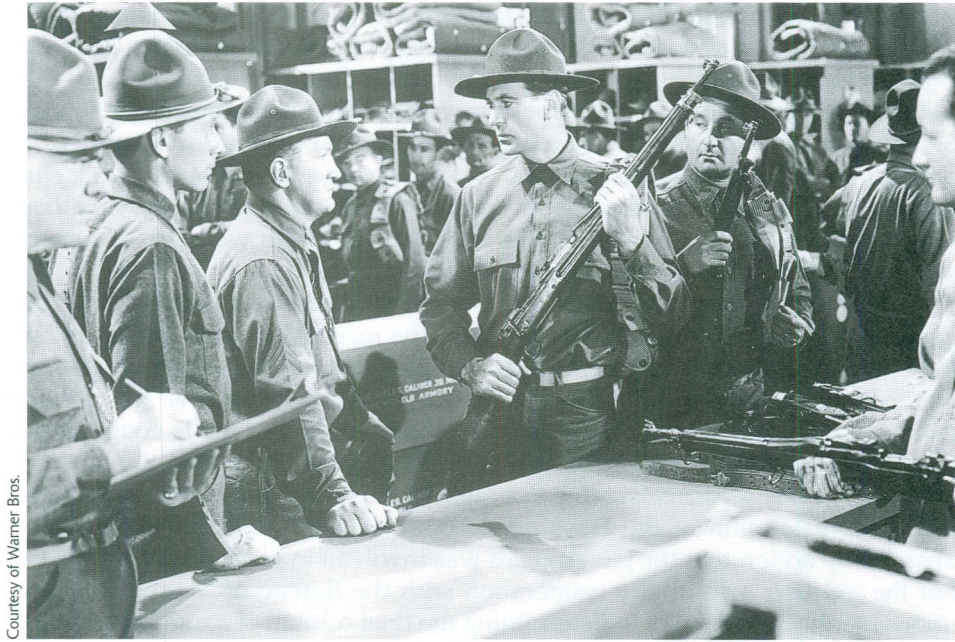
After the war, Hollywood reverted to the pacifist neutrality to which it subscribed during peacetime. *The Big Parade* (1925), *What Price Glory?* (1926), and other films dramatize the costs of war in human life and in the spirit of those who survived.

Mass Conversion: The Politics of *Sergeant York*

American sentiment regarding the war in Europe remained more or less isolationist until the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Prior to that date, members of Congress carefully scrutinized Hollywood productions, suspecting certain films such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *The Great Dictator* (1941), and *The Mortal Storm* (1940) to be prowar propaganda (while apparently missing the antifascist metaphorical implications of *The Sea Hawk* (1940), in which the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 is geared to arouse sympathy for a beleaguered England). The aviator Charles Lindbergh and other members of the America First organization campaigned to maintain American neutrality.

But as world events slowly converted America to a wartime mentality, Hollywood served as a tool of antifascist filmmakers and the Roosevelt administration for the reeducation of an isolationist and pacifist populace into reluctant warriors. The conversion that takes place in *Sergeant York* (1941)—of the born-again Christian Alvin York from a conscientious objector into a patriotic soldier—serves as apt metaphor for the film industry's project during the months immediately preceding American entry into the war; Americans were, like York, uncertain about war. After World War I, Americans resumed their predominantly isolationist stance. Though events in Europe in the 1930s prompted certain segments of society (including the president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt) to call for American intervention, many others, like York, needed to be shown their larger responsibility to the world community.

York's education takes place in two interrelated stages. Struck by lightning while raising hell outside the local church in the backwoods of Tennessee, he undergoes a miraculous religious conversion and discovers the truth of what his pastor told him earlier—that an individual, like a tree, cannot stand alone, that “a fellow's got to have his roots in something outside his own self.” Torn between his newfound religious faith, which teaches him “Thou shalt not kill,” and his duty as a soldier, York reconciles his obligations to both of these demands on his loyalty through a rationalization inspired by a passage in the Bible: he will



Courtesy of Warner Bros.

Pacifist Alvin York (Gary Cooper) is issued a gun by the Army in *Sergeant York* (1941).

render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's. He will obey his duty to the state and observe, as far as possible, his religious faith.

In this way, York (and Americans) could uphold, without rupturing them, the basic isolationist principles that underpinned his (their) identity while realizing his (their) obligations to things outside himself (themselves). Retaining its inherent distaste for European entanglements and war, America could, at the same time, give itself over to the larger historical (and moral) necessity of fighting fascism.

The logic that underscores the World War II war film is that of the reluctant warrior who hates war but fights nonetheless; in this way, the American war film (unlike those produced by the British, for example) was undermined with an antiwar sentiment that justified America's apparent about-face from isolationism to interventionism. British war films, such as *In Which We Serve* (1942), took popular support of the war for granted. *Of course* the Nazis, who had declared their intention of ultimately invading England, needed to be both fought and destroyed.

Why We Fight: Education and the War Film

The conversion process that lies at the center of *Sergeant York* reappears in dozens of combat films in the form of an educational process. This instructive aspect of the war film aligns it with the agitational and propagandistic cinema of certain

state-produced foreign films such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) or *Triumph of the*

Will (1935), as well as with America's own series of propaganda films, *Why We Fight* (1942–1945), which were produced by Frank Capra for the Army. But the propagandistic function of the American combat film is mediated somewhat by its overt *narrativization* of the educational process. Unlike Soviet and Nazi propaganda, the Hollywood war film acknowledged its status as a didactic tool, filtering its polemical arguments through characters in the narrative rather than presenting them directly. In this way, the American war film disarmed potential objections to it as blatant propaganda.

However, shortly after Pearl Harbor, Hollywood was enlisted by the government to contribute to the war effort. The recently created Office of War Information (OWI) set up shop in Los Angeles, where its Bureau of Motion Pictures served as a watchful eye over war-related productions. Its civilian members reviewed scripts, sat in on script conferences, and made suggestions about the content of finished films. The OWI's relationship with the studios remained purely advisory, serving in a capacity similar to that of the Production Code administration of the Hays office. Both the OWI and the studios dismissed any notion that the government was involved in censoring the movies, but the industry's voluntary cooperation with the Bureau of Motion Pictures undoubtedly played a role in determining the final content of a number of films made during the war.

The war film was a school for soldiers. The common soldier, whose inherent resistance to killing and to war (as well as to military discipline) was broken down in boot camp, was trained to fight and to obey (*Sands of Iwo Jima*, 1949; *Battle Cry*, 1955; *The Boys in Company C*, 1978). Having graduated from boot camp, he continued to learn—through combat—not only how to fight but why he was fighting; contact with the enemy revealed the latter's essential villainy and taught him just how necessary the war was (*Guadalcanal Diary*, 1943; *Gung Ho!* 1944; *The Green Berets*, 1968).

Combat convinces Ens. Torre (Brandon de Wilde) in *In Harm's Way* (1965) that what he initially refers to as "Mr. Roosevelt's war" is not merely a politically expedient plan to advance the personal interests of the president (and the Democratic Party) but a just war to which he finds himself committed as well. The conscientious objector in *Steel Helmet* discovers that philosophical objections to war in general have no place on the battlefield; he picks up a gun and begins to shoot at North Korean soldiers.

A similar educational process took place for civilians and other neutral observers. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* (1944), the survivors of a torpedoed ocean liner rescue the captain of the German U-boat that attacked them. The Nazi then betrays their trust, stealing more than his fair share of food and water and piloting them into enemy waters. When the others learn of what he has done, they denounce the fascist philosophy that inspires his actions and kill him.

Naive war correspondents, such as Huntley Haverstock (Joel McCrea) in *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), discover the treacherous nature of the enemy through their aggressive investigative reporting. Cynical newspaper correspondents,

such as Williams (Henry Hull) in *Objective Burma* (1945), accompany soldiers in the field and, through their participation in combat, come to understand the true nature of the enemy. On seeing the mutilated bodies of the men in his patrol, Williams loses his objectivity and bursts into a racist diatribe against the Japanese: "I thought I'd seen or read about everything one man can do to another, from the torture chambers of the Middle Ages to the gang wars and lynchings of today. But this—this is different. This was done in cold blood by people who claim to be civilized. Civilized! They're degenerate, immoral idiots. Stinking little savages. Wipe them out, I say. Wipe them off the face of the earth."

Perhaps the most famous conversion takes place in *The Green Berets* (1968), in which a liberal antiwar reporter (David Janssen) joins John Wayne's Green Beret unit in Vietnam to see for himself what the war is like. The war correspondent's skepticism colors his coverage of the war until he witnesses Vietcong atrocities. "This is what the war is all about," a soldier tells him. "Are you gonna stand there and referee or are you gonna help us?" In an abrupt aboutface, the journalist picks up a gun and helps the American forces defend themselves against an enemy attack.

The Vietnam Reversal

The educational process that took place in the classic war film illustrated "why we fight" and rationalized the necessity of war. In terms of this and other issues, *The Green Berets* emerged as one of the most representative of war films. Yet it was also unique in that practically every other film about the Vietnam War reversed this traditional educational process. In Vietnam, the soldier learned to question the simplistic, Cold War rhetoric about the nature of the enemy and the justness of the American cause that had been the cornerstones of the lessons taught in high school history classes and in basic training.

The experience of Vietnam taught that American involvement in the war made little or no sense. U.S. fighting forces not only learned from past example that war in general is hell but some also discovered for themselves that this particular war was wrong; some soldiers became pacifists or antiwar activists, as in *Getting Straight* (1970) and *Coming Home*. In *Born on the Fourth of July*, paraplegic Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) reviews his participation in the war from the perspective of a rat-infested VA hospital in the Bronx and is radicalized, becoming a leader of the antiwar movement.

The *Boys in Company C* discover that all that matters in Vietnam is the delivery of luxury items to the general for his personal amusement and the securing of good body counts for the reports sent back to headquarters. War becomes a game, like the soccer match they play against the South Vietnamese at the end of the film, a game they realize they are expected to lose. Finally, Army Pvt. Eriksson (Michael J. Fox) in *Casualties of War* (1989) learns about the nature of the American presence in Vietnam when he is confronted with the moral corruption of other members of his squad who have abducted, raped, and killed a Vietnamese girl; he first tries to prevent them from harming her and,

having failed eventually blows the whistle on them, a gesture that figuratively represents his rejection of American behavior in the war itself.

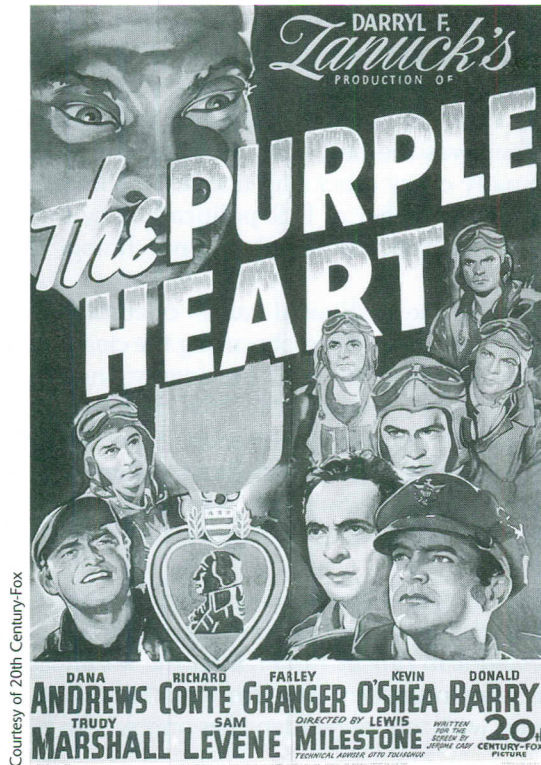
RACE, ETHNICITY, AND THE WAR FILM

Earlier war films celebrated American intervention overseas, using the occasion to present an idealized portrait of American democracy. American identity was at risk in World War II, and it was the particular virtues of that identity—democratic equality—that would win it. Thus, the combat films celebrated group teamwork, as we have seen earlier in our examination of *Air Force* and other films. The group was shown as consisting of various ethnic and social types, imitating the melting-pot ideal of American culture. As Jeanine Basinger points out, in war films the tough career sergeant regularly has under his command a rich kid from the suburbs, a poor kid from the inner-city ghetto, a lower-middle-class cab driver from Brooklyn, a Jew, a Hispanic, an Italian American, a Polish American, and an African American.

By cooperating with one another, they win the war and also demonstrate that the idea of America really works. Unfortunately, history tells us something different. For example, though blacks are occasionally depicted as serving together with whites, as in *Crash Dive*, *Sahara* (1943) and *Bataan* (1943), the armed forces were not integrated until 1948, when President Truman officially ended segregation in the military. Though blacks served valiantly in World War II, they did so, much as they had in World War I and in the Civil War (see *Glory*, 1989), in segregated units commanded by white officers.

The reality of domestic racial tension was exemplified by race riots in Detroit and other cities in 1943; by the call, within the black community, for a “Double V”—a victory over the Axis in Europe and Jim Crow at home; and by a 1942 survey reporting that 49 percent of Harlem blacks believed they would be no worse off if Japan were to win the war. Domestic racism remained in place. For example, public fear of a Mexican American crime wave led to the racially motivated police harassment of Mexican American teenagers (“zoot suiters” who wore oversize sport coats and peg-top pants) in Los Angeles in 1942–1943. Wartime racism surfaced in continuing discrimination against blacks, Mexican Americans, and other minorities such as Native Americans.

Perhaps the most scandalous act of racism was the internment of thousands of Japanese Americans in detention camps during the war and the confiscation of their property—a policy the Office of War Information attempted to justify in a documentary newsreel, *Japanese Relocation*, which was released at the end of 1942. It was not until after the war, however, that Hollywood took a more critical stance toward relocation, treating it as an embarrassing moment in American history, in films such as *Go for Broke!* (1951), *Hell to Eternity* (1960), *Come See the Paradise* (1990), and *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1999).



Courtesy of 20th Century-Fox

The demonization of the enemy: a Japanese officer (Richard Loo) looms over his American prisoners of war in this poster for *The Purple Heart* (1944).

But all of this wartime racial tension was rewritten into onscreen racial harmony, which is a more expedient reality. Any notion of segregation or racism in the armed forces would clearly undermine the ideal of equality for which America was supposedly fighting. Racism at home was, therefore, suppressed, or rather, displaced onto a race that it was permissible to hate: the U.S. enemy, the Japanese—who, once the Japanese Americans had been eliminated from view, could become visible signs of difference, of racial otherness against which animosity could be directed. Hollywood demonized the Japanese in *Across the Pacific* (1942), *Air Force* (1943), *Objective Burma* (1945), *The Purple Heart* (1944), and dozens of other films.

CONFLICTED: THE PSYCHIC VIOLENCE OF WAR

The Enemy Is Us

During peacetime, Hollywood was free to produce war films to express antiwar sentiment exposing the hypocrisy, incompetence, and insanity of the military

establishment, as in *Paths of Glory* (1957), *Anzio* (1968), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964),

and *M*A*S*H* (1970); the corruption and cowardice of officers (*Attack!* 1956; *Bitter Victory*, 1957); and the futility and senselessness of war (*Hell Is for Heroes*, 1962; *The Victors*, 1963; *Johnny Got His Gun*, 1971; *A Bridge Too Far*, 1977). With the exception of *The Green Berets*, which was the only film about the Vietnam War made during the war itself, virtually every other film about the Vietnam War took an antiwar stance that was critical either of U.S. political policy that led to involvement in the war or of the physical, emotional, and psychological damage incurred by servicemen in Vietnam.

Vietnam War films tend to undermine the traditional values celebrated in films about World War II and other wars by reversing or obscuring the clear-cut distinctions drawn in earlier war films between “us” and the enemy. Indeed, in many of the major films that deal with the Vietnam War, “we” become the enemy. In *Company C*, the black sergeant Tyrone Washington (Stan Shaw) attempts to shoot his own commanding officer, whose ineptness has resulted in the deaths of several comrades. *Deer Hunter* reduces the war to a game of Russian roulette in which Americans are driven first by torture and then by psychic trauma to shoot themselves.

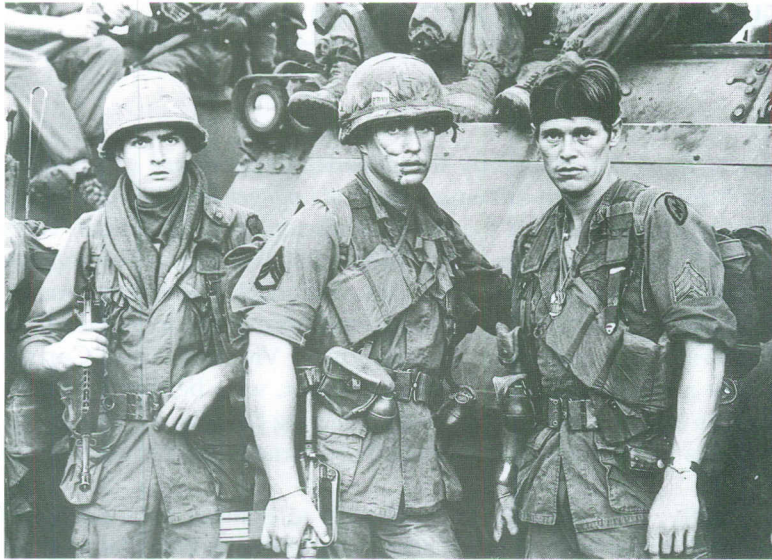
In the opening sequence of *Apocalypse Now*, Willard smashes his own image in the mirror; the central action of the film involves his mission, which has as its objective the termination of an American officer rather than the killing of the enemy, who, for the most part, remain unseen. The film concludes with Willard’s ritualistic slaughter of Kurtz, with whom he identifies and whom he resembles in several ways.

Platoon dramatizes the internal division of America over the war through the ideological conflict between two platoon sergeants (Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe). One American (Berenger) kills another (Dafoe) only to be slain, in turn, by a third (Charlie Sheen). *Fourth of July* depicts the war as a struggle in which Americans kill one another by accident, through friendly fire, a tragic phenomenon that resurfaces in Gulf War films such as *Courage Under Fire* (1996).

The Aftermath

The metaphorical representation of Vietnam as a self-destructive conflict extends into postwar representations of the aftermath of the war, seen in the betrayal narratives of a series of films involving war veterans. Thus, in *Good Guys Wear Black* (1977), an American politician who has originally conspired with the enemy to betray a crack American special forces unit proves to be responsible for their methodical assassination after the war.

The enemy in the POW/MIA rescue mission drama *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) is as much the CIA, which tries to ensure that Rambo’s mission fails, as the North Vietnamese, who continue to hold American prisoners of war. The difficult adjustment of Vietnam veterans to postwar America is frequently cast in terms of conflict between them and those who stayed behind. In *Rolling*



Courtesy of Orion

Vietnam is seen as America at war with itself in *Platoon* (1986): Chris (Charlie Sheen, *left*) poses with the ruthless Sgt. Barnes (Tom Berenger, *center*) and the more moderate Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe).

Thunder (1977), a veteran looks on helplessly as his wife and child are slain by a gang of thieves, intent on finding the silver dollars given to him by local residents on his return home. He subsequently tracks down the robbers and, with the help of another veteran, kills them in a military-style assault. Other veterans become vigilantes (*Slaughter*, 1972; *Gordon's War*, 1973; *Magnum Force*, 1973; *Taxi Driver*, 1976) or are portrayed as criminals capable of insane acts that threaten domestic stability (*Black Sunday* and *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, 1977; *Betrayed* and *Distant Thunder*, 1988).

Though the veterans of other wars are occasionally depicted as having difficulty in adjusting to civilian life, as seen in *Pride of the Marines* (1945), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), and *Till the End of Time* (1946), their problems remain contained within the family or the workplace; they rarely result in acts of civil disorder or criminal violence.

The scars of the Vietnam War, however, extended much deeper into the American psyche, producing veterans whose violence reaches from the confines of the family into the public sphere. The clear sense of victory (and of closure or completion) that characterized World War II produced a cinema that was itself untroubled in its representation of war. The sense of defeat (and lack of closure) that characterized the Vietnam War led to a cinema that continually sought explanations for the war's outcome and attempted to rewrite our defeat in Vietnam as a postwar victory. Thus, Vietnam veterans return to Southeast Asia to rescue prisoners of war (*Uncommon Valor*, 1983; *Missing in Action*, 1984; *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, 1985). Or the larger loss of the war is restaged as a smaller domestic battle that could be won (*Gordon's War*, 1973; *Slaughter*, 1976; *Rolling Thunder*, 1977; *Good Guys Wear Black* and *A Force of One*, 1979; *Forced Vengeance*, 1982; and *Eye of the Tiger*, 1986).

THE 1991 GULF WAR AND WORLD WAR II REDUX

The Gulf War

Contemporary war films are shaped by the American experience in Vietnam. One film about a fictional incident in Yemen, *Rules of Engagement* (1999), actually begins in Vietnam where the film's central character, Marine officer Terry Childers (Samuel L. Jackson) rescues fellow officer Hays Hodges (Tommy Lee Jones) during an attack. *Courage Under Fire* focuses on another Vietnam veteran, Lt. Col. Nathaniel Serling (Denzel Washington), and his experiences in the Gulf War. It also features a former Ranger who fought in Vietnam, Tony Gartner (Scott Glenn), now a reporter for the *Washington Post*, who befriends Serling while conducting an investigation of his conduct during the war. However, it is not these literal links to Vietnam that connect these films to earlier films about Vietnam.

More importantly, it is these films' approach to combat as a source of personal trauma that links them to films about the Vietnam War. As Michael Hammond points out, both films take the form of investigations into traumatic combat experiences in an attempt to find out what actually happened. Both films sift through the testimony of trustworthy and untrustworthy eyewitnesses in a cathartic process that enables the central characters ultimately to come to terms with the trauma of combat. In *Rules of Engagement*, Childers orders his men to fire on an angry mob of anti-American demonstrators outside the American embassy in Yemen, killing sixty-three supposedly unarmed civilians, in order to rescue the ambassador and his family. In *Courage Under Fire*, Serling fires on his own troops in the heat and confusion of a tank battle, killing his best friend. He is subsequently assigned to investigate a military action to ascertain whether the officer who led it, Capt. Karen Walden (Meg Ryan) should be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Both films treat instances of combat as initially unknowable, opaque events that overwhelm consciousness. Through a process of methodical investigation, their truth can be ascertained, providing some small measure of uneasy closure on the event for those involved.

World War II

Saving Private Ryan

Courage Under Fire deals with memory and trauma as contemporary facts of war. The opening and closing of Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, like those of *Schindler's List* (1993), occur at public memorials for the dead, where their memory is not only kept alive but ritualistically passed on to successive generations who owe their own lives to the sacrifices made by these who went before them. An 80-year-old man visits a military graveyard on the cliffs above



© Dream Works/Photofest

Capt. Miller (Tom Hanks, *right*) lands at Omaha Beach in Normandy with his platoon in *Saving Private Ryan*.

Omaha Beach in Normandy, stands at the foot of a grave, and remembers D-Day, the Allied landing on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. It is not until the end of the film that the audience realizes that the flashback is not that of the 80-year-old man standing at the foot of the grave but that of the soldier, Capt. John Miller, buried in that grave. Just before he dies, Miller (Tom Hanks) tells the object of his costly rescue mission, Pvt. Ryan (Matt Damon), to “earn it.” He means that Ryan should try to become worthy of the many lives that saving him cost. Spielberg’s framing sequences give no indication of Ryan’s worthiness, aside from the evidence of the supportive family (loving wife, son, and daughters) accompanying him. The assumption is that Ryan’s worthiness consists in his dutiful role as the bearer of Miller’s traumatic memories of combat, as the vehicle through whom those memories will be passed to future generations (as suggested by the *mise-en-scène* of Ryan’s family members). An 80-year-old Ryan has come to Normandy for closure prior to his own death. In reliving Miller’s story (in taking on Miller’s memory), Ryan assumes the pain and suffering of his rescuers while remaining unabsolved of his own feelings of guilt for having survived. It is precisely this relationship to memory that Spielberg wishes to convey to audiences watching the film. He wants the audience to experience it as trauma and thus to burn it into their own memories.

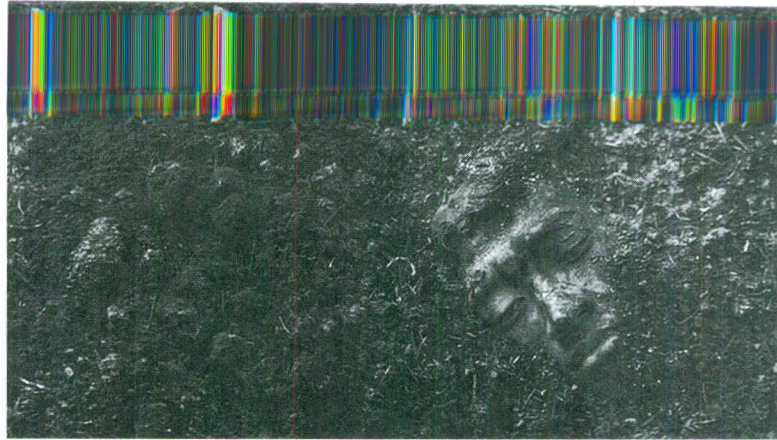
The Thin Red Line

“There’s only a thin red line between the sane and the mad.”

James Jones

The flashback that structures *Saving Private Ryan* proves to be not just the memory of Miller but the collective memory of the entire platoon. The only flashbacks in *The Thin Red Line* are those of Pvt. Witt (Jim Caviezel) and Pvt.

Disembodied voiceover narration in *The Thin Red Line*: a dead enemy soldier wonders of his killer, “Are you righteous?”



Courtesy of Fox 2000

Bell (Ben Chaplin), and they are memories of idyllic moments away from the theater of war—Witt’s fond recollections of the natural paradise he discovered when he went AWOL among the Melanesian Islanders and Bell’s of intimate moments with his wife back home. *Red Line* refuses the narrative strategies that give unity and coherence to *Ryan*. War in *Red Line* is incoherent. The film’s characters search for some kind of coherence or meaning in it. Thus, Bell reverts to memories (which seem mixed with fantasies) about his wife; Pvt. Witt meditates on Nature, War, Evil, and the possibility that humanity has one big soul; Sgt. Welsh (Sean Penn), thinking perhaps of Witt, imagines “find[ing] something that’s his” and “mak[ing] an island for himself”; and Lt. Col. Tall (Nick Nolte) focuses his thoughts on career advancement. If Spielberg’s narration is unified and collective, Malick’s is fragmentary and subjective. *Red Line* is narrated by as many as eight different voices, ranging from the central characters mentioned above to quite minor characters such as the dead (or dying) Japanese soldier, his face half-buried in the dirt, who asks his slayer, “Are you righteous? Kind? Does your confidence lie in this?”

Not only does each voice reflect a different perspective on the events depicted in the film, but the voiceovers reflect a similar fragmentation. They repeatedly return to the notion of a duality that structures both nature and human experience. The film begins with Witt’s voice wondering why Nature “contends with itself.” And it ends with Witt’s final thoughts: “Darkness and light, strife and love—are they the workings of one mind? Features of the same face?”

The soldiers in *Red Line*, unlike those in *Ryan*, almost never fight as a team. With the exception of Capt. Gaff’s assault on a Japanese pillbox, combat scenes feature confused individuals incapable of seeing the larger picture into which they presumably fit, or of seeing the chaos and pointlessness of war. Malick’s soldiers, unlike Spielberg’s, form no bonds of brotherhood over the course of the film. They remain isolated individuals. The film’s central character is a habitual deserter, wandering off on his own instead of becoming part of a team. Though he ultimately sacrifices himself at the end to save others, his death prompts a final flashback of him swimming blissfully under water with Melanesian children on his beloved island paradise. His death is less a sacrifice

than an escape to another world, one that is not “blowing itself to hell.” Even within the chain of command, divisiveness rules. Capt. Staros (Elias Koteas) refuses a direct order from Lt. Col. Tall to lead his men on a frontal assault of Japanese positions.

Nominally, in *Ryan*, “the mission is the man”; the group is sacrificed to rescue a single individual. But Pvt. Ryan must earn this. In other words, Ryan is forced into an economy of debt in which he owes everything to the men who died on his behalf. He gives value to their lives by giving value to his own. The film is a perfect illustration of an idealized, democratic reciprocity whereby the individual exists by and for the community to which he belongs. *Red Line* questions the moral economy that *Ryan* upholds. As one of the film’s voiceovers notes, “War does not ennoble men; it turns them into dogs. It makes them small, mean, ferocious. It poisons the soul.” Unlike *Ryan*, Malick’s film provides no answers. It only asks questions: “Does our ruin benefit the earth? Does it help the grass to grow? The sun to shine?”

THE IRAQ WAR

Hollywood has produced only a handful of films about the Iraq War, and none of these has fared well at the box office. For the most part, these films refuse to engage with popular debate over the justification for going to war or the relative merits of the war itself, looking instead at the toll the war has taken on American combat troops and their families. The majority of these films focus on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder brought about by psychological trauma incurred during the war. *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), written and directed by Paul Haggis, tells the story of soldiers recently returned from Iraq who murder one of their comrades. The dead soldier’s father, Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones), investigates his son’s death, retrieving cell phone videos shot by his son in Iraq and uncovering atrocities committed by his son and his platoon upon Iraqi civilians. The title of the film alludes to the biblical story of David and Goliath, which Haggis reads as the story of brave young men sent to do battle with an enemy of superior strength who stand their ground and bring the giant down. David is both the dead soldier and his father, who take on the trauma of Iraq and the bureaucracy of the army, respectively. The moral of the tale is that the war has traumatized the American psyche. The film ends with Deerfield raising an upside-down American flag over a schoolyard in his home town—the inverted flag being an international symbol of distress.

Brian De Palma’s *Redacted* (2007), based on a true story, consists of a series of (fictionalized) videos shot by American troops in Iraq on camcorders, cell phones, and surveillance cameras, as well as web footage. These scenes depict the rape and murder of a 14-year-old Iraqi girl and her family by soldiers who manned the checkpoint she passed every day on her way to school. This

war crime is presented as the consequence of the stress placed on American occupying forces by the insurgency and ongoing conflict in Iraq.

Stop-Loss (2008), directed by Kimberly Peirce, begins in Iraq with a portrait of what life is like for American soldiers interacting with one another at their base camp and then follows them to the checkpoint where they stop and search Iraqi vehicles. Fired upon by a carful of insurgents, S.Sgt. Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe), Sgt. Steve Shriver (Channing Tatum), and other members of the outfit pursue them to a partisan neighborhood where they are ambushed. In the grisly combat that follows, several members of King's unit are killed or wounded and he and Shriver are forced to kill Iraqi civilians, including women and children, in order to survive. Upon his return to Texas, King is "stop-logged." Though he has won a medal and served his agreed-upon tour of duty, his service has been involuntarily extended by the U.S. military, which uses a contractual loophole to insist that he return for additional tours of duty in Iraq. A victim of PTSD, Shriver gets drunk, assaults his girlfriend Michelle (Abbie Cornish), then digs a foxhole in her front yard and sleeps there in his underwear, cradling a revolver in his arms to protect himself. Later, King tracks down a gang of thieves who broke into Michelle's car and stole his and her things. Hallucinating that he is back in Iraq, King beats them up, takes one of their guns, and tells them to pray to Allah before he shoots them in the back of the head, execution-style. Michelle intervenes and brings him back to his senses before he can actually shoot anyone. Another member of their outfit, Tommy (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), picks a fight with a man in a bar who asks his wife for a dance, uses his unopened wedding gifts for target practice, crashes his car into a store, smashes the plate-glass window of a jewelry store with a beer bottle, and subsequently commits suicide. Forced to choose between fleeing the country or never seeing his friends and family again, King embarks on a cross-country odyssey with Michelle, finally realizing that his duty is to stick with and protect the surviving members of his platoon, returning with them to Iraq. The insanity of the war is mirrored in the nightmarish regulations of the stop-loss provision. Whether in action in Iraq or stop-logged in Texas, the common soldier is helpless to do anything but look out for his buddies.

MEDIATION AND REPRESENTATION

The war film mediates our relationship to war, helping to prepare us for it, reconcile us to victory or defeat, and adjust us to its aftermath. The conventions of the war film continue to shape our understanding of real wars—to inspire us, on one hand, to fight in them and, on the other, to protest against them. Though wars continue to be fought and won or lost on the battlefield, they also continue to be fought and won or lost through their representation on the

movie or television screen. Images of war explain why we fight; they stage and restage war's battles; and they attempt to explain why we won or lost.

In other words, all contemporary wars are waged on two fronts—on the battlefield and on the screen. Hollywood's job has been to make sure not that we always win but that we are always right—that our victories are informed by an inherent pacifism and distaste for war that redeems us from the sins of our conscienceless enemies, and that our single defeat (in Vietnam) is the product not of our consciencelessness but of our heightened conscience, which sets us against ourselves and provides the basis for the recasting of our defeat as a victory in Hollywood's various epilogues to the war. Whether we win or lose the battle, the movies are there to enable us to win the war.

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

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|---|--|
| <i>Sergeant York</i> (1941) | <i>Rambo: First Blood Part II</i> (1985) |
| <i>Casablanca</i> (1942) | <i>Heartbreak Ridge</i> (1986) |
| <i>Air Force</i> (1943) | <i>Platoon</i> (1986) |
| <i>Bataan</i> (1943) | <i>Full Metal Jacket</i> (1987) |
| <i>The Story of G.I. Joe</i> (1945) | <i>Born on the Fourth of July</i> (1989) |
| <i>The Best Years of Our Lives</i> (1946) | <i>Casualties of War</i> (1989) |
| <i>Sands of Iwo Jima</i> (1949) | <i>Schindler's List</i> (1993) |
| <i>The Steel Helmet</i> (1951) | <i>Courage Under Fire</i> (1996) |
| <i>Battle Cry</i> (1955) | <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (1998) |
| <i>The Longest Day</i> (1962) | <i>The Thin Red Line</i> (1998) |
| <i>The Dirty Dozen</i> (1967) | <i>Rules of Engagement</i> (1999) |
| <i>The Green Berets</i> (1968) | <i>Three Kings</i> (1999) |
| <i>The Boys in Company C</i> (1978) | <i>Black Hawk Down</i> (2002) |
| <i>Coming Home</i> (1978) | <i>In the Valley of Elah</i> (2007) |
| <i>The Deer Hunter</i> (1978) | <i>Redacted</i> (2007) |
| <i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979) | <i>Stop-Loss</i> (2008) |



CHAPTER 10

Film Noir: Somewhere in the Night

MADE IN THE USA

Film noir—literally “black film”—is a French phrase, but it refers to an American phenomenon made in Hollywood, USA. Though several of the directors associated with film noir, such as Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, and Edgar G. Ulmer, were foreign-born, the majority of those who explored the darker reaches of the noir experience were American, born and bred. They have included, among others, Orson Welles, John Huston, Nicholas Ray, Samuel Fuller, Joseph H. Lewis, Anthony Mann, Raoul Walsh, Joseph Mankiewicz, Don Siegel, Phil Karlson, Tay Garnett, Frank Tuttle, Edward Dmytryk, Henry Hathaway, and Jacques Tourneur who, though born in Paris (1904), grew up in Hollywood (from 1914).

Even more important, the source material for the bulk of noir narratives came from the underworld of American pulp fiction. For example, nearly 20 percent of the films noirs made between 1941 and 1948 were adaptations of