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**FILM AS PUBLIC PEDAGOGY**  
**IN THE U.S. CULTURE OF MILITARISM**

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The following study examines the relationship between militarized Hollywood cinema, the US culture of militarism, the systemic nature of US aggression, and the possibilities for creating a pedagogy of hope that will work to overcome militarism's abominations. By recognizing film as a powerful form of public pedagogy that shapes beliefs, attitudes, and values, constructs identities and identifications, and directs allegiances and actions (or inactions), the study investigates ways in which Hollywood films work to convey and inculcate circumscribed notions of history through regularized patterns of film images and narratives in pursuit of the indirect or direct goal of distracting public attention, along with conditioning the public mind, engineering public consent, and mobilizing public support for a US culture of militarism dedicated to aggression in the pursuit of global domination.

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**And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry  
speak of dreams and leaves  
and the great volcanoes of his native land.  
Come and see the blood in the streets.  
Come and see  
the blood in the streets.  
Come and see the blood  
in the streets!**

**-- Pablo Neruda, "I'm Explaining a Few Things"**

**Interviewer: ANTONIO GRAMSCI, who helped popularize the term "hegemony," wrote in 1925, "A main obstacle to change is the reproduction by the dominating forces of elements of the hegemonic ideology. It's an important and urgent task to develop alternative interpretations of reality." How does someone develop "alternative interpretations of reality," as Gramsci suggests?**

I RESPECT Gramsci a lot, but I think it's possible to paraphrase that comment, namely, just tell the truth. Instead of repeating ideological fanaticism, dismantle it, try to find out the truth, and tell the truth. Does that say anything different?

It's something any one of us can do.

Remember, intellectuals internalize the conception that they have to make things look complicated, otherwise what are they around for?

But it is worth asking yourself, how much of it really is complicated?

**--Noam Chomsky, interviewed by David Barsamian, 2003**

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

*“Was it Heraclitus who said war is humanity's natural state?  
Are those who imagine peace as the ground of a new condition  
guilty of an irresponsible wishful thinking”?*

-- James Carroll, “The Grip of War”

*“Of all the enemies of public liberty war is perhaps the most to be dreaded,  
because it comprises and develops the germ of every other...No nation  
could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”*

-- James Madison, “Political Observations” 1795

The absence of critical discussion of the overwhelming presence of militarism in US culture, how it circulates in public spaces, how it educates us publicly and privately, how it works to construct social realities and values and individual identities and allegiances, how it works ideologically in league with the material militarization of US society, how it disappears its bloody legacy, how “dangers loom *because* of American militarism,”<sup>1</sup> the extensive risks, costs and consequences that accompany a militarized society, and how it assumes the “right” of the US to employ violence and destroy lives in international affairs, suggests an immorally foreboding, and potentially catastrophic, gap in the way we understand ourselves as a society and the way we engage the rest of the world. Robert McNamara warns of an “apocalypse soon,” given the “immoral, illegal, militarily unnecessary, and dreadfully dangerous...weapons policy [and culture of militarism] of the United States.”<sup>2</sup> The increasing presence of US militarism and aggression as a way of life within conditions in which the possibilities for maintaining self-defense are evaporating suggest an urgent need to critically engage and transform these matters, ideologically, morally and materially.<sup>3</sup>

How we understand ourselves as a society and how we engage the rest of the world is constructed and conditioned, in important ways, by popular culture. One of the crucial producers of self and global understanding within popular culture is film, “a veritable obsession with American society.”<sup>4</sup> Across the history of popular film production in the United States there has been an emphasis on film narratives that draw on and glorify war, militarism and aggression helping to produce and shape a US culture of militarism. While it cannot be suggested that militarized and

militarizing films are key components in shaping what is generally elite driven US military policies, it can be suggested that film, aside from its distracting role, shapes public perceptions, directs public allegiances, produces codes, and forms public commitments, about those policies, while constructing public identification with and support for US actions.

**Codes Shaping Attitudes:** This powerful conditioning effect is related to what one might call “assumptions of representation,” wherein film audiences, because of the repeated catapulting of similar militarized narratives (inside and outside cinema) assume the representations are true depictions of both US military endeavors and the reasons for those endeavors which correspond with general audience attitudes and opinions about “war,” for example, that self-defense, but not unilateral aggression, is legitimate. Because films play such a vital role in popular culture as mechanisms of influence that condition the public, films therefore provide an opening for not only critical reflections, discussions and dialogues about the US culture of militarism and its contradictions, but they provide a vehicle for stimulating action-oriented popular mobilizations to challenge and overcome the growing US culture of militarism which now carries with it “an appreciable risk of ultimate doom.”<sup>5</sup>

A project that examines the US culture of militarism through film, is an attempt to make visible what is too often absent in public pedagogy and to challenge audience assumptions about what is and is not represented, what is and is not known, what is and what is not understood, what is and what ought to be. In short, such a project should work to recognize the political and moral of cinematic public pedagogies. If audiences believe that the standard view in the culture is to respond to challenge and conflict aggressively then violence becomes normalized; in a militarized culture rooted in aggression as part of foreign and domestic policy, military violence is normalized. At the cultural level of attitude and opinion the normalization can compel a move from the descriptive level of *what is* into a prescriptive level of *what should be*. Consequently, audiences start to believe not only that aggression is the best way but the only way to respond to

conflict and challenge. A cultural attitude develops in which not only is it true that the United States responds aggressively to challenge and conflict, but this is what the United States ought to do. With this coupling of descriptive and prescriptive a self-reproducing ideological and material feedback mechanism is engendered and inscribed, i.e. “the cycle of violence,” which not only produces cultural codes that maintain, engrain and extend the US culture of militarism, but worse it portends increasing cycles of human disaster and suffering. These cultural patterns of what is and what ought to be are internalized as codes, attitudes, scripts, opinions, and habits that frequently remain below the radar of conscious understanding, interrogation and questioning, and if they are critiqued and questioned they are refuted only with great energy and difficulty given the lack of cultural alternatives to the internalized codes and habits.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, because militarized films rarely explore with patience the possibility of peaceful negotiation to conflict and challenge, an attitude of impulsivity and immediate gratification develops in the culture. A culture of impulsivity tends to discount the future because “the temptation for immediate gratification rules [the culture].” Negotiation, politics and diplomacy require patience, critical reflection and time; violence is immediate and impulsive. It satisfies the immediate need for gratification while guaranteeing a constant state of dissatisfaction that requires further satiation because violence never addresses the conditions that produce or call forth violence in the first place. A consequence of this “impulsivity that discounts the future” is an inculcation of attitudes, codes and opinions in the culture driven to easy, fast, and what are considered the most-effective and impacting immediate solutions, and that translates descriptively and prescriptively as violence and aggression. Furthermore, the reduction of enemies to “Satanic” figures relieves the time-consuming responsibility of pursuing the historical, economic, social and political investigations necessary to explain what generates abominable acts of violence. While this form of metaphysical reductionism of enemies to “evil” beings is a time saving device, for example one can simply ignore the history of US actions in the Middle East, it does nothing to



assist in interrogating the political realities that must be understood in order to overcome the cycles of violence. Such positions are immoral because they abstract people from the historical conditions, social positions, and political struggles necessary for the critical and responsive explorations of the rich complexities of human actions and behavior that reveal to us the condition we call “moral.”

The descriptive and prescriptive encodings work historically and politically through a large circuit of militarized and non-militarized films that circulate within a broader cultural circuitry of militarism that includes violent and aggressive television spectacles, increasingly violent video-games, print media that sells militarism, aggression and violence because they sell, an economic system impulsively driven to dominate, subjugate and dissatisfy and largely linked to and subsidized by the Pentagon, and a hierarchical political system that tends increasingly toward authoritarianism. The circuit of militarized and militarizing codes that produce impulsivity, a normalization of aggression outside of films, a reductionist immorality, and a general social acceptance of a culture of militarism not only as what is but as what ought to be, is brought into films by audiences where the coding is further inscribed and instantiated. Additionally, the cinematic experience works to re-encode those militarized attitudes, opinions and cultural codifications internalized with little challenge or refutation in the larger culture. The combination and interpenetration of circuits inside and outside the cinematic experience produce not only attitudes, opinions and codes that direct audiences toward support for US policies of military aggression and massive military spending in the interest of corporate power and a global domination project, but they also produce audiences that in turn construct an allegiance to a culture of militarism and a readiness for, expression and expansion of, and normalization of military aggression.

The current project is motivated not so much by the aesthetics or mechanisms of film, but by the unspeakable horrors and dreadful human agony and suffering that accompany militarized

violence and aggression; it is motivated not so much by attempts to understand individual responses to films, but the larger cultural and moral impact of films. Additionally, the project is underpinned by a notion of morality rooted in “Just War Theory’s” principle of universality, an Aristotelian sense of ethics rooted in excelling at being human (a concept undermined by militarism emphasis on destruction and death), and finally by an opposition to US moralism. The principle of universality states that we must be willing to apply to ourselves the same standards we apply to others, i.e. if it is wrong when they do it, it is wrong when we do it; if it is right when we do it, it is right when they do it.

For example, most US “war” films assume the right of the United States to impose its military power anywhere in the world and carry out unilateral acts of violence. If we assume that films play a role in producing support for and allegiance to militarism and aggression, then films play a role in the perpetration of violence against people in foreign lands through the imposition of military might, often at monstrous levels as evidenced by the estimated 655,000 Iraqis killed as a result of the 2003 US invasion,<sup>7</sup> and violence against people domestically by appropriating public funds for the subsidization of Pentagon linked corporate sectors rather than for the support of public well-being and infrastructure. In applying the principle of universality in the case of films we might ask if we would support the production of films that function as forms of indoctrination and propaganda in support of mass violence if we were the victims of that violence. If we think it would be wrong for another country to pedagogically direct its citizens to support military aggression against the United States then we should think it wrong even more strongly for the United States to do the same given both our responsibility for US violence and the overwhelming destructive capacity of the US military. If we think it is correct for the United States to use forms of public pedagogy to condition its citizens to support military aggression then we should find it correct for other countries to do the same at a much higher level to compensate for the disparities in force capacity between the US and other countries.

The opposition to a culture of militarism herein is also rooted in the Aristotelian notion that ethics requires us to excel at being human in terms of developing and nourishing our intellectual, compassionate, creative, social, solidaristic and loving capacities. Developing these capacities cannot be accomplished alone. It requires social mechanisms and political institutions that nourish these capacities, individually and collectively. To the extent that militarized films and a culture of militarism narrow our focus to an “Army of One,” hyper-individualized masculinity and our choices to violence and aggression, they undermine both the social mechanisms and political institutions ideologically and materially necessary for the nourishment and development of our moral capacities. In short, a military “moralism” is narrowly rooted in death, ruthlessness, concentrated power and destruction, it fosters an abundance of death, whereas a social morality is rooted in life, compassion, collective engagement and support, and creativity, and encourages an abundance of life. Furthermore, US moralism assumes there are sets of questions and answers in the world called “moral questions,” that are not only personalized and individualized, but are differentiated from social, political, historical and cultural questions. In such a moralizing world action in the bedroom are moral questions but not actions in the boardroom; armpit hair is a moral question but not armaments. Moralism refutes our social allegiances, nurturance and responsibilities while at the same time distancing us from examining and living the relation between the way things are and the way things ought to be and how we should live as a result of how things are and in order to attain what ought to be.

None of this is meant to suggest that film aesthetics and mechanisms do not shape our understanding of militarism, but that the motivating value is not aesthetics but human rights, not imagery but democracy, not moralism but morality. The values we bring to the aesthetics and mechanics will shape the analysis and, one hopes the way the analysis embodies itself in actions. The facts in the world outside of cinema are vital to understanding the aesthetics of cinema because in large measure “the overall movement of cinema reflects the overall movements of

society”<sup>8</sup> as well as the dominant institutions of society of which the Pentagon is vital. To the extent that films contribute to the factual horrors and threats there is a moral and political imperative to decode and critique those films in ways that not only explain the films, and the culture of militarism out of which they come and into which they go, but to transform them. At a fundamental level what is important about a project that examines US militarism through films are the ominous risks, the enormous costs, and the horrifying consequences of military violence and aggression. The ultimate task is to turn ideas into material actions which abolish the conditions and transform the institutions that threaten “ultimate doom,” and which produce such vast human suffering, pain and death (and, in turn, abolish a culture that seems to require the glorification and celebration of mass violence to survive).<sup>9</sup>

### **What’s Goin’ On?**

Herein, there will be an attempt to use Hollywood “war” films, because of their imposing presence in public space in the culture, to assist in filling in the absence of critical reflection and engagement of the US culture of militarism by exploring the role “war” films play as public pedagogical sites, within larger circuits of cultural militarism, that produce, condition, structure and interchange knowledge, attitudes, codes, and desires around US militarism. The pervasiveness of militarized cinema and culture circumscribes choices people make in developing notions of human interaction, interchange and agency, moral engagement, and international relationships. The narrowing of options is accomplished both by what is present and what is absent in militarized cinema, by what films do and by what films do not do (that they could do). Present in these films are consistent patterns of jingoism, xenophobia, fear, narrowed history, glorifications of military power, aggression as a civilizing mission, solipsistic heroification of soldierly virtues, humanitarian intentions, and generally celebratory representations of US militarism. Crucially absent are explorations of the interface between causes, agents and effects of military aggression, insights into

the larger political, economic and human risks, factual costs and social consequences of militarism, and the histories, voices, pain, suffering and deaths of victims of US aggression.

Herein, there will be a general overview of Hollywood “war”<sup>10</sup> film history, along with a more careful examination of five more recent films: *Rules of Engagement*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Man on Fire*, and *Mystic River*. The goal will be to reveal ways in which these films have been “severely limited...[in advancing] socially critical and radical positions”<sup>11</sup> on US militarism, how they often serve as ideological vehicles that generate both a de-moralization and de-historicization of audiences, and how they engender and encode support for government and private sector institutions essential for the continuing perpetration of US aggression and war. As part of an endeavor to engage the complex relationships between film and the broader circuits of the US culture of militarism, both linked to what Richard Falk refers to as “the US global domination project,” with its multifarious, and nefarious, risks, costs and consequences, there will be an adoption of a critical pedagogical approach applied to both broader explications of the culture of militarism, politics and particular films. The goal will be to explore contexts and contradictions, provide insights and facts, and extend possibilities for critically engaging particular films, and militarized film in general.

The specific films, *Rules of Engagement*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Mystic River*, follow a long tradition of Hollywood militarized films centered around heroic rescue, humanitarian intervention, vengeful or defensive violence (a genre especially symbolic and significant in the post 9-11 arena) and imperial hubris, gaining cultural prominence during and immediately following “The Good War” years of WWII, in the 1970s with films such as *Dirty Harry*, *Walking Tall*, *Billy Jack*, and *Death Wish*, and evolving through various permutations of “Vietnam” films of the 1970s, 80s and 90s including *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Full Metal Jacket*, etc., during the Reagan/Bush Administrations’ expanded commitment to the militarization of US culture and the economy, the “resurgence of both national

and masculine power,”<sup>12</sup> and interventionism in foreign affairs (e.g. El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Grenada, Libya, Afghanistan, Panama, Iraq, etc.), with aggressive, violent and heroic films such as *Rambo: First Blood*, *The Terminator* series, *Missing in Action I and II*, *Robocop* series, *Lethal Weapon* series, *Die Hard* and *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, etc., and up to the present.

### **US MILITARISM<sup>13</sup> – ROOTS AND BRANCHES**

*“Pray, not for comfort, but for combat”*  
-- Oliver Wendell Holmes<sup>14</sup>

*“The American way of war is particularly violent, deadly and dreadful.  
We believe in using ‘things’--artillery, bombs, massive firepower.”*  
US General Fred Weyland<sup>15</sup>

Popular cultural productions such as Hollywood war films grow out of, branch into and circulate within and through history. The history and historical conditions of the society, economy, politics and culture outside of film provide windows into film, mirrors that reflect film, and hammers that work to shape or transform film. Additionally, films provide a window into the history and historical conditions, a mirror that reflects those conditions, and a hammer with a potential for shaping or transforming those conditions. Decoding history is crucial to decoding popular culture productions and those productions are crucial to decoding historical conditions. Hence, any critical approach to decoding militarized film will also be deeply invested in locating those films in the history they reflect, project, condition and produce in order to explore the interpenetrating relationship between various forms of historical power (economic, military, political, cultural) and the ideologies and pedagogies employed to protect and expand that power.

The historical roots of US militarism lie in the expansion across the continent and the violence employed to carry out genocidal attacks against and conquest of Native populations and nations. In addition, the birth of the nation was forged in war (Revolutionary War), partially as a result of the presence and fear of the British military, as was the later solidification of the nation (Civil War). Mythical military heroes such as “the warrior President,” George Washington, and

“the war president,” Abe Lincoln loom large across US history. Early military explorer’s and scientists Lewis and Clark, along with the original science and engineering function of the US Military Academy, and the military arsenal at Harpers Ferry, forged a lasting link between militarism, development, mass production and the economy. The military fueled the development of the economy and that development fueled the power and weapons of the military leading to new capacities for destruction and strategies of annihilation, strategies practiced initially on Native peoples, extended globally through hundreds of interventions, and reaching an apex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with calls for “Full Spectrum Dominance” using military force of land, air, sea and space to ensure the US maintains global power and a monopoly of force.<sup>16</sup>

The love of military violence became religious as war’s embrace led to “visions of purgation and redemption, into anticipation and intuition and spiritual apotheosis, into bloodshed [and annihilation as] sacramental, erotic, mystical, and strangely gratifying.” Wars of “destiny” fueled the attitudes and the attitudes fueled the wars; wars created new technologies and new technologies led to new wars and new levels of glorified destruction. These attitudes were “balanced” by notions of war, using supreme weaponry, leading to the attainment of some sort of American Dream, but also an end to war...but US history has demonstrated that greater weapons typically lead to more military violence, more militarism, more nightmares and more destruction, not less, and little resolution to the social and political conditions that lead to military violence and aggression in the first place.

Further forays into international military aggression erupted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the US attacked both Cuba and the Philippines, often considered the beginning of both the modernization of the US military (the size of military forces tripled after these wars) and of US imperialism (though regular military “ventures” into Central America had already persisted for 60 years and continued regularly through the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - and into the 21<sup>st</sup>). In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing movement that “wanted military power in order

to support American hegemony over a world-capitalist economy.”<sup>17</sup> But, the development of military institutions is linked to complexities of “vested interests, political and economic ambitions, unanalyzed fears and untested assumptions about historical causation,” and at this stage the country was neither competing with European militarism and might, nor solidified into a systematic form of militarization.<sup>18</sup> Though US participation in WWI was brief, the barbaric destruction and brutal dehumanization of the war’s savagery undermined visions of a US military giant able to control global markets as pacifist ideologies and moods of anti-militarism developed in the 1920s. In the following years, as the United States became more deeply involved in the world economy, the growth of military power and militarism became key concomitants to protecting, expanding and controlling US interests domestically and internationally. The growing culture of militarism in the 1930s was sold on the notion that greater weaponry would protect the nation from war, rather than provide means for perpetrating it, though the people of Haiti, victimized by a murderous US attack and an eighteen year military occupation, might beg to differ.

The shadow of war, often expressed as a foreboding external threat to our internal innocence, has hung over the US most visibly since the 1930s and become institutionally entrenched in the Pentagon System (military-industrial-intelligence-congressional-cultural complex) since 1945 when much of the US research and development and corporate economy became “Pentagonized.” “Since 1940 [the United States] has mobilized and maintained the most powerful military force in the world [while keeping] the economy...on a war footing,”<sup>19</sup> to protect against often invented threats. The Pentagon advises that “we” can only be safe “if we are prepared to fight two and a half wars simultaneously,” peculiarly linking aggression to safety, while creating the persistent illusion in the public mind that “we” are threatened in order to generate economic and ideological support for a militarized society and a culture of militarism. Regular interventions since 1945 (in Greece, Korea, Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam, Lebanon, Laos, Cambodia, Congo, Brazil, Indonesia, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Libya, Grenada, Panama,



Iraq, Haiti, Yugoslavia, Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq – to name some of the more prominent “engagements,”), accompanied by propaganda campaigns and a continuing flow of popular culture productions around war, have worked to compel the public to support the “war footing” economy.

In US culture, war, i.e. preparing for, planning, initiating and waging direct or indirect (through proxies armed, trained, funded and supported by the US) military aggression, has often been seen as something that is, or comes from, outside, rather than something internally generated.<sup>20</sup> The constant invocation of external threats, whether Nazis, “Japs,” Communists, Vietnamese, Sandinistas, narco-terrorists, Arab terrorists, Al-Qaeda, etc., has led to a notion that the US has been a passive victim of war rather than an active participant (the main initiator and wager of war since 1945) in perpetrating aggression and leading to an increasingly dangerous militarization of the world.<sup>21</sup> It has also led to the perception that the US culture of militarism, and the vigilance and propaganda with which it is so often accompanied, has little to do with internal forces such as cultural values, economic pursuits, imperial imperatives, institutional structures, corporate profits, social control and political ambitions.

In short, the culture of militarism in the United States and the arguments for its persistence have always possessed an exacerbated sense of urgent need, though they typically lacked legitimacy because the external threats were largely manufactured by powerful economic and political interests as a way to legitimate the growing militarization of the culture and economy, and a key cultural element in the manufacturing of these illusionary threats was/is Hollywood.<sup>22</sup> In addition, power relies ideologically upon and refers to sets of moral values to legitimate its actions in the public mind, but the pursuit and actions of power undermine the very values employed to legitimate power creating a contradiction that has led to a contemporary era in which power is more apt to express its naked and aggressive interests without the fog of altruistic rhetoric. Urgency also trumped legitimacy and the US culture of militarism, rooted in a largely engineered sense of national security necessities designed to promote the “real” national interest (corporate

profits and power), grew in prominence and influence across the US economy, politics and society, as enormous amounts of public resources were funneled to the corporate sector through the Pentagon, new generations of weapons were produced, military bases and materials spread across the globe accompanied by regular acts of aggression, and universities, along with research and development, and popular culture, were profoundly reshaped and redirected.

As a result of the permeation of war and militarism into the culture, whether as fear of war from outside (in the public mind) or as perpetration of aggression (in the domain of the planners and policy makers), it impacted foreign policy and politics, technological investment, research and development, the distribution of wealth and resources, consensus politics and national consciousness. Furthermore, the cultural imagination was shaped so that “war” became a metaphor for attacking problems both domestic and international, from wars on poverty, wars on polio, wars on cancer, wars on bugs, wars on drugs, wars on terrorism, to the AIDS Crusade, etc.,<sup>23</sup> and war became a critical component of how people thought about and used religion, extended life into suburbia,<sup>24</sup> lived anxiously, produced monster films, and directed energies of academics.

Though militarism is, and has been, a cause, agent and effect of much reproduction and transformation in US society, and has much to do with how the US defines itself as a nation internally and engages the world and is perceived by the world, externally, it is mostly a conditioning rather than a determining factor in the culture, and in its impact on Hollywood film production and reception. The forces of militarism looming in the culture are both dynamically connected to and neutrally disconnected from political, cultural and historical developments. Nevertheless, US militarism’s persistent and permeating presence and its hegemonic, but never omnipotent, designs and influences, have profoundly directed the last 60 years of domestic and global history and fueled much of Hollywood film production, ideologically, materially, and politically.

The United States is not unique in possessing and pursuing a process of militarization and maintaining a strong military. The United States is, however, unique in: (1) using the process of militarization and military power to pursue global domination, for it is the first truly global power in history; (2) in contributing so ominously to the potentially apocalyptic militarization of the world; and, (3) rooting its economy, and much of its culture, in military production, pedagogy, power and proliferation. Possessing a military does not necessarily produce a culture of militarism. A culture of militarism is a sufficient but not necessary feature of a society with a military; a military is a necessary but not sufficient institution for the development of a culture of militarism. A culture of militarism develops through a complex material, social and ideological process of militarization driven by the aggressive use of military power to control and dominate either regions of the world, or the world as a whole, usually in pursuit of resources, labor, or political control of a state or region, to extract subsidies from the domestic population, and to protect, promote and expand dominant sources of power domestically as in the case of military forces regularly brought in to crush union strikes and organizing campaigns in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mexico has a military and it is used repressively inside Mexico. Nevertheless, Mexico has not fully developed a culture of militarism through which the society undergoes a process of militarization to pursue regional and global power, or root its economy in military production, though the military is used to advance and protect dominant interests inside Mexico. Furthermore, a culture can be militarized, as in the United States, without being run by military institutions or military leaders (though the Pentagon, both a military and civilian institution, does play a prominent role in politics, culture and the economy).<sup>25</sup> C. Wright Mills correctly held civilian elites more responsible for what he called “military metaphysics—the cast of mind that defines...reality as basically military.”<sup>26</sup> The US is a militarized society, and the military is a crucial component in the economy and political system, but it is not a determinative force. State policies and plans, whether for domestic or foreign affairs, are typically carried out in the civilian sector and are influenced by

and serve the interests of the dominant corporate sector which uses the military as its iron fist and the Pentagon as a subsidy funnel, a reality often kept hidden from the public, and never addressed in Hollywood films about war.<sup>27</sup>

A country can be militarized within and through a culture of militarism without the population possessing a warmongering value system or spirit. The US population is generally opposed to aggression in majority numbers,<sup>28</sup> and surely opposed to “war” if it includes aggression and violence perpetrated against the homeland (this is not to say that once Washington launches an aggressive action, a significant number of people in the population do not rally around the flag).<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the culture is sufficiently invested in militarism to permit elite sectors to regularly carry out direct and indirect military aggression against foreign states and people. Furthermore, militarization does not always express itself through aggression and violence in international affairs. It can serve as an instrument of internal suppression, either directly through a police state apparatus and border protection or indirectly through the creation of a culture of fear and intimidation, or simply through redirecting resources away from social spending and onto military spending, with its concomitant anti-democratic impacts. It also can be used to not only sell itself through “product placement” of the military at sporting events (NASCAR, Super Bowl, NBA, MLB, etc.) and films, but to sell that with which it is associated, the Hummer and violent competitive sports being perhaps the most egregious examples. A culture of militarism is an institutional phenomenon that conditions individuals and groups to serve the interests of militarization. Combating such a deeply entrenched institutional phenomenon raises innumerable challenges and difficulties. In brief, perhaps the best one can say is “The [historical] forces militarizing [the United States are] deeply embedded, as are those [forces] which will establish a different path.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Brief definitions of key terms:**

*Public pedagogy*, in short, is pedagogy carried out in public spaces; i.e. anywhere the public is educated. Public pedagogy refers to the ways in which knowledge, understanding, power, ideology and authority shape and direct individual and public relationships in society. That the public is educated in public spaces, not only inside, but outside, of schools is not a theory, it is a truism. Crucial questions for a critical public pedagogy revolve around: how, and in whose interests, that education is carried out; the impact of that larger public education on social organization, policies, relations and decisions; on how power is distributed; the ways individuals interact in and interpret their relationships with others and the world, etc. In other words, questions of individual and social agency and empowerment are always present in public pedagogy. Additionally, public pedagogy is the idea of pedagogy carried out *by and for the public*, in the interest of the well-being of the public. In short, in this view, public pedagogy should be an education in mutual self-realization and empowerment. It is a call for popular democratic education in which the material and ideological resources and structures through which and within which education occur, inside and outside of classrooms, will be under public, rather than private, control. From this line of argument, film as a form of truly *public* pedagogy would be film production, distribution and exposition under public control in which the public assumes its position as producer and distributor, driven by an understanding that we “achieve our deepest fulfillment only in terms of each other.”<sup>31</sup>

Public pedagogy asks, about films and militarism: what do they teach us and how do they do it; what do we learn from them and how do we learn; what do they bring to and take from the public; what does the public bring to and take from them; what can we teach and learn from films, not only about film, but about the world outside of film; and, how can educators and other cultural workers use them as a vehicle for participating in educational engagements and actions with the public, inside and outside classrooms, following the assumption that the public not only has much to learn, but much to teach. In short, how do we make the political more pedagogical by critically reflecting on

the world, and how do we make the pedagogical more political by acting in and on the world. Public pedagogy, in this second sense, is *critical* because it taps into the multiple experiences, literacies, and complex sets of knowledge the public brings to educational spaces; it fosters *dialogue* on the grounds that critical education occurs in the context of complex reciprocities of knowledge, experience and understanding; it is *solidaristic* in that it recognizes that the free and creative intellectual, material and imaginative develop of each is conditioned on the free and creative intellectual, material and imaginative development of all; and, it is *democratic* in that it works to mobilize the collective intelligence and imagination, courage and commitment, energy and enthusiasm of the public in order to create inclusive, involved and vibrant public spaces. Public pedagogy recognizes that the public's knowledge and understanding is always directed and formed not only by what the public hears, sees, acts on and experiences, but also what it does not see, hear, act on and experience. What is absent is sometimes as powerful as what is present in shaping public thoughts and actions.<sup>32</sup> Public pedagogy is therefore a site of struggle over representations and truth, over how knowledge is contextualized and de-contextualized, over how different meanings are constructed differently, over what the moral, political and social consequences might be of the differences, contexts and representations, and it is a battle over public space.<sup>33</sup> (*See footnote for comment on "public space"*) A critical pedagogy will use films to read the world and the world to read films; will use the world to write films, and use films to write the world; and use films to right the world, and the world to right films, in a dancing dialectical relationship between films, the public and the world.

Regarding *militarism* and *militarization*: herein the term "militarism" will be distinguished from "militarization." This is not to suggest that they are not interlinked, mutually conditioning, and inseparable. *Militarization* will refer to the dynamic material processes in the political, economic and social institutions that produce the military infrastructure (weapons, bases, soldiers, planes, etc.) which encourage and permit the planning, preparation and waging of military aggression, and also

feed and shape a culture of militarism. *Militarism* will refer to the values, beliefs, habits and attitudes that are often the intellectual, emotional and psychological engine that drives militarization and directs public support for the actions arising out of militarization. In the film world, Hollywood/Pentagon films (more below on the reciprocal relationship) are part of the dynamic process of militarization that shapes the culture of militarism and also a crucial component of the culture of militarism that feeds the engine that drives militarization. Perhaps one could say militarism is the engine and militarization is the vehicle; or militarism is the brain and militarization is the body.<sup>34</sup> In other words, militarization is the set of social practices and processes that create the plans and policies for the production and promotion of aggression and violence, i.e. they create the culture of militarism, a culture that is consumed by and feeds war and aggression to an extent that war and aggression condition the metaphors, memories and visions that shape much of national consciousness and behavior.<sup>35</sup> (*See footnote for comment on “culture;” and, see APPENDIX I for a longer explication of militarism and militarization*).

Regarding *ideology*, herein it will follow a traditional notion of ideology as that which is used to validate and normalize the power of dominant social groups, institutions or classes. The primary ideology herein is, of course, “militarism.” John B. Thompson has argued, “To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination.” Power, through militarized ideology, validates, encodes and normalizes, universalizes and naturalizes itself by: vilifying perceptions, images and thoughts that are critical or challenging of it; marginalizing or disappearing events, voices, images or perspectives that might sully or weaken it; promoting the “truth” of military power’s existence and continuance as self-evident; shrouding those realities that might prove inconvenient (i.e. mass killing); advancing attitudes, beliefs, values, myths and identities consistent with its interests and persistence.<sup>36</sup>

**Presence/Absence:** Following on the assumption that ideology protects and naturalizes power not only by what is present in its projections, i.e. what it promotes and advances, but also by

what is left absent from its projections, i.e. what it disappears and marginalizes, “war” films will be examined as cultural productions that circulate through circuits of public space as forms of public pedagogy. There will be an attempt to discover patterns of present and absent images, facts, histories, linkages and narratives that work to shape public memory, knowledge, perceptions and understanding of history, morality, politics and militarism in ways that foment (not without dissent) the growing militarization of US society.

### **Assumption of Representation**

The catapulting of repeated patterns of present and absent images, narratives, ideologies, and forms, in Hollywood militarized cinema builds an assumption of representation in audiences in which audiences may begin to assume that the representations they are witnessing are a more or less accurate depictions of US militarism. The imposed assumptions about military force and aggression create attitudes and opinions that agree with and reinforce audience attitudes and opinions regarding these subjects held outside of cinema. In short, as revealed in *PIPA* and *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations* studies (more below), audiences generally oppose military aggression, mass violence, victimizing, and criminal attacks, and are supportive of peaceful negotiations, the courage of soldiers, etc. Audiences repeatedly and increasingly immersed in very narrow film representations of US militarism, accompanied by similar representations in other dominant media and other cultural circuits, as well as from the Pentagon and Executive, falsely assume that the cinematic version of “reality” corresponds with reality. The false assumptions protect against cognitive dissonance and dissent. For example, in cinematic presentations, generally, military engagement is not about aggression, mass killing, victimizing, rapacious self-interest, exploitation, stealing resources, or criminal attacks, but about soldierly courage and solidarism, self-defense, sacrifice for a good cause, liberation, humanitarianism, freedom, love of country, our victimization and “their” savagery, etc. The narrow focus on soldiers and our victimization, which is typical, disappears from history the primary cause of killing in the US arsenal: air power. Its absence further



protects against cognitive dissonances, for its presence would begin to suggest that the US is generally not the out-gunned, self-defensive, brutalized victims of savage victimizers, but an overwhelmingly powerful and aggressive force that is the primary cause of offensive destruction and death. This public pedagogy then directs audiences toward a particularly circumscribed understanding of US militarism and aggression, an understanding that understandably builds support for the militarism and aggression because the understanding of its mission corresponds with pre-held opinions, codes and attitudes in the audience.

Support for militarism is built through a conflating of support for soldiers with support for the aggressive institutions the soldiers represent, an aroused need to protect ourselves against foreboding threats absent the knowledge that the greatest threat may very well be the military institutions the audiences assume is there to protect them; a desire to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need absent the accompanying knowledge that might reveal that the humanitarian needs of the many are often a consequence of the prerogatives of the very institutions designated as humanitarian rescuers in cinema; a commitment to rescue the oppressed from tyrants, absent the knowledge that the tyrants from whom we are rescuing people are often the very tyrants we created and supported, etc. Audiences rationally assume the pro-military, glorification of military actions, sanctification of sacrifice, jingoist/patriot, self-defensive, uncritical view is the generally accepted view in the culture, because it is virtually the only view they observe. Furthermore, it is in people's best moral interest to accept the view, i.e. few people admit they are carrying out criminal actions, they are always coded in ways that assign blame in one's own best interest. It is not an unreasonable leap to believe that the perspectives presented in militarized films are representative of general public opinions and attitudes on these matters, which in a sense they are, i.e. pro-humanitarian, pro-self-defense, pro-liberation and rescue, etc. Problems arise when audiences then make the leap of assuming that what the US does with its military power is what is represented in cinema. It is both a rational and irrational leap. It is rational given what people are presented about the world, whether through

cinema or other media, including textbooks, etc. It is irrational when correlated with the facts in the world, a correlation that is sometimes difficult to discover. So, militarized Hollywood films do not so much change public opinions and attitudes about aggression, mass violence and victimizing others, they actually reinforce them, but falsely. Films, by shaping public understanding of what they perceive to be the humanitarian reality of US militarism allows the audience to live without cognitive dissonance because US military action, commitments and pursuits, as represented through Hollywood's power serving cinema, correspond with public attitudes and opinions...though not with facts in the world.

### **Naturalized Militarism and Circuits of Culture**

In some respects, as a demonstration of the power of ideology, the culture of militarism is simply there, natural, the way things are, from the beginning, seemingly inevitable, and “war [i.e. aggression] is [in the United States our] natural state.” (Carroll) This circuitry of militarism manifests itself in virtually every corner of our lives: in sporting events, video games, television, and films where the good guy (us) regularly wins, and conflict is invariably resolved through excessive, often blood-soaked, and humiliating force with no opportunities presented for negotiations, diplomatic settlement, or peace. Militarism manifests itself in research and development in computers and airplanes that have largely grown out of a militarized Pentagon economic system, in oil exploration and production, and corporate globalization that both serves and relies on the US military for guaranteed markets and protection of resources. In addition, the growing global system of US military bases as well as SUVs, clothing, schools, ubiquitous recruiting, prisons, newspapers, advertising, magazines, video games,<sup>37</sup> interpersonal relations, and talk radio that all bear the corrosive and repressive mark of a US culture of militarism. In short, “a relentless process of militarization”<sup>38</sup> has “reshaped every realm of American life—politics and foreign policy, economics and technology, culture and social relations—...”<sup>39</sup> making militarism profoundly central to the national identity of the United States and a threat to liberty to be dreaded.

C. Wright Mills, writing in the 1950's, envisioned the behemoth Pentagon system becoming something much larger than an institution of foreign policy planning and initiation. He saw it evolving into a crucial component in the development of a US culture of militarism<sup>40</sup> and a militarized US society. Carl Boggs' has suggested that "the more omnipresent [US militarism] has become, the more it permeates virtually every corner of international and domestic life, the more it seems to be ignored or deflected, suppressed or forgotten, kept safely outside the established public sphere." We are so familiarized with the culture of militarism<sup>41</sup> in which we live and breathe, think and imagine, the routine nature of US aggressive interventionism, and the spectacles of violence as the standardized form of film discourse and representation, that we seldom contest their legitimacy, infrequently question their impact, and rarely recognize their corrupting presence. Militarism has become naturalized; violence has become banal (or in some cases seen as empowering)<sup>42</sup>. Timothy Lenoir notes "the military-industrial complex...today...is invisibly everywhere, permeating our daily lives [and] has become the military-entertainment complex."<sup>43</sup> Caleb Carr writes, "brutality, massacres, terrorism, and even genocide have become daily facts of international life,"<sup>44</sup> that flood film and television presentations, cyberspace, as well as news and journalistic reports. The circuits of militarism, violence and terrorism and the accompanying uncertainty, fear, distrust, and chaos threaten to engulf us not only in the media spectacles, discourses and representations in which we are immersed, the trauma, brutality, inhumanity and destruction of life that always accompany wars, but "it invites endless war and the ever-deepening militarization of U.S. policy."<sup>45</sup>

The United States is in possession of "the greatest military [force] in the history of the world," in the words of Secretary of War Rice.<sup>46</sup> Throughout the Cold War years, 1945-90, US announced military spending averaged \$300 billion (in 2000 dollars), with announced spending projected at over \$500 billion by 2008.<sup>47</sup> It dominates the world (1,000 known military installations encircle the globe; hundreds of ships sail on the oceans of the world; an enormous air fleet is perched to attack anywhere at any moment, etc.) and the domestic social order (note the 8,500 troops

mobilized in Washington, D.C. for the Presidential Coronation; \$4 billion dollar recruitment budget...), with such vast dimensions of monetary, political and cultural influence that it has become part of our natural landscape, easy to ignore, easy to treat as routine. The long, brutal and bloody history of US militarism and imperialism, beginning with the extermination of the Native population, (referred to as “expansion” in textbooks), and continuing in Afghanistan and Iraq (and elsewhere) in the present day, remains obscure for most citizens who have been deprived, by films, textbooks, popular media, the discourse of “officialdom,” and scholarship, of crucial ideological and historical perceptions, as well as a critical political literacy that would make us “capable of characterizing the social and human consequences of [the US] government’s foreign [and domestic] policies.”<sup>48</sup> The distortion, evasion and evaporation of honest discourses and representations surrounding US militarism is an enormous pedagogical tragedy for both the US and global public. This obfuscation and mystification of social awareness has immunized the public from the enormous and horrifying risks, costs and consequences of militarism and imperial pursuits that have caused tens of millions of casualties in the forms of killing, maiming, disappearing, displacement, and the corresponding environmental devastation, etc., threatened nuclear annihilation, redirected trillions of dollars of vital resources for war, policing, and repression and away from spending for the public good, undermined democratic practices, eviscerated international law and subverted or corrupted international institutions.<sup>49</sup> What is striking, given these horrific and often deadly results, is the ease with which militarism and aggression are celebrated and spectacularized in cinema.

### **Pentagon Censorship: Perceptions trump Reality**

*Today, American planes regularly bomb the distant cities of Iraq  
and no one even seems to notice. No one, not even reporters on the spot, bothers to comment.  
No one writes a significant word about it. Should we be amazed or horrified, proud or ashamed?  
-- Tom Englehardt<sup>50</sup>*

Englehardt’s question should be answered with another question: what has occurred pedagogically in the political and cultural, ideological and material lives of people in the United

States that either encourages or permits silence in the face of atrocities? Any answer points to a complex array of connections, circuits and other questions with multiple answers. Related to the current study one thing that has happened is Pentagon “control” of, and influence in, Hollywood. Jonathan Turley argues, “The U.S. military operates perhaps the most sophisticated and successful propaganda system in the world.”<sup>51</sup> Pentagon editing of Hollywood scripts, shaping of imagery and manufacturing of history has been practiced, and largely accepted, for decades, and continues. It extends from *Hellcats of the Navy*, *James Bond*, *Lassie*, *Star Trek* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*, to *The Perfect Storm*, *Armageddon*, *Mars Attacks*, *Independence Day*, *Jurassic Park III*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Tears of the Sun*, etc. It is, David Robb suggests, “Hollywood’s dirtiest little secret,”<sup>52</sup> a combination of material and ideological benefits that are reciprocal. Collaborating with the Pentagon can save time, money, travel and effort for film productions. The Pentagon can offer “access to billions of dollars worth of sophisticated military hardware.” Access to Pentagon equipment, personnel, assistance, film archives, bases, buildings, etc. can save many millions of production dollars. Hollywood offers the Pentagon “access to the eyeballs of millions of viewers and potential recruits.”<sup>53</sup> US military aggression stimulates public interest in “war” movies, generating more revenues at the box office. According to the army’s “Hollywood Handbook,” “*A Producer’s Guide to U.S. Army Cooperation with the Entertainment Industry*,” working with Hollywood film productions “must boost manpower efforts [i.e. serve as] recruiting commercials [and generate funding].”<sup>54</sup> The Pentagon works with Hollywood on a simple reward and punishment formula of coercion: obey demands and you will be rewarded, i.e. given access; disobey and you will be punished, i.e. denied access. From the Pentagon’s perspective it is a cost/analysis scenario: we will supply what you need if you do what we want because we will gain benefits. In order to gain access to Pentagon support film producers must provide, for Pentagon approval, five copies of the film script, agree to script alterations demanded by the Pentagon, produce a final product in accord with

Pentagon approved script and image changes and procedures; prescreen the “final edit” of the film for Pentagon officials before screening the film in public venues.<sup>55</sup>

The Hollywood/Pentagon relationship is symbiotic: for a film industry driven by the bottom-line, it is a good deal, it saves money; for the Pentagon, driven by the bottom-line of recruitment and funding for the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, as well as funding for weapons and technology research, development and production in the private sector as part of the public subsidy/private profit Pentagon system, it is a good deal, it brings in money, support for policy, and recruits. Hollywood benefits because access to real equipment and buildings adds an air of authenticity; the Pentagon benefits because they can create illusions, mold perceptions and thus construct historical fabrications with an air of authenticity and thus believability. In other words, the Pentagon benefits because it can participate in shaping and manipulating the script and images of the military, thus creating favorable and supportive public impressions of the military and its aggressions, or it can create distractions from reality, and perhaps more importantly, it can pedagogically shape and design historical (mis)understanding. To borrow from Kenneth Burke it provides the Pentagon an opportunity for the “reflection of reality” as they want it reflected, and for the “deflection of reality” they want hidden.<sup>56</sup> The Pentagon is well aware of the public pedagogical power of film (in Phil Strub’s words “an influence machine”) and that film “has long been recognized as a powerful transmitter of culture, because it transmits beliefs, values and knowledge; serves as a cultural memory...consequently, the cinema remains a continual battleground in the cultural conflicts in America;” and on battlegrounds the Pentagon has the advantage.<sup>57</sup>

The reflections and deflections are presented to the public through what may be the most influential public pedagogical vehicle and propaganda machine in the culture – films. With a “real” Pentagon budget approaching 1 trillion dollars, Hollywood, by operating in public space with a strong capacity for shaping public perceptions, provides a crucial public pedagogical instrument and force in creating a culture of militarism by shaping public impressions of the need for massive

military might, public impression of threats, public support for military aggression, public distancing and distraction from “the greatest perpetrator of war crimes in modern times,”<sup>58</sup> and public subsidies for new technology and spending through creating a culture of fear, glorifying military performance, and through sanctifying and celebrating the “humanitarian” righteousness of US military efforts.<sup>59</sup> In brief, films participate in a larger culture of militarism under particular sets of political, economic and military conditions to privilege certain representations of the world, certain ideas, meaning and images over others so that they generate ideological impacts and create circumscribed common sense understandings of the world.<sup>60</sup>

Oliver Stone notes, “They [the Pentagon] make prostitutes of us all [in Hollywood] because they want us to sell out to their point of view... They want a certain kind of movie made. They don’t want to deal with the downside of war. They assist movies that don’t tell the truth [about war] and they don’t assist movies that seek to tell the truth [about war]. Most films about the military are recruiting posters.”<sup>61</sup>

Tim O’Brien’s comment “you can never tell a real war story,” alludes to another serious problem related to pedagogy and indoctrination. There has been, and is, a failure on the part of US public education (inside and outside classrooms) to contextualize US military aggression, locate it within historical contradictions, provide tools and skills for understanding the complexity of war in the modern period, and to demonstrate the far simpler point about modern war - it brutalizes, traumatizes and destroys human lives and communities, typically through the use of the always cinematically absent massive US airpower. It has also failed to make clear that the standard victims are civilians, mostly women and children, as is the case again in the 2003/2006 US attack on Iraq, and the July/August 2006 US/Israeli attack on Lebanon. “Civilian deaths are now the central fact, the very essence of war. Not seeing that means not seeing war.”<sup>62</sup> We don’t see “the truth” of war because we vanish the primary victims; not only in films, but in the general coverage of US aggression in the circuit of textbooks, television, magazines, video games, etc., in all public spaces

where the public is educated about “war.”<sup>63</sup> We disappear people from life, and we disappear people from death, and in the process we disappear ourselves from our own humanity as part of the larger pedagogical process of de-moralization and dehumanization that accompanies the culture of militarism. The impact of this sort of public pedagogy impacts filmmakers as much as audiences so it is no surprise that “war” films produced with or without Pentagon coercion generally “follow orders” by reflecting the common sense ideology and general cultural (mis)understandings about US military aggression and violence.<sup>64</sup>

Pentagon Hollywood liaison Phil Strub (retired military) claims that while the Pentagon and Hollywood work together as an “influence machine” in the culture (i.e. a form of public pedagogy), they are not engaged in propaganda and the Pentagon does not engage in censoring films, but merely directs them in ways positive for the Pentagon (in short, they engage in propaganda).<sup>65</sup> Strub argues, plausibly I think, that in general most people in Hollywood (and elsewhere, one might add) accept a view similar to his regarding the military and US foreign policies.<sup>66</sup> It is true that the Pentagon does not change reality or excise “accurate” accounts of historical events, as long as that reality and those historical accounts correspond with the Pentagon requirements to preserve the faith, i.e. duty, patriotism, discipline, loyalty, integrity, and honor, and preserve the mission, i.e. recruitment, retention, promotion, research, development and investment. Image often supersedes fact in Pentagon/Hollywood productions.<sup>67</sup>

*Windtalkers* (2002) director John Woo was compelled to excise grim, but historically accurate, scenes, such as Nicolas Cage executing a surrendering Japanese soldier, because Marines were portrayed in ways claimed to be more representative of a conscript force rather than honorable Marines. The Pentagon also demanded a watered-down rewrite of the historically accurate depiction of Marines ordered by the military to kill Navajo “windtalkers,” if it seemed they were at risk of capture by the Japanese. The killings were to be carried out to prevent the secret “windtalker” codes from being discovered.<sup>68</sup>



The Pentagon influence is direct in that it both screens scripts and images, and makes productions more expensive by withholding access to equipment and support; and, indirect in that producers, directors, writers, etc. have internalized the values, attitudes, myths, codes and beliefs of the culture of militarism. It should be noted that the equipment, buildings, and resources being withheld from Hollywood by the Pentagon in the interest of protecting and promoting a culture of militarism is public property. In effect, the Pentagon is using public property as a negotiating tool, and public funding, to compel Hollywood to perform a pedagogical function of propagandizing and coercing the public, against the interests of the public, to support policies and programs to which the public is generally opposed.<sup>69</sup> In brief, the public pays to be propagandized.

The films we view about the US military and war are rarely historically accurate productions in which decisions are made in the interest of facts, morality and art, but are largely commercial propaganda products that have been squeezed through manipulative procedures and adroit negotiations with the film as incidental to the real target – US, and global audiences, who are (mis)educated to submissiveness, patriotism, militarism, romanticization of war, and the glorification of military aggression and violence. Strub described the Pentagon's limiting version of film accuracy: "Any film that portrays the military as negative is not realistic to us."<sup>70</sup> Films that "reflect reality" as that reality is positively defined or created by the Pentagon are "true;" any films that deflect negative realities are potentially true; any films that do not portray as positive US military actions are "false." In other words, anything that might undermine support for the US military is unacceptable; anything that might stimulate support for the US military is acceptable. This simple circumscription suggests that anything resembling that which "tells the truth about war" will be edited, unsupported or shelved, leaving the public with an extremely narrow opening for insights into "the truth about war." Tom Englehardt observes, "The American military's mode of response to any 'incident' almost invariably turns out to be a long journey from the truth." And so it is with the film pedagogy of largely disappearing the primary physical, emotional and psychological pain,

destruction and suffering that accompany US military aggression.<sup>71</sup> One goal is to have perceptions trump reality. One effect is to have illusions trump morality so that the US can bomb distant cities and “nobody even seems to notice.” Because it is crucial for the evidence of its existence to remain invisible in order for “catapulted propaganda” to work effectively lest recipients become skeptical about deception and resistant to manipulation, US audiences “are never informed that the movies [they watch are] subject to military revision or censorship...[and] the role of military censors is hidden from the viewer.”<sup>72</sup> One is reminded of Churchill’s admonition: “In wartime [100% of the time in the US], truth is so precious that she should always [‘over and over and over’] be attended by a bodyguard of lies.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Enjoying brutality brutalizes enjoyment**

Films such as “*Mystic River*,” “*Black Hawk Down*,” “*Tears of the Sun*,” “*Man on Fire*,” (all post 9/11) and “*Rules of Engagement*,” (2000) to name but a few, along with the audiences that ingest them, the producers and directors who make them, the advertisers who sell them, the critics who review them, all emerge from the omnipresent and visibly invisible culture of militarism. Each of these films, four with Pentagon assistance, take-up the formulaic Hollywood vehicle of aggression and violence, and serve in various ways to either, or both, legitimate and/or de-legitimate aggression and vengeance. That each of the films emerge from a culture of militarism and US pursuit of global Empire is typically absent from reviews and criticism of the films, a particularly jarring absence in a world in which US power has dedicated itself, in some large way, to domination and aggression in global (and increasingly domestic) affairs, and a “global domination project”<sup>74</sup> accompanied by an increasingly belligerent culture of militarism. In multiple ways each of the films reinforce and celebrate the principal Pentagon-friendly ideologies, aesthetics and values of militarism, including: machismo, hyper-masculinity, virility, subjugation of the weak, warrior spirit, aggressiveness, regeneration through violence, orthodox gender relations, bellicose patriotism, legitimated murder,

tyranny, conservative politics, hubris, imperialism, gunfighter ethos, and hierarchy, as they are typically represented in Hollywood war-related and militarized cinema.

We might consider: Why the celebration of violence, mutilation and aggression: is it masochism or sadism? What sorts of shifts, if any, have occurred in our attitudes, values, commitments and beliefs so that violence is not only legitimated and glorified, but where some of us find it necessary to celebrate the use of force and violence? How has the relationship between US citizens and US victims been constructed, deformed, and maintained? How has film, in conjunction with the culture of militarism and aggression, organized meaning, shaped understanding, and extended experiences, so that people have learned to read militarism, violence and aggression as acceptable and effective means of human interaction? When we learn to enjoy the brutalization of others what is the impact on our own capacity for enjoyment, i.e. do we learn to brutalize our enjoyment?

These questions, and others, led to a consideration of the relationship between representations of violence and aggression in films, the pedagogical power of filmic discourses, the culture of militarism, and violent US foreign and domestic policies, with a goal of developing notions of how violent films and the culture of militarism function as material and ideological discourses, as public pedagogies that inculcate sets of values, attitudes, allegiances, desires, definitions, beliefs, identities and identifications in US society, and as public pedagogies that locate people in particular historical settings, social formations, cultural practices, representations, and patterns of knowledge and ignorance. In addition, it led to a consideration of how these discourses might be taken-up in ways that are not only explanatory and critical, but interventionist and ameliorative. In other words, to ask how can we address issues of militarized and militarizing film violence and the culture of militarism in ways that will assist us in not only understanding why things are the way they are, but in developing our critical thinking capacities for analysis and interpretation, while simultaneously creating realizable methods and tools for adopting oppositional

and alternative stances and for intervening in the culture and society in order to challenge and overcome the culture of violence and militarism on the way toward a more substantive and peaceful democracy.

In the midst of “a generational war of infinite justice and educative violence;”<sup>75</sup> a deeply entrenched commitment to the use of US military power to advance political and economic interests globally (including the control of space as part of a plan for “Full Spectrum Dominance”); the continued normalizing of war and violence as the only acceptable method of conflict resolution; the call to “fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars” as a “core mission;”<sup>76</sup> Dick Cheney’s call for wars that will last a “long, long time, perhaps indefinitely;” “policies that rely more on force than on dialogue and compassion;”<sup>77</sup> a militarized society in which there is often no choice over aggression or non-aggression because aggression is the only choice; the soldierization of the citizenry; and, a US military transformation that “carries an appreciable risk of ultimate doom;”<sup>78</sup> it appears vitally important to address the ways in which these forces, policies and projections shape and are shaped by other forces, policies and projections within the militarized social, political and cultural apparatus. In particular, militarily violent, aggressive and ubiquitous film representations and discourses, combined with other dominant media texts, serve as powerful pedagogical vehicles that teach us military values and aesthetics in classrooms and in the streets, in movie theatres and in our living rooms, in the workplace and the church space, in our interpersonal relations and political understandings, at the Mall and the sports stadium, etc. If for no other reason, we might address these themes and take up this critical task in the hope that imagining “peace [and social justice] as the ground of a new condition” is not merely “wishful thinking,” but, in concert with actions toward realization, the only morally and politically responsible option we can pursue. “The risks of inaction are far greater than the risks of action.” (Cheney)

## Context

Educational practices, inside or outside classrooms, cannot be separated from the context in which they take place. Therefore it is critically important to adjoin what is taught, why it is taught, who or what is doing the teaching, where and when the “lessons” are advanced, and how the teaching is carried forward. A public pedagogy of militarized films will not limit the teaching to what the film teaches, but will work to subject that cinematic teaching to critique and analysis that takes the lessons outside the film and into the world. This must then be seen and understood in combination with the elucidation and amplification of the interconnections and interpenetrations between what learners bring to the pedagogical space and the material conditions outside of that space. The conditions, codes and circuits outside of the pedagogical space include: cultural discourses, economic positions, power relationships, historical expositions and traditions, and political representations that shape the circumstances of life and learning inside and outside the pedagogical space. Films have long been an “influence machine”<sup>79</sup> in the culture, performing a crucial teaching role as public educator. As such, a critical approach to films will note the context in which films are produced and viewed; for example, the attempt herein to locate militarized films within a larger cultural and social discourse of militarism and US commitments to aggression in international affairs.

So we might ask, among other related (or unrelated) questions: in a particular film, or set of films; what military values are taught; what facts are absent; what is reproduced from a culture of militarism and what is challenged, critiqued or made problematic; what teaching role is played by the Pentagon in films such as “*Behind Enemy Lines*,” “*Black Hawk Down*,” “*Tears of the Sun*,” “*Rules of Engagement*,” etc., in which the Pentagon performed a vital role in providing equipment and script oversight; why are particular sets of relationships valued and represented while others are left absent or underrepresented; what is the political and historical context in which the events inside the film occur, what is included and what is excluded, and what is the relationship between that

context and the cultural and social context outside the films representations and discourses, for example, the “war on terror,” the attack on Iraq, the Abu Ghraib revelations, violent video game culture, a disempowered citizenry, etc.; or, because of the viewer’s role as student and teacher, what might the film viewers teach themselves as a result of interacting with the film and the history they bring with them into the theatre; what are the conditions outside of the film production and presentation that influence how and what is presented with how and what is taken up by an audience.

Furthermore, we can ask how we might take up: the very violent film *Tears of the Sun* in the context of power relationships, inequality, poverty, abuse, racial codings, authority, religion, and a current culture of militarism and exacerbated violence in global affairs; *Mystic River* in the context of imperialism, domination of the weak by the strong, violence breeding violence, male bonding and hyper-masculinity, and a culture of vengeance; *Rules of Engagement* in the context of US crimes against humanity and war crimes in Vietnam and Iraq and in the context of attempts to erase “the Vietnam Syndrome,” in which the population developed an opposition to indiscriminate violence and killing; *Man on Fire* in the context of torture revelations, the growing cultural links between religious fundamentalism and violence, historical discourses representing the US as “gunfighter nation,” the links between military and religious sacrifice, and demonizing of the other in the context of a long history of placing Latin America beneath the United States; *Black Hawk Down* in the context of soldier culture and nationalism, humanitarianism and aggression, pro-war and anti-war positions, state-terror and non-state terror, attempts to reawaken patriotism through a celebration of heroism and sacrifice, etc.

Given that we are all in the position of teachers and learners in the culture of militarism, taking-in and giving-out various values and attitudes, reinforcing and reproducing, or challenging and transforming, particular ideologies and politics, it is critically important, to consider the values, attitudes, politics and ideologies that are promoted through militarized film as dominant discourses and representations. What do these films teach us about power relationships, ideological positions,

political options, possibilities and hopes for the present and future, conflict as a form of constructive engagement versus conflict as a form of destructive avoidance, suffering as a human condition, patriotism as a form of fundamentalism versus a form of humanistic support, imperialism as a form of nationalist celebration versus imperialism as a form of elite domination domestically and internationally, pain as dehumanizing trauma or pain as courageous drama, etc. Furthermore, how might these be taken up and contextualized or re-contextualized through examinations of plots and subplots, storylines, character, visual representations, militarized discourse, historical settings, character development, ethical commitments, etc., as these interface politically and morally with conditions outside of the aesthetic sphere? In other words, how might we see, read, analyze, and interpret films not only as aesthetic and emotional vehicles, but also as moral and political pedagogical vehicles that shape our understandings and commitments and encourage or undermine political and moral agency. Additionally, how might we engage and employ films as part of a larger project of overcoming the crisis of citizenship that is reflected in growing militarism? Furthermore, how can we find ways to contextualize films as always part of a larger political discourse, as part of a public pedagogy, in order to understand how memory is shaped, how national identities are formed, how allegiances are inculcated, and come to terms with our own power as individual and social agents in the pursuit of democratizing the culture, economy and politics?

### **Why these films?**

Aside from the broad overview of Hollywood militarized films over the past ninety years to establish a general set of repeated patterns that have led audiences to assume that representations of military actions and US military actions in the world are correlated in terms of mission and consequences, there are several related factors involved in selecting the five particular films.<sup>80</sup> **First**, the films were either huge commercial successes or significant artistic successes. *Man on Fire*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Tears of the Sun*, and *Rules of Engagement* were the top grossing films upon their release, and *Mystic River* was hailed, and rewarded, for its artistic achievements. In other

words, for either commercial or artistic reasons, or both, each of the films played a prominent pedagogical role in public spaces, and each film circulated widely across the culture in terms of not only viewing, but commentary, reviews and criticism.

**Second**, each film centers on an act, or acts, of aggression and violence that calls forth vengeance of a far more vicious, bloody and destructive sort. In the cultural landscape of the US before, but especially after 9/11 (including the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq), in a culture taught to live in fear and seeking both security and redemption, this theme of victimization and brutal vengeance seems particularly relevant in terms of its pedagogical weight in influencing, endorsing, or perhaps challenging, attitudes and opinions regarding the long-term US commitment to military aggression and intervention. Cinematic militaristic discourses and representations of violence have operated on a fundamentalist Manichean scheme in which aggression, power and US interventionism are necessary to protect our noble way of life from ignoble demonic, monstrous and terrorizing others. As noted, this simplified approach robs audiences of political and historical understandings necessary to take up these films morally. The events of 9/11, and the ways those events were played by the Bush Administration and US media, tended to reinforce these hallowed notions of an innocent US victimized by threatening beasts who operate outside our longstanding commitment to law and order, peace and freedom, in the world. The films, operating prior to, or after the events of 9/11, can be seen as operating within, through, and at times against, both the long strand of cinematic discourses as well as militaristic responses to the events of 9/11.

A **third reason** to take up these films in relation to the culture of militarism, is that a rabid patriotism, a heightened sense of imperial hubris, a narrow-minded, bloodthirsty and celebratory commitment to violence, persevering preparations for aggression in international affairs and repression in internal affairs, and elevated connections between both Hollywood and the Pentagon and filmmaking and war making, continue to resonate throughout US culture and society. This is often true because films, and television, provide a window on war and violence, but rarely take up in



meaningful ways, the short-term and long-term suffering, pain, trauma and destruction that are the concomitants of war and violence.

Each of the films discussed draws attention to violence in different ways. *Mystic River*, in particular, attempts to address the costs and consequences of violence by “scrutinizing the mechanisms, [histories, relationships] and implications of violence through different processes of framing, juxtaposing, repeating and quoting images [and narratives],”<sup>81</sup> therefore rupturing our standardized conception and attitudes around violence, and complicating our assumptions and sentiments regarding the morality or immorality of violence, vengeance and aggression and the ways in which they affect human life, understanding and agency. *Rules of Engagement*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Man on Fire*, while indulging the mass psychology of US global supremacy and the long history of the “gunfighter nation” ethos, and celebrating and glorifying the violent excursions and explosions of the main characters, nevertheless complicate the idea that these “hard bodies...stand not only for a type of national character—heroic, aggressive, and determined—but for the nation itself.”<sup>82</sup>

A **fourth reason** for engaging these films critically in the context of the growing US culture of militarism and aggression, is a desperate need to critique, challenge and overcome narratives and policies that justify or initiate violence, Empire and the unilateral US global domination through military might project. The continuation of these policies and pursuits pose grave risks for the future of humanity, portend immense human suffering and trauma, and should therefore be engaged and challenged at every opportunity.

## CHAPTER 2: The “Theoretical” Framework

Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh inveighed, with partial understanding, but with direct experience, against the US *culture of militarism* in stating “Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill it teaches the whole people.” McVeigh’s actions in Oklahoma can be seen as shaped by, among other complex factors, his own demolition training and Gulf War soldiering in the US military, the culture of militarism that led to his service, and a US government and military dedicated to aggression and the rule of force. McVeigh’s recognition of the pedagogical scope and force of government actions and commitments and a long history of US aggressive militarism is insightful and harrowing, but limited. What he fails to note is that the long-term US commitment to aggression and militarism is conditioned not exclusively by the political system, or economic system, but also through a complex set of cultural mediums and circuits that work to legitimate “overgrown military establishments” that produce regular patterns of winners and losers, targets and non-targets, victims and non-victims, well-funded and under-funded people and institutions.<sup>83</sup> Mass media and popular culture, of which Hollywood films play a significant role, create pedagogical patterns and circuits of beliefs, myths, values, allegiances, identifications, and attitudes through which and within which a US culture of militarism and aggression is created. Militarized film productions permeate our lives, shape our understanding, and work to legitimate the US “permanent war abroad and permanent war at home.”<sup>84</sup>

### **PEDAGOGY**

The term “pedagogy” will be employed to suggest several meanings and contexts, mutually reflective and active. As suggested, public pedagogy refers to forms of education as broad political and moral practices occurring beyond simply the borders of schoolrooms, i.e. pedagogy refers to “what it means to assess the political significance of understanding the broader educational force of culture”<sup>85</sup> in all public spaces.<sup>86</sup> Pedagogy recognizes that education, in forms of both teaching and

learning moral and political practices and commitments, occurs at multiple and interpenetrating sites in our everyday social and cultural lives; i.e. the pedagogical is social as the social is pedagogical; the pedagogical is cultural as the cultural is pedagogical; the pedagogical is militarized as the militarized is pedagogical. In other words, the culture and society inform the teaching and learning, and the teaching and learning inform the society and culture. Pedagogy, in Raymond Williams view, examines carefully, and looks reflectively and critically at “the complex ways in which individuals are formed by the institutions to which they belong, and in which, by reaction, the institutions [take] on the colour of individuals thus formed.”<sup>87</sup>

So, we might ask how the culture of militarism, through violent films, forms or influences individuals in ways that create support for aggressive foreign interventions and war, and how in turn, the militarized society and culture of militarism take on the color of those conditioned by militarized films, and how the films take on the color of those conditioned by the culture of militarism, etc., in a continual dialectical dance. Pedagogy is always contextual, “never an abstraction; it always takes contingent shape,”<sup>88</sup> is always discursive, directional and formational, and thus, is always bound up in questions of political, ethical and social power and responsibility. Pedagogy explores, illuminates and interrogates the material and ideological relationships between power, knowledge and authority and raises questions about not only how knowledge is produced and inculcated but also about who controls the conditions for the production of patterns of knowledge and ignorance in the culture. Militarized films, as public pedagogical vehicles, shape political and moral values, locate viewers in particular spaces of film discourses and representations, as well as particular pasts, presents and futures, and lay foundations and frameworks within and through which people engage and reflect on their own commitments and beliefs, the ways in which they construct identities and allegiances, the ways in which they assign meanings and express desires, as well as how they interrelate with others and form affective investments in, maneuver through, and pursue encounters with, the broader social universe and cultural landscape.

A critical pedagogy will approach the relationship between audiences, militarized films, the US culture of militarism, and aggressive interventionism, in ways that open up the relationship to possibilities for explanatory and emancipatory knowledge, critical understanding and mobilized challenges in order to develop opportunities for thinking differently about ourselves individually and collectively and acting differently in our relationships with others and the world. A critical pedagogy, in its commitment to radically contextualizing these complex ideological, historical and cultural relationships, will ask not only what, why and how militarized films teach, but also what, why and how we learn from films and how we might redirect that learning as a pedagogical force in the culture that transforms not only individuals but crucially the institutions in and through which we construct or destroy lives.

Any serious discussion around notions of reducing militarism in film representations and discourse then must be linked with broader discussions and debates about the economic, political, military and historical relationships and institutions that produce and reproduce militarism in the larger society. At the core of those discussions should be dialogues and debates around visions and plans for transforming those relationships and institutions. Crucially, a critical pedagogy will ask how taking up militarized films critically can expand the boundaries of what we thought possible in terms of struggling for and creating a more socially just, peaceful, fair and equitable society. A critical film pedagogy will seek to uncover not only hegemonic ideologies and patterns that reproduce unjust power relationships, but also seek to discover what Ernst Bloch calls “utopian moments.”

Because films are tied up in questions of power, ethics, and social reproduction and transformation, they are: never innocent, but, as noted, carry a burden of responsibility; never only entertainment but always political (accompanied by the question “in whose interest, with what goals, in what direction, and with what consequences are they political?”); never simply fantasy but always in some ways truthful; never only aesthetic but always moral; never merely reflective but always

constructing; never neutral but always ideological; never exclusive, always mediated; never singly literate but always performing and producing multiple literacies; never a monologue always a conversation; never only affective but always epistemological; never only about the future but always about the present and the past; never only about the past but always about the present and the future; never only about the present but always about the past and the future; never only artistically free but always critically accountable; never rigid, always flexible; never only private but always public. In all of these senses a critical film pedagogy is always about translating across and between these permeable borders infused with the hope of producing not only a transformatory set of critical reflections but social engagements driven to abolish the conditions and transform the institutions that give rise to militarism and aggression and their concomitant human suffering.

What an individual film teaches is less important than both what a pattern of films teach, and the institutional structures in the culture and society in and through which the teaching is carried forth. It is less important to understand what a film tells us about ourselves as individuals and more important to understand what films tell us about ourselves as a culture in order to produce the kinds of knowledge that motivates the mobilization of collective resistance to militarism. As Gabriel Kolko points out in discussing US militarism, “It is far more risky to focus on particulars as if they have no precedents or are not a part of an older, longer pattern.”<sup>89</sup>

### **Action Oriented “Theory”**

A critical public pedagogy that addresses films and the culture of militarism (CPPFM) will then be an action oriented “theory,” a self and social understanding process, hoping to develop forms of knowledge and engagement that emancipate us from the threats and violence and the falsehoods of cinematic representations and other narrowly focused forms of public pedagogy as they circulate within the larger US culture of militarism. It will work to stimulate a new relationship between facts, values, ideas and actions, and leave open “the possibility of making other connections and developing ideas in other directions,”<sup>90</sup> when we engage film, cultural texts and militarism. It

demands that we develop the kinds of knowledge and understanding of films and the culture of militarism that is required to alter the situation and condition of both, a task that will also evolve a new understanding of ourselves, individually and socially. It is not new to recognize on the one hand that changing material conditions changes ideas, or that changing society changes people, and, on the other hand, changing ideas create new potentials for changing material conditions, or changing people creates new potentials for changing society. We should also that understanding ourselves and our conditions, in a new way, will change us in the process. Because we the subjects are also one of the objects under contemplation, we alter ourselves as both subjects and objects in the process. As an object we are a self in the process of being understood. As a subject we are a self in the process of understanding. Because the understanding of the self develops in the context of the conditions under which understanding develops, for example, as a film critic, or a public living in a culture of militarism, the kinds of knowledge that develop are intended to move beyond the self-contemplative in order to serve the purpose of changing social conditions. The process is one in which the self, the public and the society are changed in the process.

A critical film pedagogy then is not merely a reflection *on* film and militarism, or a reflection *of* film and militarism that maintains a distancing level of abstraction from the selves and society in which and through which both are shaped, but a practical engagement that is attempting an inseparable three-way form of knowing and understanding: *that* things are the way they are (basically facts), *why* they are the way they are (basically analysis), and *how* the way they are can be transformed into *how* they should be (basically strategy and hope), in a move from the descriptive to the normative, facts to values. A CPPFM will recognize the historical relationship between the descriptive and the normative in noting that how things are often shape how things can be and also how things should be can reflect backward to shape how things are (i.e. reality shapes imagination; imagination shapes reality).<sup>91</sup> The difficult goal is to achieve in historical reality that which we can imagine in our minds (for example, a society in which WMD are abolished and mass violence is no

longer celebrated, or even possible, because the material mechanisms, if not the ideological tendencies, for its realization have been abolished), while understanding that *what* we can imagine in our minds is shaped by the historical reality we are attempting, and hope, to transform.<sup>92</sup> It should be recognized that a CPPFM is a “realist,” not an “idealist” pedagogy in that it recognizes that things are the way they are because they got that way, not because they have to be that way, and the future will be the way it is not because it has to be that way, but because it gets that way, and therefore we have a hand in creating it. Engaging in ideas and actions that liberate us from the material and ideological conditions of militarism, i.e. working to imagine and create a better future, is a value driven pursuit. Developing the knowledge and understanding necessary to embark on such a product is largely a matter of factual understanding (hence the importance of accumulating and comparing facts in the world as they relate to film presentations of the world).

The presentation of different facts is of vital importance given the assumptions of representation concerning cinema (and other popular pedagogical forms of media) that appear to reinforce audience attitudes and opinions about aggression and war, i.e. the audiences are generally opposed to aggression and war, and favor peaceful negotiations, upholding of international laws, etc., but often end up supporting aggressive policies. The problem, of course, is that the representations the audience assume to be true are often in fundamental conflict with the realities of US military actions (e.g. cinematic portrayals of US aggression as defensive or humanitarian, or cinematic suggestions that we are the victim of evil victimizers, or the regular hiding of the real source of US military violence, air power, and the highly destructive consequences on civilians of US air strikes, etc.)<sup>93</sup>. It appears that audiences are generally in line with more progressive values, but they are lacking in facts that would demonstrate how those values are regularly being violated by the actions driven by the US culture of militarism.

A CPPFM recognizes and encourages the dialectical relationship between values and facts, ideas and actions. It also recognizes that in a burdensome social order desperately in need of an

overhaul, in order to not only address the massive violence and suffering it produces, but also to arrest the possibilities of annihilation, ideas should be geared to achieve political ends of an unshackling sort. Such a position is not an anti-intellectual endeavor that calls for action without ideas. But it is also not an anti-action position that calls for the replacement of action by torpid ideas.<sup>94</sup> One goal of a CPPFM, circulating within the larger US and global culture of militarism, should be to pursue the kinds of facts that assist in developing the kinds of ideas that can be linked to valuable social and self understanding and transformations along with the development of sets of values that fundamentally motivate us to pursue oppositional and alternative facts and to develop the kinds of knowledge and understanding that lead to organized public action that transform society and ourselves.<sup>95</sup>

Because of the complexity, and multifarious, and often nefarious, nature, of the relationship between audiences, films, the culture of militarism, and US aggression, and the complicated and complicating links with the broader economic, political, ideological and oppositional forces at work in the society, there will be an adoption of a radically contextual and multi-perspectival approach that brings together the fields of critical pedagogy, cultural studies, film studies, political science, history and peace-studies. The importance of such an approach is its nuanced attempt to bring together in ways that organize, dis-organize, clarify, challenge and disrupt assumptions and presuppositions by employing insights and frameworks from various disciplines. Furthermore, it recognizes that “pedagogy and [film] studies...exist everywhere...[join] together a different range of disciplines in adapting...to [and transforming] the existing academic, [political, media] and intellectual environment[s]” and power relationships, and reflect “the rapidly shifting ground of thought and knowledge, argument and debate, [discourse and representation] about a society, [films, militarism] and about...culture.”<sup>96</sup>



## **APPROACHES**

Henry Giroux continues a long-term project of linking critical pedagogy to film studies in an attempt to make knowledge meaningful, critical, and transformative. Giroux outlines the key issues with which critical film/cultural pedagogy is concerned: “The relationships between knowledge and power, language and experience, ethics and authority, student agency and transformative politics, and teacher location and students formations.”<sup>97</sup> Giroux extends this by noting critical pedagogy and film/cultural studies are engaged in contributing to our knowledge and “understanding of how culture deploys power and is shaped and organized within diverse systems of representation, production, consumption, and distribution.” In this approach, the relationship between power, knowledge, meaning, and production, in both their material and ideological formations, are explored in terms of the ways in which they “constitute the precondition for all meaningful practices.”<sup>98</sup> In the present study, for example, we might ask how films and the culture of militarism deploy power, shape ideology and consciousness, condition aspirations and agency, produce allegiances and attitudes, inform or disrupt meanings and opinions, through and within complicated and complicating systems of investment, development, production, distribution, and consumption as well as through and within a complex array of images, discourses, and texts.

Roger Simon argues that fundamental to a critical pedagogical approach to cultural studies and politics is a moral commitment to “read the ground of the popular for investments that distort or constrict human potentialities and those that give voice to unrealized possibilities.”<sup>99</sup> The point is to open possibilities for emancipatory knowledge through critical reflections that challenge the constrictions and create conditions for realizing possibilities, sometimes within the same discourse. For example, military films often celebrate courage, solidarity, sacrifice, and strong allegiance. As applied to aggression, nationalism and violence these characteristics “constrict human potentialities” for moral commitments, but when applied to struggles to overcome militarism and domination they can “give voice to unrealized possibilities” for peace and social justice and contribute to overcoming

the conditions that stimulate violence and aggression in the first place. Films that portray US military intervention as “humanitarian” are lies that “distort...human potentialities;” but, humanitarian assistance itself can “give voice to unrealized possibilities” for human solidarity and support. Films that celebrate mass violence and glorify abuse may be grotesque and thus “constrict human potentialities” for kindness and compassion, but the very grotesqueness of the representations can call forth critical questions about ourselves as a culture that “give voice to unrealized possibilities” for struggling against the aggression and abuse. The cinematic absence of alternatives to aggressive responses to threats or conflicts “distort...human potentialities,” but that absence can itself stimulate critical questions that “give voice to unrealized possibilities” for alternative approaches to conflict and threats. A critical pedagogy of film analysis will look for these contradictions and use them as vehicles to stimulate dialogue and discussion in order to open the possibility for emancipatory knowledge.

In this context, we might also ask what is being taught and why, as well as where and how in contemporary film discourse and representations distortions and restrictions of our moral and political potential are produced, distributed and consumed, and crucially ask how we might speak against those restrictions and distortions in ways that extend possibilities for social change, meld knowledge to commitment, learning to transformation, pedagogy to engaged citizenship and political vision, and open up critical discussions and debates around violence, human rights, militarism, aggression, crimes against humanity and peace in classrooms and the broader spaces of public life. In this light we might ask how we can translate filmic representations and discourses into re-representations and disruptions that open-up struggles over different identities and identifications, aspirations and allegiances. For example, in the context of violent and militaristic films and the values and positions they inculcate, identifying with victims rather than victimizers, non-violence rather than violence; identifying the conditions that give rise to violence rather than identifying with the violence that gives rise to the conditions; or, forming an identity that refuses to surrender to the

normalized discourses of power and subjugation, but struggles to challenge those discourses; an identity that seeks to create conditions that give voice to the voiceless rather than simply reiterate the voices of power; an identity that relishes working in solidarity with others to overcome the institutions of violence, rather than accepting the self-interested, competitive, hierarchically organized picture of individualism and atomization that steals our morality and empathy; an identity that refuses spectatorship and passive reception of history, but intervenes, individually and collectively, to both understand how history and the present are constructed and how the future can be imagined and created.

Stuart Hall adds that cultural studies “insists on the necessity to address the central, urgent and disturbing questions of a society and a culture in the most rigorous intellectual [and moral] way we have available.”<sup>100</sup> Here Hall is calling for an approach that links a radical contextualization of knowledge and understanding, politics and history, with moral and political pedagogical practices that bear witness to and addresses the social relations of insufferable oppression and savage violence that burden, stifle and crush the lived realities of countless human beings. It is a call to link a rigorous intellectualism with a politics of practice that “collectively articulates a common affective vision of a shared political future” based in concrete but contestable meanings, values and possibilities for public life and society.<sup>101</sup> A long-term project of linking critical pedagogy, film and the culture of militarism could illuminate not only the relations between culture and ideology, power and the public mind, knowledge and commitment, learning and social change, violence and non-violence, militarism and peace, but be based in “a deep regard for matters of compassion and social responsibility.” The goal is to open up rather than close down public spaces in which democratic, anti-militarist and peaceful visions, values and practices can be explored, expanded and nourished, where individual and social agency in the pursuit of economic and cultural democracy can be engaged, and where “alternative pedagogies [can create] new forms of collective resistance.”<sup>102</sup>

Douglas Kellner provides a call for film/cultural studies and critical pedagogy to become “interested in advancing a critique of structures and practices of domination and advancing forces of resistance struggling for a more democratic and egalitarian society” in the face of spectacles of film culture and militarized society “predicated on submission... pacification... stupefaction... [and] conformity” that alienate “human potentiality for creativity and imagination.”<sup>103</sup>

Because of the dominant role that film and other media play in conditioning public attitudes, opinions and commitments, a CPPFM calls for the creation of expanded educational spaces and conditions for citizens to explore and analyze the interplay between the symbolic and discursive domains of film and the culture of militarism, along with the dominant political ideologies films and militarism feed upon and nourish, in order to produce skills and strategies for critical readings that increase understanding and knowledge, stimulate engagement and social action, and open up potentials for an empowered citizenry and social transformations. In other words, the educative work of CPPFM is anchored in “a radical project that seriously engages the promise of an unrealized democracy against its really existing forms,” and thus calls for an engagement, beyond academic discourse, of theory with urgent social problems, such as increasing militarism, as they are manifested on the terrain of everyday life, material conditions, and global realities and contested by social actors “buttressed by a profound desire to overcome [the] injustice...”<sup>104</sup> produced by the culture of militarism.

Roger Simon suggests that a multiple-approach to cinematic literacy must recognize and “comprehend the full range of multiple, shifting and overlapping sites of learning that exist within the organized social relations of every day life.”<sup>105</sup> David Trend adds that media literacy’s approach “entails abandoning assumptions that particular readings are self-evident or that the medium itself is a neutral carrier of information... it needs to be pointed out that truth does not pass perfectly through a video to a student, nor knowledge through a teacher.”<sup>106</sup> Truth and knowledge are always mediated through and within the histories, ideologies, and popular cultural formations students and

citizens bring to their educative experiences, and the ways in which images and information are presented.<sup>107</sup>

Merging critical pedagogy with film/cultural studies in an attempt to better understand the relationship between representations and discourses of film militarism as they interrelate and interpenetrate with the US culture of militarism and aggressive international and domestic policies calls for the development of literacy not only in the way we see, hear, examine and analyze media, but also in the ways we engage, critique and find meanings within and through politics, history, economics, ideology, and other popular cultural forms outside of film. This approach seeks to disrupt normalized assumptions and presuppositions regarding violence and war, as it works to produce alternatives to violence and war. Critical pedagogy's commitment to examining the interchange between power, knowledge and ideology, the interplay between popular culture and political power, and the interlacing of academic discipline and the material conditions of everyday life outside of the classroom, as well as its objective of establishing the conditions in which we can speak back to and challenge authority and power, exercise freedom and self-determination, nourish critical citizenship and democratic values, and produce conditions for individual and collective empowerment, suggests why, in the face of a growing and foreboding culture of militarism and violence, and a continuing flood of film violence that conditions our understanding of human interactions, intentions and potentialities, an approach rooted in critical pedagogy's political and moral projects is required for the pursuit of the present study.

### **Method**

Henry Giroux argues, "As militarization spreads through the culture, it produces policies that rely more on force than on dialogue and compassion, offers up modes of identification that undermine democratic values and tarnish civil liberties and makes the production of both symbolic and material violence a central feature of everyday life."<sup>108</sup> Films, and other features of the culture of militarism, as pedagogical forces, construct for us symbolic and material meanings of what are

violence, aggression and militarism, how we engage them, how they condition other relationships, whether they are acceptable and effective or unacceptable and destructive, what problems produce violence and what violence produces problems. They guide us in classifying the world in terms of various forms of violence and militarism and the way they relate to power and ideology. In light of this, this study will explore and examine a number of violent and aggressive militarized films in terms of the ideologies they produce and reflect, the myths they reproduce or challenge, the facts they obscure, the lessons they inscribe, and the larger sets of histories and politics they deploy as part of their relationship with and within the circuits of a US culture of militarism and aggression.

After an overview of militarized films, these dialogical and dialectical readings will center on five films: *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *Black Hawk Down*, (2001), *Mystic River* (2003), *Tears of the Sun* (2003), and *Man on Fire* (2004). There will be an attempt to locate these films within and around the cultural and political terrain of US militarism, the expanding Pentagon System, and the ways in which these films mobilize sets of meanings, allegiances and desires around violence, aggression, patriotism, vengeance and militarism. Crucially, there will be an attempt to demonstrate how what is absent in film presentations is often as powerful and meaningful as what is present in shaping our understandings and commitments.

Films are often violent not only because of what they present but because of what is absent. For example, onscreen celebrations of violence presented without the accompanying physical, psychological and emotional trauma and pain suffered by the victims and their families, may lead viewers to see and feel violence as an acceptable form of conflict resolution and rob us of desires for dialogue, diplomacy and expressions of compassion. This acceptance can play out, in a militarized world quaking under the continuous threats of US aggression, with catastrophic consequences. The violence here is two-fold: it is perpetrated against potential victimizers and potential victims. It robs the victimizers of the moral, political and emotional understandings that might lead them to question the use of violence, and robs the victims often of their dignity, and sometimes, their lives.

The project will necessarily incorporate historical, economic and political data as it relates to the films under study and the culture of militarism out of which and into which they emerge. Outside the general overview of “war” films, the period in which the films were produced is somewhat constrained, 2000-2004, but was chosen to take into account the period just prior to and after 9/11. *Rules of Engagement*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Tears of the Sun* are the most directly military films. *Rules of Engagement* sets-up the events of 9/11 in particularly graphic ways, especially when we consider the oft-denounced question “why do they hate us?” The film opens up a dialogue around that question, as well as the accompanying questions, perhaps more pertinent, “why do we hate them,” and “who do we mean by ‘we,’ in both formations of the question?” Each of the films, in their own ways, resonate with the dominant political and aggressive military ideologies of the pre- and post-9/11 period, and reproduce long held myths surrounding aggression, combat and militarism in US culture and history.

There will be an attempt, following Stephen Prince, to address the interface between the politics and ideologies of the films, the larger culture of militarism, and the histories out of which they evolve, especially around questions of violence and aggression, and the legitimization or de-legitimation, of both violence and aggression. Prince argues that popular films are always interpenetrating with the “desires and anxieties” of the culture and they “embody and refract the currents of social and political culture...” Films, “inevitably part of a collective cultural landscape,” he argues “define [and are defined by] the era to which they belong...” Nevertheless, “a perfect correlation” never exists “between trends in Hollywood films and society or politics,” thus always leaving open possibilities for reading political complexities into what are often seen as politically simple and circumscribed film narratives. Because film, “as a political [and commercial] medium” generally reproduces “the traditions and conventions of the political discourse” of a surrounding culture often devoid of “debate, ideological difference, and a wide spectrum of political opinion [and with] an inability...to articulate alternatives to imperial perspectives,” it is crucial that educators and

cultural workers seek out disruptions and fissures that open up debate, introduce oppositional ideologies, extend the boundaries of political opinion, and use films as vehicles for larger public discussions around the costs, risks and consequences of the US culture of militarism and its expanding “visions of empire.”<sup>109</sup>

Following Robin Wood there will be attempts to open up new structures of film public pedagogy that encourage audiences to engage “the possibility of making other connections and developing ideas in other directions” outside the world of film. He suggests we must recognize that “what happens in the cinema will clearly depend upon what happens in American society and politics.” To understand the world of militarized cinema we must work to understand the complexities of the world out of which and into which cinema emerges. In other words, there is always present a pedagogical “interconnectedness” between film, politics, ideology, economics, militarism, history and culture. Films are, Wood advises, always produced out of these categories, but are not necessarily a mere product of them. In short, films often go beyond the society out of which they are produced, while at the same time being a product of that society. It is in the “going beyond” feature of films that we may find cinema’s transformatory potential to challenge militarism and open up the possibility for democratic popular control of the larger cultural production apparatus, of which film is such a crucial component. A critical pedagogical approach will recognize that films, even the most reactionary, are “never monolithic,” but often “oppositional” and filled with “counter-currents” and “utopian moments” (Bloch) that must be mined in order to produce “the notion that it is within the bounds of the human imagination radically to transform and restructure our culture [of militarism],” a culture that is presented to us as a means of “protection” but that should really be seen as a “means of destruction” we must transform and overcome.<sup>110</sup>

Following Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan there will be attempts to develop “an understanding of the ideology of contemporary Hollywood film [and how ideology and films are] inseparable from the social history of the era,” while noting that “in American culture, film



representations of military prowess seem inseparable from national self-esteem,” just as “militarism in the United States is inseparable from [the regular production of bogeymen in cinema and elsewhere]” to elicit fear in the domestic population and support for the Pentagon budget and US military aggression overseas. Kellner and Ryan suggest that “ideological conjunctions” across film genres in which there are heightened representations of violence, aggression, domination and militarism “[are] symptomatic” of rightward and authoritarian turns “in American culture [and politics]” and “of revived military might as a result of threats to national self-esteem,” either real or invented. This conjunction is witnessed in a comparison between *Mystic River* and *Man on Fire*, two indirectly militarized films, and *BHD*, and *Tears*, three directly militarized films, all of which reveal heightened representations of and commitments to violence, domination and aggression during a period of “threats to national self-esteem” following 9/11. These “threats” to US self-esteem awaken conservative ideologies that tie “greatness as a nation” to “ability to exercise military power,” or dominance in interpersonal relationships. Those “threats” to “self-esteem” as measured by military prowess and willingness to use force and dominative violence can be both internal and external. Domestic opposition to military aggression is generally addressed by an increase in “threats” and the production of a culture of fear (for example, in an increase in horror, alien, and military films, etc.). External threats are generally addressed with the threat or use of violence against that threat. The exercise of military power in films, “hard ideology,” however, is frequently coded in a “soft ideology” in which “national idealism” is represented not so much in terms of the destructive capacities of US military power but in the portrayal of our humanitarian commitments through the image of “the American fighting man as a heroic liberator of oppressed people and as a defender of freedom,” or as self-defense.<sup>111</sup> In different ways, this “soft ideology” of military “humanitarianism” is manifested in *Black Hawk Down*, *Man on Fire*, and *Tears of the Sun*, and that of “self-defense” in *Rules of Engagement*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Mystic River*, and *Tears of the Sun*.

Following Carl Boggs there will be attempts to address the relationship between the US culture of militarism, Hollywood and the Pentagon, and argue that “war and the preparation for war resonate through virtually every region of artistic expression, though perhaps nowhere so extensively as in the Hollywood filmmaking enterprise,” if for no other reason than cinema’s ability to penetrate public spaces on a large scale. The “cinematic output” of Hollywood, Boggs argues, “has served propaganda functions for the government and Pentagon.” In the post 9/11 world, more than ever before, Hollywood films “constitute a significant ideological and cultural weapon in the service of U.S. foreign and military policy,” and the Pentagon based economic machine that feasts on and nourishes militarism. Much of the pedagogical groundwork for “public endorsement of [U.S.] military action,” Boggs intones, is laid by Hollywood “combat and action movies [that] glorify U.S. supremacy [and aggression],” and “validate anew the sense of national (or global) mission.” This pedagogical work is carried out partially by romanticizing, relativizing, sanitizing, spectacularizing and beautifying US military aggression and violence, he notes. Put simply, violence and aggression are portrayed as positive and celebratory when carried out by the US military, and negative when imposed by “the demonized enemy.” Absent, he argues, is always “historical context.” Young people are taught to applaud combat, glorify aggression and internalize “xenophobic and violent sentiments” seeing repeated images of “scheming Arab villains [who are]...detonating atomic devices, beating up women, kidnapping children, and generally acting like sub-humans.” Largely absent are scenes of the US military “detonating [weapons of mass destruction], beating up women, kidnapping children, [torturing people or summarily executing them], and generally acting like sub-humans.” If US soldiers behave like “sub-humans” it is generally contextualized in a self-defensive and protective mode in order to justify the actions. Furthermore, in attempting to produce a “seamless web of unity” (Bush) around US aggression, “the militarization of popular culture” works at “diminishing boundaries separating entertainment and war,” with the dangerous consequence that

more people, from a safe distance, equate war with entertainment and thus participate in endorsing actions that will eventually eliminate the safe distance.<sup>112</sup>

In line with Tom Pollard there will be the recognition of an increasing number of “films dramatizing noble wars [and warriors] against evil adversaries” as the United States continues its “global war of terrorism.” Pollard points to two films released after 9/11 *Black Hawk Down* and *Behind Enemy Lines*, (and, in a modified context, we can add *Man on Fire*, *Rules of Engagement* and *Tears of the Sun*, and metaphorically *Mystic River*) that project a similar message that has played out in reality in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Lebanon: “U.S. forces [and proxies] may defy the international community in order to rescue one of their own...if they are in the clutches of ‘barbarians,’ and they may do so with intensely destructive and disproportionate brutality. The regular appearance of “war films,” he argues, reflects “the values and beliefs held by filmmakers working within contours of the [already militarized] culture industry,” along with the idea that “few dramatic situations can compete with organized warfare for sheer conflict” and the catharsis audiences often feel when warrior “heroes” confront and decimate “ruthless, powerful enemies.” Pollard intimates an innate primal need for participating at some level in acts of aggression and domination, a need, he suggests, met vicariously by “combat films” in which people can “carry out violent acts of aggression regarded as taboo in non-combat situations.” Though Pollard’s critique is generally a radical one, he veers close here to endorsing a standard “violence is innate [i.e. inevitable]” conservative position, along with some perverse intimation that domination and decimation are cleansing and therapeutic. Regardless, Hollywood filmmakers have learned “it has become politically incorrect in Hollywood today to convey negative images of the U.S. military,”<sup>113</sup> and the celebratory aspects of militarized cinema will be addressed herein.

Following James Snead’s discussion of the cultural power of “mass visual productions,” and calls for expanded “ways of seeing...and thinking about what we are seeing [so that we] not only see films, but also...see through them,” there will be attempts at demystification of cinematic militarism

and suggestions to see “through” films in ways that develop skills to critically “scrutinize what films are actually showing,” and “figure out what the film is claiming to portray.” Beyond that we must also understand that the way we see the world outside and inside of film is partially shaped by the world we inhabit as film viewers. In other words, we see the world “through” the eye of films because of film’s pedagogical role as “influence machine,” a seeing “through” that not only colors how we view the world but also how we view films, and it is a form of seeing, in line with Snead, that requires regular interrogation. We have to see ourselves and the world through film, but also see film through ourselves and the world, and ask “from whose social vantage point any film becomes credible or comforting, and ask why,” and when necessary we must work pedagogically to discredit and discomfort the world as seen and projected “through” the film.<sup>114</sup>

The long history, and recent reemergence, of militarized films in the US, in the context of increasing militarism in the culture and military violence and spreading weapons in the world,<sup>115</sup> calls for a critical examination of the relevance of these films pedagogically, politically, historically and culturally in terms of not only how they reflect and project militarism and its related values, attitudes, and actions, in the larger social order, but how they condition the ways in which we take-up violent images, narratives and representations that produce levels of detachment and insensitivity to the diverse forms of human suffering and pain that result from military aggression. Giroux points out, “This suggests developing forms of public pedagogy that critically engage how language, images, sounds, codes and representations work to structure basic assumptions about...public memory...history,” military aggression and human suffering.<sup>116</sup> In recognizing the political power and pedagogical force of visual culture it calls for public pedagogies that counter the common sense assumptions and presuppositions embedded by dominant cultural productions around militarism by linking public knowledge to challenges to power in an effort to understand how to inspire individual and social agency and effect social change” at ideological and material levels, as well at individual and institutional levels.

Brian Goldfarb notes that any call to visualize films as powerful cultural teachers must recognize “the degree to which engagement in [film] technology and [the culture of militarism] and [their] institutions is [now] not a choice but an inevitability of life...shaped by an ethos of the visual, [of the militarily aggressive], and of media pedagogy.”<sup>117</sup> This does not suggest that different audiences might not critique and receive films differently, but they will do so within a range of interpretations appropriate to conditions,<sup>118</sup> especially given shared backgrounds, common institutional formations and similar indoctrination.<sup>119</sup> Understanding how films work pedagogically requires attempts to locate them in history, politically and morally, as well as socially and economically, so as to see and feel how particular sets of meanings, beliefs, ideas and desires are dominant and others subordinate. Understanding a general US “culture of silence” around militarism requires understanding how our education toward silence “is always articulated through militarized institution[al structures] and the [cinematic] technologies [the culture of militarism] sponsors and uses.”<sup>120</sup> This kind of critical reading is reflective and is an endeavor that moves from the political to the pedagogical. The critically reflective move should not be severed from a move from the pedagogical back to the political which is projective and calls for collective mobilization in order to intervene not only at the level of interpretation but at the level of reinventing the social order.

One of the reflective processes would encourage film audiences to consider the educative and political nature of militarized cinema, and interrogate the ways in which the cinema works under current social and historical conditions to legitimate, or challenge militarism and instill sets of beliefs that often become accepted as common sense in the culture. Furthermore, a critically reflective examination would ask audiences to consider how the films order or disorder their daily lives and whether they overplay or underplay social conditions of violence, fear, threat, terror, domination, and hope. Additionally, there should be reflections on what is absent in militarized film texts. For example, audiences should ask why military films so rarely attempt to provide a public

discourse directed toward peaceful resolution of conflict with social justice as the centerpiece of discussion, why they so frequently provide instead discourses in which ruthless violence dominates conflict resolution and individual combative heroics leave collective peaceful courage absent, and why human wrongs supersede human rights. These kinds of questions open up the possibility for moving from reflection of what is to projections of what could be by revealing not only what is present but also what is absent in militarized cinema. While it would reveal the ever-present military values of hierarchy, obedience, domination, aggression and force that play a powerful role in limiting public imagination and engagement it would also look at the contradictions present in these films by showing how military films are also a reaction to a social order in which increasing numbers of people are opposed to militarism and aggression, and where people are looking toward values of solidarity, questioning, equality, cooperation and peace. These kinds of interrogations reveal the battle of ideas always present between power and the people.

In the course of this study there will be moves to unpack these discourses and narratives, open-up to scrutiny their pedagogical ploys and implications, examine the ways in which aesthetics and politics work to position audiences and inscribe values and attitudes through film representations and discourses, concentrate on characters as representatives of larger social, historical and cultural forces, explore how character is used as a device to shape identities and crucially to condition identifications with particular notions of violence and vengeance, and also pursue possibilities for rupturing the narratives and disrupting the discourses in ways that open up potentialities for: (1) seeing beyond the culture of militarism; (2) imagining beyond violence and aggression as acceptable and effective forms of human interaction: and, (3) awakening our human capacities for engaging in solidaristic struggles for a more peaceful, socially just, non-violent, and democratic world.

Herein, one of the basic questions, largely speculative but linked to the facts of military planning and aggression, is “how do films reflect and help to reproduce the US culture of militarism and in turn serve and service power and the increasing militarization of US society and the world?”

Films do not cancel history, they “only remember or forget or invent it.”<sup>121</sup> One of our tasks should be to rescue from oblivion that which is forgotten, for example, the voices and suffering of the victims, as well as the primary source of US violence, i.e., air power, and to reveal the lie of that which is invented, for example, that US interventions are driven by humanitarian intentions or that we live in a hostile world against which we must heroically defend ourselves and the accompanying implication that our military aggression is really only self-defense.<sup>122</sup>

### **INTERPENETRATIONS**

*“Of course, **Syriana** is entertainment first and foremost.  
-- TIME Magazine, Review of the film **Syriana**<sup>123</sup>*

Oliver Stone, a left liberal, and William Freidkin, a center liberal, tend to agree that films function mostly as “entertainment,” and that they, as directors, are not responsible for how people take up their films.<sup>124</sup> Both engage in a discourse of apologetics for the increasing militarization of cinema and society, the ways militarized and militarizing films work in context as social, political and historical discourses, and they fail to take into account the ways in which cinema’s public pedagogical role is linked to other ideological and material articulations in the larger social order. They express a general, or feigned, ignorance of how films that promote militarism, hierarchy, violence, domination, fear, combat, threats, terror and aggression serve as moral, political and ideological links between private life and public discourses, personal desires and social institutions, individual needs and collective directions, present acceptance and future imaginings, and how films impose and expose certain ideologies, attitudes, beliefs, options and values into public spaces for consideration. They miss the crucial interpenetrating linkages films create between our everyday lives and the larger political structures, social formations, and the general level of cultural commitment to the military that circulates within broader sets of public and private institutions. It is difficult, for example, to screen *Tears of the Sun* outside the general cultural projection that the US military is committed to humanitarian intervention. It would therefore feel awkward to leave the

film and not feel good about oneself as an American “knowing” how our fellow citizen soldiers are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to save those less fortunate than ourselves. The emotion surely carries over into our everyday lives and how we take-up the next presidential announcement about military intervention.

Stone and Friedkin fail to understand that militarized films, as public pedagogies, instantiate and reinforce particular sets of meanings and identifications in audiences who already bring a culture of militarism with them into the theatre. *Black Hawk Down*, for example, cannot really be distanced from the general celebration of combat culture and soldierly solidarity that has permeated US society since *Saving Private Ryan*. It is difficult not to identify with the soldiers as victims of an under-funded, under-prepared, and under-supported military system, especially given our belief that we are the most powerful country in history, and not in some way feel that more money should be spent on the military to ensure the safety of the sacrificing soldiers. These filmic projections do not merely distract or reflect; they also project and inculcate ideas about how humans live with one another or against one another in the world, how we define ourselves and others, and how we should or should not resolve conflicts. For example, it is difficult to view *Mystic River's* “survival of the ruthless” Social Darwinian themes of vengeance and violence inside a post-9/11 US culture driven by misdirected vengeance and brutal violent retaliations, and somehow not find a way to apologize for and even legitimate the misdirected violence in the film’s conclusion. It is also difficult not to accept the film’s continual cycle of violence as somehow necessary (descriptive becoming prescriptive), and leave the theatre reinforced in the belief that violence and vengeance are a necessary and inevitable part of the order, and disorder, of the world. Militarized films, operating in a world of terror and aggression, arouse fears, desires, allegiances and visions that are never simply isolated within a filmic text. *Man on Fire*, for example, as a film that glorifies and celebrates the torture, hate and murder of those who are already our victims, cannot really be disconnected from the Abu-Ghraib revelations released while the film was in theatres, the broader social discussions of



immigration, and the “reemergence of fascist cultural formations.”<sup>125</sup> Part of the task of critical film pedagogy is to open up those connections. The impact, character, and force of militarized films is located in the various ways the films line-up with or against not only our assumptions and perceptions, but the institutional structures that shape our understanding and actions regarding class position, economic beliefs, and social and historical possibilities and limitations. If we enter *Rules of Engagement* carrying the assumption that it is impossible for the US to commit war crimes (the John McCain position), we will characterize the film differently than if we understand the long history of US war crimes. On the other hand, the film’s presentation of mass slaughter is so egregious that its apologetics for US war crimes may be undermined by its own brutality, leaving open the possibility for audiences to see through the indoctrination so as denounce the culture of militarism that perpetrates such vile actions. If we are reading and decoding films in order to read and decode the world, and reading and decoding the world in order to read and decode films, both require “a critical understanding of reality [that includes] denouncing it and, at the same time, heralding that which does not yet exist.”<sup>126</sup>

Films that celebrate war crimes (*Rules of Engagement*), endorse US military incursions (*Tears of the Sun*), make violent combat heroic (*Black Hawk Down*), revel in torture (*Man on Fire*), and glorify vengeance and imperial killing (*Mystic River*), may not resonate with individual beliefs and attitudes but they clearly pulsate within the larger culture of militarism represented by the Bush Administration’s projected hyper-violent warrior mentality, its rogue actions including torture and rendition, and its commitments to unilateral aggression and war crimes. Oliver Stone may argue that he is only reflecting the world as it is, and William Freidkin may claim that he has no agenda when making films, but films feed back into the culture as production and reinforcement mechanisms (but not without contradictions). What is crucially absent in both approaches (reflection and indifference) are questions about how, in a culture permeated with war, aggression, terrorism and militarism, we might interrogate these films both for how they work pedagogically as part of a larger

assemblage of material and ideological forces that reproduce militarism in the culture, what those effects are, and how they might be used to challenge the oppressive militarism and general popular acquiescence so pervasive across US society.<sup>127</sup>

Additionally, entertainment carries with it cultural messages, habits, indifferences and directions. A director's indifference does not erase the pedagogical impact (political and moral) of a militarizing film's reflecting and projecting hyper-violence, aggression and exulted militarism during a historical period in which the United States is engaged in "the long war,"<sup>128</sup> the public is increasingly offered fear inducing proclamations, images and discourses, we live in times of narrowly defined war and terror and are taught to believe that there are malevolent groups in the world dedicated to victimizing us, and all actions are justified on the grounds that we are defending our innocent selves against terrorism.<sup>129</sup> There is a general and wide-scale failure on the part of popular film critics, and directors, to connect the aggressive militarism, fear inducing terror and combat celebrations on-screen with the US violence perpetrated against Iraqis, the war of terror, the attacks against civil liberties in the US, and the general cynicism and political disengagement among US citizens. That failure is a political position, a largely disengaged position, and arguably an irresponsible and immoral position. The romanticizing of military violence and aggression, and the celebration of male bonding around combat, develop a narrow sense of political agency in which empowerment has come to mean wielding a gun with a willingness to use it,<sup>130</sup> and solidarity sinks to the level of fascist spectacle.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, this romanticizing of military "values" is a product not only of films but a larger culture committed to and drowned in militarism that creates the conditions for the production, distribution, marketing and reception of such films.

Making these connections is crucial to producing counter-pedagogies that develop skills, tools, knowledge and understandings that will assist in resisting present and future aggression and militarization and open up new definitions of and perceptions around individual and social agency. In other words, these connections could assist in producing a sense of agency rooted not in

domination and violence, but in cooperation and solidarity. In response to films and other cultural and political productions that attempt both to locate us within a set of identities and subject positions, and inculcate a set of values and beliefs, that glamorize military aggression, that celebrate mass spectacles of violence (i.e. sadistically torturing and killing people) and that directly or indirectly engender support for militarized hierarchies, pedagogies of opposition must be developed that challenge our deeply held assumptions and disrupt our presupposed modes of understanding. This will require not only the development of demythologizing skills (typically linked to an exploration and application of facts), expanded notions of literacy and intellectual self-defense mechanisms for the critical reading and decoding of film texts, but also a wider linking of films to political struggle, decoding of power relationships, and commitments to socially just and peaceful transformations.

## CHAPTER 3: A Short History of Militarized Films

*Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion.  
Four less brave, but knowing each other well,  
Sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aid,  
will attack resolutely.*  
Ardant du Picq, 1870<sup>132</sup>

*The filth and stench of war, The corpses on the parapet,  
The maggots in the floor.*  
A.P. Herbert

*“See in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth [sic] to  
sink in, to...catapult the propaganda.”*  
--George W. Bush<sup>133</sup>

In a country intent on global domination through military might where “we must learn to deal in straight power concepts,”<sup>134</sup> one would expect public space and the public mind to be covered in a constant “catapulting” of an exacerbated glorification of military violence across cultural domains;<sup>135</sup> the sanctification of US patriotism and militarism, the spectacularization (i.e. excitement, honor and thrill) of the military experience; the romanticization and sanitizing of military history and violence; the disappearance of both the primary victims and primary source and extent of violence; the aestheticization of combat with an emotional and solipsistic emphasis on individual heroics and small group bonding, loyalty and solidarity; and, the depiction of military exploits as heroic and even mythical (rather than as extreme and abnormal behaviors engaged and performed by people placed in extreme and abnormal circumstances).

As a crucial component of and pedagogical force in creating illusions and inventing realities, and reflecting and producing US culture, it is no surprise that these are standard components regularly repeated in the wide output of the “Hollywood War Machine”<sup>136</sup> whether depicting violence against Native Americans, Japanese, Germans, Vietnamese, Russians, Latin Americans, Aliens, gangsters, terrorists or Arabs. There is an expansive collection of militarized films in Hollywood’s cinematic history including over 3,000 directly war related films since 1939 along with many thousands of other films inspired by the male-dominated, action-oriented, hyper-violent,

Manichean, jingoist, patriotic, solipsistic, survival of the righteous (and often most ruthless), adventurous, group-hero/rugged individualist, superior culture, profit producing narratives common to military films. These include Westerns such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Magnificent Seven* (1967), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *Silverado* (1985), *Unforgiven* (1992); police films such as the *Dirty Harry* series; gangster films such as *The Godfather* series, *Casino* (1995), *Running Scared* (2006); sci-fi thrillers such as the *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *Alien* groupings, as well as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *Independence Day* (1996) and *War of the Worlds* (2005), that are all “thinly disguised Cold War films in which storm troopers, aliens, and even friendly androids stand in for evil alien military forces,”<sup>137</sup> recent historical epics such as *King Arthur* (2004), *Troy* (2004) and *Alexander* (2004); and spy-thrillers including the *Bond* series and the *Mission Impossible* films, etc.<sup>138</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

Though the introduction of the motion picture camera brought about a “giddy anticipation of the new medium’s novel ability to project motion pictures of real battles for the viewing pleasure of the American consumers across the country,”<sup>139</sup> and this “anticipation” has been realized in the mass production and glamorizing of cinematic military violence to an increasing number of US viewers, some filmmakers over the years have addressed the less pleasurable aspects of military violence, for example the charnel-house carnage, with the intention of promoting an anti-war agenda. There have been brief forays just prior to and just after WWI, and in the aftermath of the US attacks on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, in which some films have expressed abhorrence for, or questioning of, military aggression and violence. In the case of the “critical” Vietnam films (more below) it has typically been accomplished through a lens that suggests “it was bad for us,” leaving the primary victims of US violence faceless, uncounted and dehumanized, thus leaving the morality of these film productions questionable both for what they present to the audience, our pain and suffering, which is bad enough, and what they leave absent, the pain and suffering of our victims, which is much worse.

## **Common Themes Abound**

There are several common themes present in many of the films focusing on WWI, also often common to films that ostensibly take an anti-war stance: the excessively brutal, traumatic, and destructive nature of war (usually focusing on soldiers pain, or the pain caused to civilians by a brutal and damnable enemy while leaving absent the traumas induced by US violence); the momentous terror, slaughter, waste and suffering caused by war (i.e. war is de-romanticized); the forgotten battle-scarred veteran; and, self-absorbed, career and power driven and often incompetent leaders, officials, politicians or commanders who directly or indirectly abuse and betray the troops in the field.<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps the two most compelling theatrical anti-war films, both focused on WWI, are Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1931), and Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957). Both films are attacks on militarism and classism and suggest that the real enemy in war is not fellow soldiers on the other side of an arbitrary line but the institutions of class power and authority that drive war and doom soldiers, the ways in which arrogant and abusive power glorifies war at the expense of its victims and in power's interest, and the senseless slaughter, torpid terror and wounding waste of war itself. In short, the real enemy in war is the dehumanizing culture of militarism that plans, prepares, initiates and wages military aggression and slaughter. In most war films there is "an inevitable glamour attached to the fighting...In *All Quiet* [and *Paths*] there is no glamour. It is courageously bitter."<sup>141</sup> Both films suggest the real outcome of war is not glory but gore, not victory but violence, not fulfillment but an often fatal emptiness. "If the [war] dead could rise up [as they do in *All Quiet*, Abel Gance's *J'Accuse* (1919), James Whale's controversial *The Road Back* (1937), and Joe Dante's *Homecoming* (2005)<sup>142</sup>] they would constitute an army of the betrayed and brutalized carrying an indictment so strong that none could question it."<sup>143</sup> The bitterness of these films, however, often descends into cynicism. A critical approach would ask how we could take that bitterness and transform it into indignation that might fuel challenges to the cause

of the bitterness. Bitterness collapses a social matter into an individual sentiment; indignation opens us up as individuals to confront, in league with others, the social conditions that produce war and militarism. In the end, these films, though ideologically anti-war are not necessarily materially pro-peace, a position that would require an encouragement of the abolition of the institutions and conditions that give rise to war in the first place.

The 1914 film *Civilization* portrays a world restored to peace by the spirit of Jesus, “The Prince of Peace,” embodied in a soldier committed to redeeming humans from their too often violent ways, suggesting a disempowering and disheartening lesson that only through some power outside of ourselves will we ever overcome war. D.W. Griffith’s infamous *Birth of a Nation* (1915) depicts the trauma, brutality and destruction of the Civil War thus de-romanticizing war, especially for soldiers. His next film *Intolerance* (1917) also reveals the depraved and repulsive nature of war, though the film was essentially lost in the growing jingoism and propaganda surrounding US entry into WWI. He then released, at the end of WWI *Hearts of the World* (1919), another exposition of the savage character of war in which peaceful French villagers are tortured and murdered by monstrous and craven German soldiers. The shock and awe of heinous and crazed bombardment drives the maddened heroine (Lillian Gish) to spend an absurd and perverse night with the corpse of her lover suggesting not only that war is hellish and grotesque but also that if we learn to love war we will learn to love death. The 1927 film *Wings*, (winner of the first Academy Award for Best Picture and the first film to have the full support and cooperation of the US military<sup>144</sup>) reveals some of the reality of fighter pilot escapades. The crucial plot twist involves two hi-flying hero friends (Jack and David). After both participate in shooting down a number of enemy planes, David is shot down behind enemy lines, but survives. He courageously steals an enemy plane in order to escape only to be shot down by Jack who assumes he is the enemy therefore forcing the audience to question a number of assumptions about killing and war. The episode lends a crucial element of universal morality to the story and thus invites the audience to question both the validity of war as well as the

validity of fighting and killing to defend what in the end are really abstractions, i.e. lines on a map called states or countries, at the expense of human lives which have an objectively equal value regardless of the side of the arbitrary line on which they live.<sup>145</sup> While *Wings* maintains an anti-war element, even in the midst of sanctifying military conflict, the 1930 aerial warfare film *Dawn Patrol* foregrounds, in standard Hollywood fashion, war as heroic, infused with unfortunate yet courageous deaths, but carried out, in a Manichean world of good and evil, for just and righteous reasons, and sets the stage for WWII films.

As conflict was building in Europe toward WWII the largest grossing war film in US history appeared, *Gone with the Wind* (1939). It is a grim look at the Civil War and its aftermath, released in the midst of a rash of screwball comedies, westerns, gangster films<sup>146</sup> and musicals. Scarlet's first lines reflect the general public mood of the day regarding the looming war: "This war talk's spoiling all the fun at every party this spring!" The mood changed soon thereafter. By 1941, as the US was embroiled in WWII, Hollywood responded with a series of formulaic patriotic pro-war, civilizing mission, essentially jingoist propaganda films that featured resolute, stoic, epic heroes carrying out courageous attacks and dangerous missions against an ominous, sinister and depraved enemy thus glorifying war's exploits and downplaying many of the more grim, gruesome, carnage-laced, unromantic and enervating features of war. The pattern was repeated "over and over and over" in *Flying Tigers* (1941), *Wake Island* (1942), *Destination Tokyo* (1943), *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), *They Were Expendable* (1945), *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944), *Casablanca* (1942), and dozens of other films.<sup>147</sup> The diverse personality types regularly presented supply not only opportunities for dramatic development but also a wider appeal for the militarized values being inculcated as well as helping to extend and fulfill Pentagon goals of support, recruitment, retention, and funding.<sup>148</sup> Anthony Quinn, for example, appears as the token ethnic type in *Guadalcanal Diary* "meant to inspire volunteerism in the barrio."<sup>149</sup>



Similar jingoist films, *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), and *From Here to Eternity* (1953), followed after WWII as the US was embarking on its “global domination project” (Richard Falk) through military power. The growth in military power was vitally linked to both the development of the public subsidy/private profit military-industrial-congressional complex,<sup>150</sup> essentially a form of public welfare for the corporate economy and hi-tech industry, and a growing culture of militarism. The latter rally ‘round the flag film, produced in the midst of the US attack on Korea (between 3 and 5 million people killed mostly by US airstrikes<sup>151</sup>), notes “They’re pickin’ trouble with the best army in the world!” as it promises that the “Japs” will pay severely for their vicious attack on Pearl Harbor with the implication that both the “good fight” of the “good war” will continue and anyone who challenges the new global hegemon will pay severely. In all of these jingoist and patriotic pro-military propaganda films,<sup>152</sup> examples of US atrocities such as the fire-bombing of over sixty Japanese cities (138,000 killed, 787,000 homes and buildings destroyed, 2,625,279 people displaced in Tokyo alone)<sup>153</sup>, and numerous German cities (approximately 600,000 civilians killed by US and British mostly indiscriminate bombing)<sup>154</sup>, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,<sup>155</sup> the placement of Japanese-Americans in camps, etc., remain absent so as to *prevent* any sully of the “good war” myth, *preserve* notions of US infallibility, purity and righteousness, and *protect* against the introduction of cinematic material that might prove morally trying or politically troubling to US audience assumptions (and hence US power) or add degrees of grayness to the black and white world of Manichean good and evil so frequently portrayed in US war films and Pentagon propaganda.<sup>156</sup>

Sam Fuller formulaically addressed the Korean War in *The Steel Helmet* (1951) by presenting a small group of diverse soldiers (a former conscientious objector, a black medic, a Japanese-American grunt, a young Korean child, and a rugged cigar chomping white working class New Yorker) who survive a vicious North Korean attack. Through *Black Hawk Down*-like close-knit cooperation and individual acts of heroism they overcome a group of North Korean soldiers.

The narrow focus on ground troops bonding under the harsh conditions of man-to-man combat in the face of life-threatening obstacles is a standard pattern that continues to be repeated (*Black Hawk Down*, *Tears of the Sun*, *When We Were Soldiers*), to build audience identity, attract audience identification, and avoid the primary source of US imposed violence in war: air power.”<sup>157</sup> In Korea, the criminal bombing from the air and sea continued to obliterate civilians and continued to remain invisible in Hollywood films.<sup>158</sup> The carnage and devastation of such unremitting horrors have been disappeared in US war films only to leave the heroic acts and courageous struggles of individual or small groups of soldiers fighting “the good war.” This absence of carnage pedagogically distances viewers from the real impact of military violence on its typical victims, innocent civilians, and thus morally and politically distances audiences from historical understanding, moral engagement and political interventions that might criticize and overcome such abominations, but opens up opportunities for discussing the massive carnage perpetrated by the US culture of militarism.<sup>159</sup>

*The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954) celebrates the individual heroism and sacrifices of a US airman (William Holden) in Korea who plays a pivotal role in changing the course of the war, while the film avoids, again, both the momentous sacrifices and suffering of the Korean people and any questions around the legitimacy and legality of US military interventions and killing in, and destruction of, foreign lands. The film ends with an Admiral asking “Where do we get such [heroic] men?” intimating that life finds its deepest meaning in war when “real men” put aside individual well-being and happiness to sacrifice for the cause of national interest thereby inculcating viewer aspirations for heroism through military service and sacrifice.<sup>160</sup>

### **Recycling the “good war”**

War films continued to be produced, as did new generations of weapons and aggressive US interventions in the late 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and 2000s. The films continue “over and over and over...catapulting propaganda” through standard war film tropes including: male bonding, jingoism,

patriotic fervor, stoicism in the face of grave danger, rugged and heroic individualism, coolness while confronting sinister, Satanic and inhuman villains, and celebrations of US technological prowess and creative ingenuity while often returning to the valiant “glory days” of WWII. The propaganda power of WWII was captured by a comment in Charles Krauthammer’s genuflecting praise for Stephen Spielberg’s critically acclaimed *Saving Private Ryan*: “World War II speaks for itself...Only a moral idiot can doubt its justice.”<sup>161</sup> Such sutured moralism not only entrenches the “good war” trope but also pre-empts critical reflections regarding the power interests and political motivations involved in waging not only WWII but also all wars. Vincent Canby captured the cultural importance in suggesting, “With *Saving Private Ryan* war is good again.”<sup>162</sup> In short, films were, essentially as they always have, representing US militarism in ways that correlated with constructed audience assumptions.<sup>163</sup>

*D-Day: the Sixth of June* (1956) and the star-studded *The Longest Day* (1962) celebrate the tumultuous Allied WWII landing on the beaches of Normandy, France. Both flag-waving films reiterate the spirit of WWII as a “good war,” the glory of death in battle, and US mettle as unflinching and unstoppable. The gun-toting WWII film tradition of valiant soldiers driven by a moral imperative to engage and conquer a ruthless and hateful enemy continued with *Bridge at Remagen* (1969), *Patton* (1970), *Tora, Tora, Tora!* (1970), *Midway* (1976), and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), *1941* (1979), *Final Countdown* (1979), *Indiana Jones* (1981-90), *Empire of the Sun* (1987), *Schindler’s List* (1993), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *U-571* (2000), *Pearl Harbor* (2001), *Band of Brothers* (2001), etc.<sup>164</sup> (See footnote for discussion)

Most of these WWII invoking films demonstrate, to some extent, the hellish and weary nature of war but aestheticize it in such a way that it is both glamorized and exhilarating. War, in these films, is again presented as a force that gives life meaning (to borrow Chris Hedges book title) and the only really good and meaningful life, they suggest, is a life that has either fought in war, killed in war, or better, made the ultimate sacrifice in war. As uttered by the “poster boy for

heroism,” Rafe, in the “war porn” *Pearl Harbor*, “I’m not anxious to die, Sir, I am anxious to matter.”<sup>165</sup> “Honor, duty, courage, and sacrifice,” are the repeating tropes, “over, and over, and over” as suggested by Lt. Hart, in *Hart’s War* (2002), another WWII film that preaches “greatness,” and a Christ-like Godliness is achieved through the ultimate sacrifice by a courageous warrior for his men and country. Lt. McNamara, (Bruce Willis), senior ranking officer imprisoned with hundreds of other US soldiers in a German camp, heroically outwits the Nazis, leads his men through a tunnel in order to blow-up a German munitions factory, and then offers his own life to the Nazi commandant in order to save his men.<sup>166</sup>

The “Hollywood War Machine,” has sanctified WWII more than any other war. It is called the “Greatest Generation” war, and it is difficult to imagine critical films that might challenge the righteousness and morality of these atrocity filled conflicts (perhaps 50-60 million people killed) in ways that films have been produced, in limited and limiting ways, to critically examine WWI, Vietnam, and the Gulf War, and one suspects films in the future that will, in typically limited fashion, critically examine the 2003 US attack on Iraq.<sup>167</sup> “If it’s possible to call a war a ‘good war,’ that label would have to apply to World War II. Never before in our history was there such a clear-cut case of good versus evil. There is no ambiguity about [US] involvement in that war.”<sup>168</sup> The constant recycling of the “good war” discourse works pedagogically to imbue a certain (non)-sense that all US wars are, in the end, “good wars,” in which we the “good guys” fight and defeat them “the bad guys,” that the US (rather than the Soviets) was largely responsible for defeating ultimate evil, the Nazis, and, that US “wars” offer the possibility through courage and sacrifice of achieving “greatness.”

The recycling is also part of a reclamation process that rearticulates the nobility of combat and war’s heroic sacrifice, while continuing the corrective effort to overcome the multiform, and culture of militarism, threatening “Vietnam Syndrome,” particularly that part of the malady that

undermined the US meta-narrative of a patriotically unified (largely mythic) national identity. Both are vital components necessary within a thriving culture of militarism.<sup>169</sup>

### **VICTIMS ARE US: FILMS (NOT) ABOUT THE US ATTACK ON VIETNAM**

*“...the Hanoi government revealed on April 3 [1995] that the true civilian casualties in the Vietnam war were 2,000,000 in the north, and 2,000,000 in the south. Military casualties were 1.1 million killed and 600,000 wounded [5.7 million casualties].”<sup>170</sup>  
-- Agence France Presse, April 4, 1995*

The propaganda function of film and the cinematic glorification, sanctification, spectacularization, romanticization and sanitizing of military exploits presented new difficulties during and immediately after the horrors of the US attack on Vietnam, especially given popular opposition to the US aggression after 1970 along with revelations about US atrocities. The absence in films of both the primary victims, civilians, and the main cause of US violence, air power, however, remained intact. In Tom Pollard’s generally radical critique of Hollywood films about Vietnam he suggests, “By depicting the war in all of its innate brutality, futility, and grim reality, these films ultimately questioned the morality of all wars.” While the films to which he refers evidence the futility of the war, usually they do so by suggesting that the heroic US military was forced to fight a limited war by bureaucrats in Washington or cowardly protestors who never experienced the grunt work in the jungle (In *Rambo*’s words “who are they to protest me unless they had been there,” as though the lack of jungle experience de-legitimizes protest and dissent),<sup>171</sup> rather than by more accurately suggesting that historically war is always futile for achieving social and political aims, while it has proven quite successful in causing great destruction.<sup>172</sup> These Vietnam “War” films might serve to “question the morality of all wars” if they depicted “the grim reality” of the US attack on Southeast Asia “in all of its innate brutality” but overall they do not. Rather, they narrowly focus on the brutal impact of the war on the United States, typically by looking microcosmically at the aggression through the eyes, voices and experiences of overstressed US soldiers or betrayed and damaged veterans. As “grim” as that “reality” is (and we should not

downplay the harm done to and victimization of soldiers, on any side, in war), an honest and moral look at “all of [the aggression’s] innate brutality [and] grim reality” would not only include the myriad horrors suffered by Southeast Asian people and societies, but would emphasize those grim realities for they represent the predominant trauma, destruction and brutality suffered in the terrifying US attacks. In short, the films proceed at a narrow political level and a highly questionable level of morality by performing a historical inversion, i.e. they hold the mirror up internally when looking at the victims of war (us), and hold up the mirror externally when looking at the victimizers (them).<sup>173</sup>

Following a number of film depictions of Vietnam veterans as maniacs, vigilantes and killers in *Magnum Force* (1973), *The Stone Killer* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), etc., Michael Cimino released *The Deer Hunter* (1978), the first of a series of what are considered “critical” films, sometimes called “realistic,” about Vietnam. The film is grim, with scenes of torture (by evil, sub-human Vietnamese monsters who force GIs to play “Russian Roulette”<sup>174</sup>, murder (Vietnamese soldiers killing civilians – a family killed with a grenade), suicide (of an American soldier in a game of Russian Roulette), and hellish emotional devastation, and it thus challenges the notion that Vietnam was a “good war.” Unfortunately, the challenge is done narrowly on the grounds that it was not “good” because it was bad for us, as we are the key and visible victims. Nowhere is it clearly suggested that the US attack was bad for them (the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians). In *Deer Hunter* it was “our” body (national and individual) that was injured and tormented and in need of healing, and the primary suffering is ours. Largely disappeared is the suffering of the 4 million (and more) Vietnamese victims (and perhaps another 1.2 million Cambodians and Laotians). The film “rebukes us with...visceral visions of a war that...deeply damaged America.”<sup>175</sup> The film is critical, but from a right-wing perspective, suggesting, in a metaphorical set-up for the appearance of Ronald Reagan and a manifestation of a new militarism, that with stronger leadership in the form of a Hollywood invented “warrior-leader-savior...super individual hero”<sup>176</sup> who understands the deeper

meanings and necessities of violence in nature and politics, we can regain our transcendent place among nations. Furthermore, aside from suggesting that war is simply the product of not only self-interested human nature, but also nature “itself,” it individualizes and naturalizes the war and avoids any attempts at historically and politically understanding or contextualizing the systemic, cultural and institutional nature of the US attack (wars are not planned or initiated by individual soldiers or jungles). In addition, like many other films in the cycle, by naturalizing war it removes it from the arena of morality and politics, and lets off the moral hook both audiences and the nation.

*Deer Hunter* was followed by Francis Coppola’s operatic *Apocalypse Now* (1979) a study in individual depravity and horror in which a special-forces officer Willard (Martin Sheen) undertakes a dangerous, often surreal, upriver mission into the Cambodian “Heart of Darkness” in order to “terminate with extreme prejudice,” an imperious head-collecting defector Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando). In a scene borrowed directly from *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz’s grotesque jungle compound is “protected” by rows of decapitated heads on pikes suggesting a ritualistic, primitive and barbaric Cambodian hell into which he has entrenched himself.<sup>177</sup> While both the film’s title and Kurtz’s final haunting utterance “the horror, the horror,” suggest a hellish truth about the US attacks on Southeast Asia and war in general, the film narrative suggests that the real problem in Southeast Asia was a locally produced primitive corrosiveness and corrupting barbarism, and leaves the audience with the sense that the “war” was a mistake not because the US killed millions of people but because there was no way for our civilized selves to rescue the barbarians from their Satanic grotesqueries.

The Cambodians are shown as child-like, primitive “noble savages,” subservient to and dependent upon the superior visions and leadership (albeit depraved) of Western Man.<sup>178</sup> The film also redirects audience attention to individual insanity rather than systematic policy, individual killers rather than carpet-bombing, and provides that the solution to the madness of depraved killing is to eliminate the crazed and corrupted military individuals responsible for “the horror.” Because of the intimation that Kurtz was corrupted and driven mad by the Southeast Asian barbarians there is

also the suggestion that the barbarians must be eliminated.<sup>179</sup> In effect, the film serves as a form of “My Lai” style (or Abu Ghraib style) damage control, i.e. blame the carnage and criminality on individual rogues in order to hide the larger picture of institutionalized mass killing and devastation; or blame it on the victims, as in “they corrupted our good intentions.” The film does follow the standard blame the victim pattern by suggesting that the reason the US “lost” the war in Southeast Asia was because our civilized “good” selves could not overall, unlike Kurtz and then Willard after he kills Kurtz, fully adopt the “darker side,” i.e. the barbarian “evil” Cambodian/Vietnamese way of *killing without a conscience*.<sup>180</sup> The film suggests, absurdly given the facts on the ground, that we were simply too civilized to carry out the necessary evil to achieve victory. This lesson carries with it the trace that intimates “next time, if we want to ‘win’ we must unleash the full fury of our ‘civilized’ and technological might,” and thus serves as an opening in the revitalization of militarism in US “victory culture” that gained full-force under the Reaganites in the 1980s while forebodingly continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Coming Home* (1979) again narrows the vision of Vietnam by focusing on the (real) shocking impact back home, on veterans and families. Much of the pain depicted in the film is the consequence of two marine’s experiences in Vietnam, though peculiarly Vietnam itself is absent from the film. One of the characters, the deranged Bob (Bruce Dern) commits suicide to rid himself of the demons he acquired in Vietnam. His suicide serves a symbolic role in that it suggests a national cleansing of those demons necessary for a national reconciliation. In short, we must kill off history and our own weakness in order to again feel good about ourselves and regain our strength as a nation. The audience might ask “what is it about that history that we are not supposed to know?” Any closing down of historical understanding undermines both our morality and our possibilities for addressing and overcoming the continuation of militarism into the future.

These three “realistic” films present the US aggression through a narrow focus on personal psychology, mythic contestations, and individual struggles, thus burying the historical, political,



institutional, cultural and economic features and frameworks of the US attack on Vietnam. The constrained boundaries of vision and narrative offered in these films, continued in subsequent cinematic expressions of Vietnam, presenting a coherent, but morally damaging, perspective on how the US aggression should be understood in public memory and how it might shape the future. As noted above, what is absent is often as important as what is present in film narratives and imagery. The historical complexities of institutional prerogatives as well as the brutal and traumatic simplicities of the carnage of mass violence are largely absent. Public memory is shaped both by what is culturally remembered and what is forgotten, and also how we learn to take up cinematic discourses. Future generations come to understand past war through its representations in their present. The construction of the past, present and future of war through film “operates through a remarkable dialectic of memory and suppression,”<sup>181</sup> that shapes not only memory but also morality. Every “Vietnam” film, in some way, works to shape public memory toward direct allegiance to an increase in the militarization of US culture through direct or indirect celebrations of US militarism.

### **Vigilantes Missing in Action**

Ted Kotchoff’s *First Blood* (1982), the first of three *Rambo* films, opens up a series of reactionary and history narrowing post-Vietnam films that either: (1) celebrate vigilantism carried out by hyper-masculine super heroes; or, (2) celebrate missing-in-action rescue teams that in most cases cinematically serve to re-fight the war and this time “win.” These films recast history and provide opportunities for “us” to “win” this time, revitalize the wounded national psyche, show the US as underdog,<sup>182</sup> and blame “failures” in Vietnam on an unsupportive political and citizen apparatus at home. *First Blood*, category (1), continues the individualist, we were wounded in war, victimization ethic, while reinvigorating a return to a more direct and celebratory cinematic militarism. It naturalizes militarism through linking it to “nature.” Rambo co-opts a “hippie” counter-culture style of natural foods, Che Guevara-like guerrilla long hair and beard, comfortableness in the forest/jungle, and a general rebelliousness against everything that smells of

“the system.” Like many films in this genre it attempts to celebrate and promote militarized violence by linking it to a re-assertion of hyper-male power through a rebellious anti-authority character who claims to be fighting for *justice*, thereby recoding and disappearing the immense *injustices* of the US attack on Vietnam. The intent is to allow the audience to feel good about violence and aggression.<sup>183</sup> An anti-government theme, typical of many military films, is established early when the fellow-vet Rambo visits to open the film dies from Agent Orange poisoning.<sup>184</sup>

In *First Blood* Sylvester “Rocky” Stallone is the emotionally scarred, underdog and socially abandoned Green Beret veteran “hardbody” John Rambo. After being mistreated by and fighting against uncaring bureaucrats, pompous elites, contemptuous, arrogant “get a haircut” police, he emerges as the super-killing machine, hyper-masculine, vigilante, patriot, and combat hero. We are told by his former commanding officer that Rambo’s job in Vietnam was “To kill, period... [and] Rambo was the best.”<sup>185</sup> In the end, after it is demonstrated that Rambo is a very effective killing machine, it is suggested that Rambo, and by association the US military in Vietnam, could have won the war, as easily as Rambo destroys the local police and National Guard, if only the government and society back home had not abandoned the cause. This theme fed into Reagan’s call for a revitalization of the military to ensure that next time “we will win,” and might be considered the awakening of the “support the troops” movement that has emerged again in post-9/11 films such as *Black Hawk Down*.<sup>186</sup>

*Rolling Thunder* (1977) addresses the wounded, economically and sexually deprived and socially mistreated veteran from a decidedly reactionary, sexist, racist and vengeful vigilante position. Here the violence of the US attack in Vietnam is a poison brought back into US society (again suggesting “their” corrupting power over us) by shamed and victimized veterans who lash out against non-Americans in order to retrieve their manhood thus preparing the audience emotionally and psychologically for a re-enlistment into the 1980s hyper-masculine US military aggression against third world victims in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Libya, Angola, etc.

Absent, of course, is the poisonous violence and destruction left behind in Southeast Asia, including the violence of destroyed towns, farms and villages, hunger, sickness, displacement, disease, and the long-term emotional scarring of mass killing and injury.

*Uncommon Valor* (1983), *Missing in Action* (1984), *Rambo* (1985) fall into the **missing-in-action** rescue category designed to restore national esteem through cinematic rescue and victory and to both implant again the notion that the real savagery in Southeast Asia existed in the Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians, and that the US, again, was the real victim of the aggression. These films focus on brutalized and abused, but courageous and disciplined, US prisoners rather than the brutalized and abused, and courageous and disciplined, people of Southeast Asia. In *Uncommon Valor* a retired and tormented Special Forces commander Rhodes (Gene Hackman) recruits and prepares a rugged and disciplined group of men to embark upon a dangerous rescue mission of former US soldiers (including his son and the son of a wealthy oilman who finances the mission) still missing in Laos. The real enemy in the film is not so much the Laotians holding the prisoners but US government bureaucrats who have abandoned veterans. This sets up a common theme in the MIA films, one in which government officials and anti-war activists were responsible for the “loss” in Vietnam because they interfered with operations, failed to believe in the rightness of the criminal aggression and undermined the military mission during the war and then deserted those left behind. Rhodes instructs his recruits before the mission “While the politicians sit on their asses, I’m going to ask you to lay yours on the line.” In this film world, “nobody can dispute the rightness of what we’re doing.” Implied is “last time what we were doing was right, but the problem was that some people thought it was wrong.” Lost in the sentimentality is history. The humanitarian rescue, albeit militarized, of missing Americans provided a politically uncontroversial filmic device for launching successful attacks in Southeast Asia and thus offered a symbolic military victory and reinstatement of national self-esteem and military honor, crucial to re-enchanting the US culture of militarism and driving forward the global domination project. The narrative symbolism of ideological and military

victory in these films is carried out in the safe-space of both the uncontested future after the real war and in the context of a heroic rescue operation of brutalized comrades. The real “defeat,” as well as the political and ideological conflicts that surrounded the “war,” is left safely uncontested.

A much more reactionary and vitriolic version of the trope is revealed in *Missing in Action* (1984), the first in a series in which hard-body Chuck Norris leads a commando assault into Vietnam to violently rescue US prisoners held in extremely inhuman conditions by hateful, subhuman enemies. It is another attempt at rehabilitating militarism and restoring national honor by presenting super-patriot military heroes launching interventions to bring families back together and in doing so winning the victory against blood-lusting, freedom-hating, depraved Vietnamese savages.

Perhaps the most telling film in the captivity narrative genre is *Rambo* (1985). Before leaving on his rescue mission to Vietnam, Rambo, a Reagan-era symbol of blighted and disillusioned underdog manhood and nation-hood, seeking restoration through violence and vengeance, offers up the typical, but peculiar, narrative historical inversion, when he asks Commander Trautman, “Do we get to win this time?” In other words, “Will they provide the support we need to attain victory?”<sup>187</sup> An overmatched and outnumbered Rambo undertakes a series of violent and victorious episodes against evil “communists” (Russian and Vietnamese).<sup>188</sup> The episodes work as a process of individual and cultural regeneration that cinematically serve to combat the reality of US violence against the Vietnamese that was a reality of individual and cultural degeneration (for us), and social and cultural destruction (for them). Rambo, in possession of expansive, virtually omnipotent and omniscient, physical powers and mental acumen, is an expert jungle fighter and macho hero, well-versed in guerrilla tactics and warfare. By adopting these tactics and stylings, Rambo represents more of a Vietnamese fighter, a revolutionary warrior, a “freedom fighter,” than he does a counter-revolutionary insurgent US soldier. In a sense he performs a symbolic re-engagement in conflict with the Vietnamese where they become us, the counter-revolutionary “losers,” and we become them, the revolutionary “winners.”<sup>189</sup> Rambo does retain one crucial feature of the US military, an

inordinate capacity to kill and destroy in vast numbers, and that too is celebrated - repeatedly. His violence, in another standard historical reversal, is portrayed as defensive, and his firepower is minimal in comparison to what he confronts. Those he kills are portrayed in standard fashion as subhuman, usually faceless and voiceless, monsters. This falsification of history allows Rambo, and symbolically the nation, to not only “win this time,” again “stand tall,” (Grenada-style), in rugged individualist strength, dominance and patriotic splendor, but also align himself/itself with the revolutionary struggle for freedom. This allows a cultural reclamation of the moral high ground of the conflict in a way that attempts to link the “Vietnam War” to “the good war,” with the contemporary purpose of reinvigorating an indestructible culture of militarism and creating the proper winning nationalist attitude regarding war in the national psyche under Reagan.<sup>190</sup>

In the end, the lasting message of Rambo is one of not only patriotic love of country, but a particularly jingoist form of patriotism in which true patriots are those who abandon their hatred of war and aggression (because we really are the “good guys”) and support the re-inflating culture of militarism. When Rambo finally puts down the gun after having rescued the MIAs, he gravely intones, “I want what they want and what every other guy who came over here and spilled his guts and gave everything he had wants—for our country to love us as much as we love it.” Because Rambo symbolically represents the nation this is a coded version of “my country, right or wrong.”<sup>191</sup> (See footnote for discussion).

### **Not so critical critical films**

*What makes the grass grow? Blood, blood, blood!*  
*What do we do for a living? Kill, kill, kill!*  
-- US Marine chant, *Full Metal Jacket*<sup>192</sup>

Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986), Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), John Irvin’s *Hamburger Hill* (1988), Patrick Duncan’s *84 MoPic* (1989), and Stone’s *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) continue the ideological filtering of historical and political understanding by omitting “politically unacceptable or unpleasant features of the war,”<sup>193</sup> particularly, as noted, the impact of

US violence on the victims, US airpower (the main source of violence), the long-term struggle of the Vietnamese people for independence, especially the NLF, US intolerance for independent nationalism (anywhere), the immorality and illegality of the attack, the complexity and reach of the peace movement (except derisively) and the moral arguments against the war, the voices of the victims, and the systemic and institutional nature of US militarism and aggression. Each of these films also lapses into a distancing and de-moralizing form of solipsism by intimating that the real confrontation in Vietnam was not against independent nationalism but against either the roiling darkness in our own soul, an approach that existentializes, metaphysicalizes and de-politicizes the U.S. aggression while obliterating history and obviating any understanding of institutional power relationships; or the “war” was against un-patriotic, obtuse, pro-enemy peaceniks in the US. Furthermore, these films all approach the content through an air of documentary realism thus suggesting that what the audience is seeing is “the truth of war,” which again distances people from the barbarous truth of the attack. Additionally, the films present often technically striking, even strangely beautiful, images of the horrors of military violence (a conceit of cinema), thus aestheticizing, and therefore distancing the audience from that violence and death by locating them in the wondrous, even transcendent, nature of the filmic spectacle.<sup>194</sup> Carl Boggs plausibly argues that the effect of the spectacle is to “reinforce, indeed legitimate, U.S. military power and its interventions around the world.”<sup>195</sup> Finally, the films undermine morality by presenting the war as either existing in a realm of hellish irrationality, or in the realm of nature.<sup>196</sup> (*See footnote for comment*).

*Platoon* focuses graphically, within a documentary texture, on the physical, emotional and psychological ordeals confronted by US soldiers ensnared in the oppressively hot, lush and dense jungles of a hellish Southeast Asia, and their struggle to discover something meaningful about their lives as the forces of a mythical good and evil, symbolized by the noble Christ-like Sergeant Elias (Willem Dafoe) and the savage and Satanic Sergeant Barnes (Tom Berenger), bear down upon their

troubled souls. “There are times...when I’ve felt like a child born of these two fathers,” claims Private Taylor (Charlie Sheen) embedding the notion that military aggression and combat struggle is in our nature rather than in historical, cultural and political structures. The larger picture of the US aggression gets lost in both the religious and nightmarish symbolism and the individual existential contradictions and struggles to understand that which is presented as irrational. Taylor says, “Hell is the impossibility of reason [and] this place is hell,” adding later that he cannot tell the difference between “right and wrong.” The emphasis on the irrational undermines not only morality but also historical understanding. In the end, the emphasis on the metaphysical and irrational undermines both our knowledge of the US aggression and displaces any attempt to locate it within the bounds of moral discourse for if actions are irrational and metaphysical then questions of right and wrong become largely meaningless. Tom Pollard notes that any “visual sense of the enemy” is missing, and he argues that this “defacing of the enemy [makes] the audience question the righteousness and effectiveness of the war.”<sup>197</sup> Contrarily, I would argue that this standard disappearing of the victims of US aggression contributes to the belief in the “righteousness” of the war, and allows the audience to distance themselves from the suffering and pain inflicted by mass violence. This removal of the human face of the victims carries with it a double-dehumanization: that of the victims who remain invisible and that of the victimizers who find it difficult to identify with that which is disappeared, an identification that could open the victimizer to the possibility of re-humanization. It is true in *Platoon*, and in DePalma’s *Casualties of War* (1989), that US soldiers shoot and kill unarmed Vietnamese civilians; but the soldiers are reacting in outrage to the killing of their comrades. When the audience identifies with US soldiers as victims, it lends an air of acceptability, if not legitimacy, to massacre, while deflecting the ugly fact of US aggression.

The film, in line with the standard US government propaganda dispatch, also intimates that the fight in Vietnam was more about solipsistic struggles within American society, defending our freedom, and about bringing US style freedom to the Vietnamese. Taylor claims “[we’re] fighting

for our society and our freedom.” Because there is no critical reflection on these claims the film serves to endorse and further entrench these historical falsehoods in public memory. Since the film operates within the larger pedagogical context of cultural misunderstandings, misrepresentations and myths of the US attack as a liberation effort it swerves dangerously close to reinforcing the notion that the struggle for freedom in Vietnam (i.e. our struggle to liberate the Vietnamese from themselves) was lost because of a lack of fortitude and support on the US home-front. It therefore suggests that if future struggles for freedom are going to be won then we will have to support the troops and the US cause of freedom in the form of humanitarian and liberation intervention. This embedded myth inculcates two dangerous notions that require constant critical reflection and pedagogical challenge because of the regular repetition: (1) the US attacks other countries in order to bring freedom; (2) military might is used as a liberating force.

Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* paints, in a visually arresting manner, on a larger but still substantially mythologized and de-historicized canvas.<sup>198</sup> Kubrick investigates two themes prominent in most of his films: (1) the way institutional structures and prerogatives create “worlds of shit” and work to condition, often dehumanize, and mutate people; and, (2) the struggle between the heart and the mind/passions and reason, expressed in *Full Metal Jacket* in multiple forms, but primarily as a reflection on the struggle between “good” and “evil” in our nature and how conditions and circumstances, as well as training, can compel evil to manifest itself. In *Full Metal Jacket* the institution is the US Marine Corps (symbolic of the larger US culture of militarism in general), and the recruits are transmogrified into “killing machines.” Private Joker (Matthew Modine), with “born to kill” painted on his helmet, and a “peace sign” pinned on his uniform over his heart, when in Vietnam, narrates, “The Marine Corps does not want robots, the Marine Corps wants killers...indestructible men, men without fear.” In other words, the Marines want human killing machines and boot camp is presented as a pedagogical industrialization experiment in just that. The surreal, confused, insane, often individualized, world depicted when the film moves to Vietnam



(actually a London outdoor soundstage) suggests that there were no planners and initiators or powerful institutions behind the US attack, only flustered soldiers in a disconcerting world of chaos, irrationality and bewilderment forced to confront their own demons in situations where they must kill or be killed (partially true). Vietnam is nowhere present in the first half of the film, and minimally alluded to in the second. The boot camp sequence functions as a harrowing meditation upon the US culture of militarism's obsession with, and inculcation of, aggressive attitudes and murderous values, how that works pedagogically to create hard hearted killers, and the possible apocalyptic consequences that arise when a culture of militarism, engrossed with killing, too deeply inculcates and internalizes in its citizens the values, attitudes and beliefs that drive its brutal engine forward.<sup>199</sup> Sgt. Hartman instructs the recruits, "Your rifle is only a tool. It is a hard heart that kills." In short, this sequence demonstrates both the localized irrationality of "war," and the ways in which it de-moralizes people. The recruits chant, "Without my rifle I am useless...so be it until there is no enemy." This repeats the standard trope, and even the diabolical obsession with absolute annihilation. It suggests that life is useless and meaningless without aggression and war, and again, "war is a force that gives us meaning," especially when it portends the apocalypse. In short, war gives life meaning only to take it away. Furthermore, it suggests that everyone who is considered "enemy," must be eliminated, making clear that *genocide* is the likely consequence of this kind of training.<sup>200</sup>

While the drill instructor's intention is to mold weak, undisciplined, non-professional and "green" recruits into ruthless, professional "ministers of death," and disciplined killers of a distant enemy (again, mostly unseen and voiceless in the film), his lessons are taken to their logical conclusion by Private "I am in a world of shit!" Pyle who becomes the ultimate in monstrous "doomsday device," killing machines: i.e. one that has internalized the love of death so much that it apocalyptically kills its maker and itself.

The second part of the film follows Joker to Vietnam, but much seems un-rooted historically and politically and, again, largely missing, physically, emotionally and intellectually, are the Vietnamese victims of US violence.<sup>201</sup> The real pedagogical failure of this part of the film is that it refuses to take sides politically. The film collapses into a struggle for survival on all sides of “the conflict” (with the primary focus on US soldiers, their confusion, their pain, their demons, their existential turmoil, etc.) in a collapsed and crushed urban environment that invokes WWII, “the good war,” more than it does Vietnam.

*Hamburger Hill* and *84 Charlie MoPic* feign a radical critique of the US attack on Vietnam while in the end falling back into a celebration of soldierly valiance and virtues, Sisyphean persistence, and a depiction of “Vietnam” as a corruption of our values and ideals, rather than a destruction and obliteration of a foreign land and people. *MoPic* adopts a narrowly focused pseudo-documentary subjective perspective (infantry man’s point of view) to lend the film a sense of immediacy, legitimacy and accurate historical reconstruction (though the effect is, arguably, emotional distancing and moral de-legitimation), but without the careful analysis or critical reflection that would provide the audience with insights beyond the standard narrative look at the efforts of a small, loyal and struggling group of courageous and honorable US soldiers working through their daily routines and surprises in the daunting jungle.

*MoPic*’s subjective camera works to make the film more solipsistic as we see the world of Vietnam only through US eyes while completely eliminating the perspective of the Vietnamese (a strange option given that we were in their country, attacking them). One soldier proclaims, catching the mood, intention, and Protestant fundamentalist anti-democratic lesson of the film, “You’re supposed to do your job the best you can, no matter you like it or not. You do your job, leave right or wrong to others.” In short, soldiers (and by filmic linkage the attack itself) are not “right or wrong” they are simply determined killing machines with no moral choice. Here the film makes a slight nod (not untypical in this round of films) at introducing the corrupt and criminal nature of the

US attack. It is a standard anti-authority moment that attempts to provide the film with a rebellious attitude that in the end only serves the interest of the authoritarian and militaristic attitudes it feigns to challenge.<sup>202</sup>

*Hamburger Hill* is laced with gritty realism regarding soldier's grim struggles, harrowing sacrifices, extended suffering and dutiful dedication to maintaining national honor, but it is explored in order to create a narrative that in the end becomes an anti-anti war film, as one of the primary enemies depicted in the film is not Vietnamese NLF fighters or North Vietnamese communists, but the peace movement in the US (a theme also addressed in Coppola's *Garden's of Stone* (1987)). The peace movement is presented in a shrill, hostile, insulting, even violent, right-wing stereotyped caricature. It is an image with which new generations of audiences would find it very difficult to identify, and of course, these films are directed to shape public historical memory in order to influence and shape the future.

In fact, the "movement" is not presented as a movement at all, but as abusive, pro-"enemy" and non-caring individuals. In *Hamburger Hill* the "movement" is alluded to thrice, but its own voice is absent: (1) a soldier's girlfriend back home informs him in a letter that she must stop writing because the peace movement has instructed her it is immoral; (2) a Sergeant tells his fellow soldiers that people in the peace movement call parents of dead soldiers to tell them how happy they are that the son was killed; (3) the same Sergeant tells fellow soldiers that he had bags of dog shit thrown at him by peace protesters. He intones, "That's why I am here." The suggestion again is, "the real enemy was us (thus disappearing the victims), or at least some of us, i.e. the un-patriotic anti-Americans." In the future, it is intimated, that internal enemy must be destroyed if the US is going to win "wars." The lesson is simple: peace has no place in a culture of militarism in which the only accepted planning option is the military option. *Hamburger Hill* continues the narrow historical focus of most US war films. Here the action centers on one depressing battle, a futile and bloody assault by one company on one small mud-soaked hill in Vietnam in which limbs are blown off,

faces destroyed, and nearly every US soldier is brutally killed or wounded. The cinematic brutality verges on the hyper-real and the stark and excruciating depictions suggest an anti-war stance, but it serves more to imply that it is not so much “war” that is bad but “wars” in which we suffer casualties because of betrayals on the home-front by people who do not understand honor, courage, discipline and the harrowing sacrifice of our soldiers. In this perspective, immorality is placed on the hearts and minds of those back home that refused to support what are portrayed as courageous and honorable actions. Intimated is “if we are going to regain our morality we must support the military.” The primary victims are invisible and without voice, perspective or humanity.

*Gardens of Stone* takes a slightly different “anti-war” turn by announcing that the real anti-war protesters are the soldiers fighting in Vietnam. This serves a multiple pedagogical effect: (1) it suggests that only those who experience the horror of war can legitimately protest against war; (2) it very conveniently re-writes history by suggesting that the murderous US attack on Vietnam was undertaken as an anti-war mission (a logical impossibility, but a position that hawks the standard US “liberation intervention” propaganda line); (3) because the statement is made in a letter from Vietnam written by a soldier who is obediently carrying out his duties while having some doubts about the “war,” it provides the position with an air of legitimacy, thus taking on an Orwellian “war is peace/peace is war” aura. Gravity is added to his position when he is killed in Vietnam and the audience suffers along with his wife at his burial in Arlington cemetery. It is difficult not to identify with, and internalize the wife’s pain, loss and anger. But because there is an absence of historical and political context in the film, it is all too easy to redirect that pain into anger at the Vietnamese. Because we lack individual capacities for vengeance against distant enemies who brutalize our countrymen (always portrayed as defending the homeland and our way of life) this cinematic inculcation of pain and loss, and hatred of distant “enemies” can easily translate into support for aggression carried out by the US institution that does possess the capacity to carry out international “vengeance” i.e. “aggression:” the Pentagon.

Of all the films about Vietnam that attack the peace movement, perhaps the most venal is *The Hanoi Hilton*. About this film it also should be noted that while virtually every film about Vietnam concentrates its attention on foot soldiers in the ground war this film explores the “war” through the lives of imprisoned pilots who have been prosecuting the monstrous air war over North Vietnam. Though this is one of the rare allusions to the primary source of US violence against the Vietnamese, the film focuses not on the bombing attacks, the defoliation, the destruction and death among Vietnamese, but on the struggle of captive US airmen to maintain their humanity, dignity, courage and lives while being abused, beaten, insulted and tortured by depraved North Vietnamese prison guards and commanders in a Hanoi prison.<sup>203</sup> Because the airmen proclaim that they are in Vietnam to bring American values, particularly “individual freedom,” the brutal robbing of the airmen’s “individual freedom” while imprisoned by hateful Vietnamese implies that the Vietnamese are fighting against freedom thus burying the reality that they were fighting for freedom from a genocidal foreign invader. This projection repeats the standard government “liberation” propaganda line – heard again in “Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

The filmic depiction of horrible mistreatment of honorable, courageous, “bravest of the brave,” and virtuous US soldiers by an evil, inhuman and barbaric enemy not only paints us as the victim, not only locates us on the side of “good” in the Manichean dichotomy, not only disappears those who suffered the most horrors, but in this case, by using pilots as the victims of Vietnamese brutality, works to legitimate the bombing attacks that turned much of the country into a moonscape and charnel-house. There is little attempt to reveal why the Vietnamese might be angry at US pilots. The Vietnamese regularly refer to the airmen as “war criminals,” but it is mocked in the film as a form of commie brainwashing, stupidity and hatred of Americans.<sup>204</sup> The “we won” narrative also appears. The main battle in this film is not a nation protecting itself against a murderous foreign invader, but mostly that between a venal Vietnamese prison commander and the US airmen who try to stay alive in the face of brutal punishments and deprivations. The airmen win the battle because

the commander fails to break them. The commander is reassigned because of that failure, and before leaving he confronts the US superior officer and says, “Well, you have survived.” The airman responds, “No, we won.” Soon thereafter the airmen are freed and they return to the homeland. The main protagonist narrates, in conclusion, “What kept us alive was not love of country, but [love] of countrymen [i.e. fellow airmen].” This is a coded attack against “the country,” i.e. the people, back home and in turn the audience watching the film. We are led to believe that everyone back home abandoned the POWs and the US military effort, called all soldiers “fascists,” “lost” the war, undermined the battle for “freedom,” and, most importantly, were responsible for all of the grotesque suffering endured by the US airmen. Through a sly imposition of guilt on the people back home, and, by association, the audience, accompanied by the implication that real countrymen never abandon their comrades, the film maneuvers audience support for the military and militarism. A late 1980s filmgoer could easily conclude “I don’t want to be like those people in the 60s and 70s who abandoned these brave men while they were fighting, suffering, being tortured and dying for freedom and our way of life. Next time, we better support the troops so this type of thing never happens again.”<sup>205</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

Because the US is portrayed in these films as a liberating force attempting to bring peace and freedom to Vietnam while the Vietnamese are depicted as warmongers and freedom-haters, and the peace movement is seen as supportive of “the enemy,” there is the twisted intimation that the anti-war movement was really pro-war and anti-freedom, and that carries with it the clear fascist implication that it must be abolished.

*Born on the Fourth of July* is often celebrated for its intensely critical view of the Vietnam “war.” While the film provides important, if narrow, insights into Vietnam Vets Against the War, and Ron Kovic’s dedicated and heart-wrenching courage to fight for peace after being paralyzed in Vietnam, the film becomes more of a personal journey of discovery about internal conflicts in the US, and how the “war” was bad for us as a society and culture because it shattered our ideals,

promises and dreams. Any critique of the political roots and historical realities that led the US to attack and virtually destroy Southeast Asia is largely absent.<sup>206</sup> The concentration on the American experience and our national psyche again means the Vietnamese are absent as are any questions about the criminal nature of the US invasion or how this US aggression was not an isolated occurrence but part of a long-term, and continuing, pattern. The heartwarming ending of the film, in which Kovic hopefully intones, as he prepares to address the 1976 Democratic Convention, “Just lately I’ve felt like I’m home, like maybe we’re home,” suggests that the wounds are healed, we have found peace amongst ourselves, the “mistake” of the past, is just that, a “mistake,” (not a crime), and we can leave that past behind us and enjoy our re-found dreams in a free society led by the un-sullied Democratic Party.<sup>207</sup>

Perhaps Stone, in ending the film at the Democratic Convention on a Liberal hopeful tone, is attempting a brutal irony? Pentagon policy changes little from administration to administration. JFK launched the US attack on Vietnam in 1962 and the major escalations occurred under LBJ, both Democrats. Carter began the major re-militarization of the US in the late 1970s, picked up by the Reaganites in the 1980s. The film was released in 1989 after ten years of brutal US attacks on Central America that left hundreds of thousands of corpses dotting the landscape and eight years of the Reaganite’s re-invigoration of the US military machine suggesting that “if we are home again,” it is “home at the Pentagon,” and within a re-energized US culture of militarism. Also missing from the comforting, “we can finally feel good about ourselves,” “we’re home [in the Democratic Party],” pronouncement is any discomfoting realization that perhaps we should “finally feed bad about ourselves” because of what we left behind in Vietnam: 9,000 of 15,000 hamlets totally destroyed or damaged; 25 million acres of farmland destroyed; 1.5 million cattle, crucial for survival in an agrarian society, killed, and more than 1 million widows and 800,000 orphans. In the North, over 1 million acres of farmland were damaged, with much of it a bombed out moonscape; 400,000 cattle killed; all major industrial cities damaged and half of them totally destroyed; 12 of 30 provincial

towns completely obliterated with 16 more severely damaged along with 4,000 of 5,800 communes and 96 of 116 district towns. A critical and moral approach to cinema would take into account the costs and consequences, across the board, of military aggression.<sup>208</sup>

Susan Owen rightly argues that Hollywood Vietnam films “suggest that Southeast Asia may not have been a worthy candidate for democratic intervention.” What she fails to note in that suggestion is that Hollywood has repeatedly accepted and catapulted the myth that the US was in Vietnam to bring democracy but failed because of the unworthiness of the Vietnamese, and that acceptance and portrayal leaves absent the simple fact that the US invaded the country to undermine Vietnamese attempts at self-determination and national independence.<sup>209</sup> Virtually every commentary about Vietnam films discusses “the crisis of mythic male heroism in post-Vietnam American culture,” and how the “anxiety about what it means to be a hero slides into an anxiety about what it is to be a man. A threatened and deeply troubled masculinity...is...a recurrent feature of Vietnam films” and that weakened American manhood “is no longer adequate to the demands of war.” What is never mentioned, however, is how this “crisis of masculinity” somehow failed to rise to the level of turgidly manly Pentagon planners who maintained perfectly well their “hegemonic and penetrating masculinity” while continuing their planning and policy initiation as though the global domination project had encountered very little, if any, limpiness.<sup>210</sup>

### **COLD WAR ENDS AND HOLLYWOOD’S MILITARISM CONTINUES: THE 90S**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the sole global superpower intent on spreading its imperial wings (evidenced immediately in the attacks on Panama (1989) and Iraq (1991)), Hollywood continued its march of militarism with a dramatic resurgence of military films often made with Pentagon assistance. These films frequently celebrated war making as a noble and heroic pursuit while leaning toward terrorism as the new threat to our mythical values of freedom and democracy. Deeply resurgent were the conservative ideals of rugged individualism, jingoism, patriotism, military might, patriarchy, Protestantism, etc., all linked



to “the cultural and political dictates of U.S. Empire.”<sup>211</sup> The films included (but were not limited to): *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), *Navy Seals* (1990), *True Lies* (1994), *Sudden Death* (1995), *Courage Under Fire* (1996), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Siege* (1998), *Three Kings* (1999), *U-571* (2000), *Pearl Harbor* (2001), *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *The Sum of All Fears*, (2002), etc. “The new cinematic militarism” of the 90’s presented a slightly modified narrative where “US military intervention [is now] necessary to protect American values and Western civilization from hordes of demons and monsters lurking about in the post-cold war Hobbesian turbulence.”<sup>212</sup> It is “new” in that the Russians were no longer the primary enemy out to destroy civilization; it is old in that it rehashes standard tropes from Westerns, and other genres, including military films, from the past, in which law, order, freedom and democracy are the responsibility of the good guys, “us,” to protect against a foreboding, evil, terroristic and chaotic world, “them,” always ready to pounce upon us. It is new and old in that the films frequently call up the glories of past military victories and accomplishments with the goal of legitimating and generating support for the always continuing US military encounters and spending of the present. A number of the films repeat the Vietnam film “war is hell” trope. They do so in ways reminiscent of WWII films to suggest that war is necessary, heroic, even exhilarating, and a lesser hell than surrendering to the barbarian terrorists out to take away “our way of life.” The hell of war is presented as a noble and worthy self-sacrifice for the higher cause of the omnipresent national interest.

The increase in onscreen gore and bloodshed, and the “hyper-realistic” manner in which it was excitedly depicted through new film technologies suggests that Godard was correct when noting, “War on screen is always exhilarating.” As portrayals of “war” became more gruesome through the 90s, culminating with the gut-spilling horrors of *Saving Private Ryan*, Tom Doherty suggested in *Cineaste* that the horror was not met with repulsion, moral agony or disgust because the vigorous horror was overcome by the “stunning spectacle of sight and sound” that became “a joy to

behold” from the thrilling safety of the seat in the “amusement park” atmosphere of modern theatres. The films were “intense,” yes, but at the same time “hypnotic” in a way that made the grotesque beautiful and the sadistic sublime, matching in some ways the spectacular depictions of the first US attack on Iraq in 1991 in which massive and sadistic violence was portrayed largely as colorful fireworks displays that distanced the audience from the carnage beneath the repeated “beauty.” As Tim O’Brien has noted about the ugly beauty of war, “you hate it...but your eyes do not.”<sup>213</sup>

Phillip Robinson’s *Sum of All Fears* portrays the US as victim of a “Neo-Nazi” nuclear terror attack in which a small nuclear device is exploded in Baltimore during the hallowed Super Bowl “national holiday.” The terrorists are attempting to provoke a nuclear conflagration between Russia and the US that will destroy them both and thus allow Nazism to rise to a place of supreme global power. Though the film was begun before 9/11 its depiction of the near annihilation of Baltimore and the concomitant human misery accompanying a nuclear strike cannot but exacerbate anxious feelings of threat and fear in the post 9/11 viewing audience. Given that audience members are in no personal position to defend against nuclear terrorism, the film, along with other real and manufactured threats, feeds into public support for Bush Administration moves toward authoritarian governance, “Homeland Security” repression, and inflated military budgets that the public hopes will protect them against such terrorist horrors.

The film carries with it a triple ideological threat that pedagogically feeds the culture of militarism and the increasing militarization of the US: (1) Nazis are the main villains, and this invokes notions of “the good war,” thus promoting the idea that US militarism is “good,” and “necessary” to defeat the ultimate evils in the world; (2) Russians are semi-villainous and about to launch a nuclear strike against the US in retaliation for what they perceive as an imminent US launch thus tapping into culturally embedded Cold War mythic images of Soviet monsters (and nuclear annihilation), who were ultimately defeated (in the public mind and in US propaganda) by Reagan’s Rambo-like posturing and massive increases in US military spending; and, (3) Al-Qaeda and

international terrorist networks, though visually absent from the film, are clearly present in the public mind, given that the film was released after 9/11. By symbolically linking both the “goodness” of the US military in “defeating” the Nazis, and the purported necessity of massive US military might to beat down the Soviet monster and prevent Armageddon, with a cinematic nuclear strike carried out by international terrorists in a post 9/11 milieu the film works powerfully to tap into audience fears of terrorism. The film thus works pedagogically to stimulate audience support for the militarization of US society, increases in “defense” spending, and a deeper entrenchment and expansion of the US culture of militarism.<sup>214</sup>

The post-Soviet “New World Order” opened up fresh and freer avenues for US military aggression and adventurism and a reinvigoration of the global domination project partially on hold because of the Cold War. Hollywood supported the “project” with a number of films invoking the “good war,” cinematic concomitants to the reclamation of national patriotic triumphant character underway following the Cold War “victory” and the overcoming, in George Bush’s mind anyway, of the infamous “Vietnam Syndrome,” a malady that had sullied our view of ourselves as perfect thus undermining support for US aggression. As much as anything these films again serve to disappear the systematic and institutional nature of US militarism, as well as the political, ideological and economic forces and interests that drive US militarism, alternatively locating aggression in the mysteries of nature (as though nature outside of human institutions is in possession of cruise missiles), or in the demonic evil of others, two sources outside of audience control. The failure, or refusal, to present to US audiences the facts of US militarism and the institutions and policies that drive its engine, works to undermine possibilities for audiences developing an emancipatory knowledge that draws new sets of values from new sets of facts by using that knowledge not only as a force for reshaping ideas but for using the ideas for reshaping material reality.

Terrence Malick’s WWII “Battle of Guadalcanal” epic, *The Thin Red Line*, offers philosophical speculations and ruminations on the sources of war. One soldier, worn down by the

brutal conditions of hellish combat, asks where the great evil of war comes from, how did it come into the world, and “what seed, what root did it come from?” The film visually and rhetorically answers the question by suggesting that it is nature that is the fundamental source of conflict: “Why does nature vie with itself; the land contend with the sea? Is there an angry power in nature?” the narrator intones (*see footnote for discussion*)<sup>215</sup>. The film places human values in a subservient position to the “values” of war. One character, Captain Staros, often referred to as “idealistic” in reviews, but I would argue “realistic,”<sup>216</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*) is relieved of his command of troops and sent back to the US because he fails to take the military “realist” position that believes human life (flesh and blood) must be needlessly sacrificed in the interests of the “life” of the state (abstraction). Intimated is the idea that war is nature and nature is more powerful than human morality, therefore we must surrender ourselves to and not question the higher power of nature. In fact, the higher power to which Staros surrenders is the power of US military might that works to protect and extend State power. In short, the film falsely argues that because needless slaughter is a fact of war, war is a fact of nature and nature is fundamental, it follows that militarism is a fundamental part of nature about which we can do nothing to stop anymore than we can step in and stop nature.

Spielberg’s tortuously “realistic” WWII combat film *Saving Private Ryan (SPR)* taps deeply into public memories of the “good war,” and its theme of bonding, “fighting for each other”<sup>217</sup> brotherhood, already largely constructed by cinema, while also relying heavily “on the strategy of victimization,” the idealizing of heroism, and “the murderous immediacy of the world into which [soldiers] are thrust,” already prevalent in numerous Vietnam films.<sup>218</sup>

The *Saving Private Ryan* focus on WWII film norms, along with the bloody and grotesque “realism,” deflects viewers from asking larger questions surrounding that conflict, and war in general...a standard practice in US “war” cinema. Additionally, the narrow, distressing and immediate focus on the subjective engagements of the US soldiers on the ground largely empties

politics and history from the film thus allowing Spielberg to “uncontroversially” present an “authenticity” of battle scenes as a safe substitute for the political complexities of war. As Phillipa Gates points out, such films avoid the crucial questions surrounding why the US is always engaged in war and whether military aggression and violence is wrong or right, and instead, in order to safely avoid these larger questions, “focus on the fact that...the men fighting it are doing so for the right reasons,” at least in their own minds.<sup>219</sup> In short, the morality of war trumps the politics of war by never questioning the morality, thus leaving the audience with little option other than support for war. Private Caparzo (Vin Diesel) lets it be known that the soldiers are not simply there to perform some duty; they are there to do “the decent thing.” And in the end they do, when they assist, at the cost of most of their lives, Private Ryan, and others, in defeating German tanks and soldiers in order to defend one small, but key bridge.<sup>220</sup> When they finally find Ryan he refuses to leave his fellow soldiers, expressing a desire to follow orders and defend his post, meanwhile advising Miller to “Tell [my mother]...I [am] with the only brothers that I have left---and that there was no way I was going to desert them,” suggesting a peculiar link between “family values” and military violence. While this intimates a noble and heroic sense of solidarity, it is used within the context of supporting militarism. It produces a sentimental allegiance to the soldier who serves as the filmic symbol of US martial prowess, commitment and allegiance.

Because of the way the film is framed, beginning in the future and returning to the future, with Ryan standing in the Normandy soldier’s graveyard amidst thousands of crosses, looking for and finding Captain Miller’s grave, we are led to believe that the answer to the individual versus group moral dilemma is “yes,” we should sacrifice the many for the few, it is sometimes not only necessary to do so to protect the future, but that “self-sacrifice in the service of justice” is the greatest honor.<sup>221</sup> And because Ryan, in the end, through a set of questions and answers about living a good life, symbolically represents “the good life” we the US have led since “defeating” the ultimate “bad life” of Nazi evil, the film reaffirms the idea that US intentions are “good.” In turn it

suggests the US must use its military might to protect “the good life,” won in, and continually protected by, “good wars.” *Saving Private Ryan* reflects something held in common by most of the films representing the new cinema of militarism of the 90s (common to most “war” films of all periods): the portrayal of the US as victim by focusing repeatedly, gruesomely and extensively on US casualties, suffering and damage. In these films, it is typically done to set up a countering fight for and winning of a victory over the demons distributing the sorrows thus establishing the US soldiers as not only heroes meeting the ultimate test of character, but also moral victors.

Louis Menand notes another effect of the solipsistic focus: the standard disappearance of the primary victims, civilians. Menand describes witnessing *Saving Private Ryan* audience members weeping when US troops were killed, or when Mrs. Ryan fainted upon hearing three of her sons were killed, etc., but observing very little concern or emotion expressed when German soldiers were killed, or any consideration of how German mothers may have felt to hear of their sons killed in battle, or how people living and dying in bombed out cities may have felt (a reality not experienced in the US). He then adds, “What makes war appalling isn't the possibility that someone will maim or kill you; it is the possibility that you will maim or kill someone else.”<sup>222</sup> While the point may be questioned, it alludes again to the solipsistic and immoral position taken by US films and how they construct war in the public mind by refusing to address the complex emotional, physical and psychological pain that accompanies killing, for both the victims and the victimizers.

It is a historical coincidence that the US attack on Yugoslavia occurred “in the midst of a nationwide vogue for a bygone war,” largely driven by *Saving Private Ryan*. There is no point over the last sixty years at which a film would not coincide with some form of direct or indirect US military aggression, so the reciprocal impact, is constant. What that impact is leaves open many questions and avenues for exploration. In *American History/American Film* the editors write, “...it is impossible to discover whether films serve more to shape popular attitudes or reflect them.”<sup>223</sup> Given where military plans and decisions are made, among elites, how the reciprocal nature of the

Pentagon/Hollywood relationship operates to shape scripts and images, and how there are shared interests among elite sectors across the culture, it seems clear that war films shape more than reflect popular attitudes, but do reflect and are shaped by elite attitudes. This is not to say that what is reflected is not in response to popular attitudes, but the reflection is generally offered in order to shape that reflection toward interests other than public interest.

It is to some extent clear that militarized films and the ways in which “war” is depicted, in J. Weisberg’s view, “subtly influence the way...most Americans think about [military crises].” He wonders whether these films that glamorize war, glorify military violence, sanctify US patriotism and militarism, spectacularize the military experience, romanticize and sanitize military history, disappear both the primary victims and primary source and extent of violence, aestheticize combat with an emotional emphasis on individual heroics and small group bonding, loyalty and solidarity, and depict military exploits as heroic and even mythical “make us more eager to fight...or more reluctant?” These films, he intones, frequently “sober us to the physical reality of war,” but they do so in ways that are “deeply nostalgic,” so that the nostalgia serves as an intoxicating, rather than a sobering, agent in how we respond to the carnage. In the end, it is the celebratory nature of the representations in which they revere war as “the proving ground of manhood...the ultimate test of character [and our ultimate] national bonding experience” that leads us to gravitate toward “eagerness” rather than “reluctance” when it comes to supporting US militarism.

## **CHAPTER 4: “Waste the Motherfuckers!”** **“Rules of Engagement’ and the Pedagogy of US War Crimes”**

*These crimes, carried out every day before the eyes of the world,  
render all who do not denounce it accomplices of those who commit it,  
so that we are being degraded today for our future enslavement.*

-- Jean Paul Sartre, “On Genocide”<sup>224</sup>

*“The architects of power in the United States must create a force that can be felt but not seen... Power remains strong when it remains in the dark; exposed to the sunlight it begins to evaporate.”*

-- Samuel Huntington,

*“If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we will not recognize it in ourselves.”*

-- Carlos Fuentes, “The Mirror of the Other”<sup>225</sup>

“Waste the motherfuckers!” screamed by a maniacal “no regrets” US marine war criminal Colonel Terry Childers (Samuel L. Jackson) is immediately followed by a US Marines Special Operation’s bloody massacre of 83 Arab civilians, mostly women and children, along with the critical wounding of hundreds more. “Waste the motherfuckers!” reverberates hatefully off the screen, in William Friedkin’s inhumane, pro-war crime, and degraded “Rules of Engagement” (*Rules*) (2000).<sup>226</sup> The dehumanizing phrase, the crimes carried out before our eyes on screen, the consequent demonizing of Arabs, the degenerative process of heroizing the war criminal, and the legitimizing of war crimes, echo pedagogically into the past and into the future. The film opens hauntingly in the past, in the foreboding jungles of 1968 Vietnam, a period of the US attack on Vietnam that historian Marilyn Young refers too as “Bloodbaths.”<sup>227</sup> The scene depicts, in grueling, blood splattering, agonizing slow motion a “massacre”...of US soldiers ambushed in a swamp by jungle-meshing Vietnamese forces. Massacres (perpetrated by the US) were not unusual in Vietnam, reporting of them was. Ground massacres, though frequent, pale in comparison to massive massacres carried out by the largely “unseen” US air power, completely absent from the film.<sup>228</sup> (*See footnote for facts*)

The grueling cinematic presentation of the massacre of US soldiers in *Rules* performs, in isolation, a double rewriting of history: through commission and omission. It omits any context in



which an audience in 2000 and beyond might place the massacre. For example, there is no context that might lead to the simple, but crucial, questions, “What were heavily armed US soldiers doing hunting and killing Vietnamese in Vietnam in the first place?” Or, more starkly, “What right does the US have to kill people in their own country?” The narrow focus also leaves the audience with the impression that the primary victims of violence and massacre in Vietnam were outmanned and outgunned US soldiers. Because the “massacre” of US soldiers is coupled with a killing of a prisoner of war (a war crime) by Childers in an attempt to stop “the massacre,” it leaves the impression that US war crimes in Vietnam were somehow justified, even cathartic, in self-defense against the despicable cruelty of the “motherfucker” Vietnamese who could only be stopped by “war crimes” of a lesser sort. In short, it leaves the audience with the impression that doing the wrong thing, committing war crimes, is really doing the right thing, because our “war crimes” are carried out for the “right reasons,” i.e. “self-defense” in the narrow sense of protecting soldiers in the immediate circumstances, and “self-protection” in the larger sense of protecting “civilization” and some spiritualized entity, “America,” from a hateful enemy. One would not get the impression from *Rules* (or any other Hollywood Vietnam film) that the United States was the attacking country perpetrating large-scale massacres as part of “search and destroy” mission policy, including “Operation Wheeler Wallawa” which killed an estimated 10,000 civilians, of which My Lai’s more than 500 civilians were only a small part.<sup>229</sup>

In short, the “rules of engagement” in Vietnam included permission to “free-fire,” i.e. kill everything and anyone. Nor, from *Rules* would one get the impression that the Vietnamese were defending themselves against and resisting a US attack that essentially destroyed much of the country.<sup>230</sup> In *Rules* the theme of massacre reappears later in Yemen in the “Waste the motherfuckers!” scene that visually carries with it the photographic trace of the horror of My Lai (more on this below). The coded representation of the “wasting of motherfuckers” inside *Rules*

pedagogically prepares citizens to support the culture of militarism's wasting of people beyond the cinema.<sup>231</sup> (*See footnote for facts*).

Five years after *Rules*, and one year after the wasting of Fallujah,<sup>232</sup> “waste the motherfuckers” continues to echo in Iraq as an anticipated increase in already mass murderous US air strikes lies on the horizon, and pro-violence US military films continue to dot the landscape as witnessed in *Jarhead* (2005), the jingoist fest *Annapolis* (2006), and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). Seymour Hersch reports in the *New Yorker* that the US in Iraq is “just whacking [i.e.wasting] targets—it’s a reversion to the Stone Age...[it] will get very ugly...on search and destroy missions [and] more civilians will be killed.”<sup>233</sup>

Militarized cinema of the *Rules of Engagement* sort in an increasingly militarized and aggressive US culture of militarism continues to provide sites of convergence for representing themes which repeat themselves regularly on screen and off: (1) what is deemed the “justifiable” use of the ferocious and highly destructive military might of the United States, even when it is used to perpetrate war crimes; (2) the assumed legitimacy of the “rule of force” over the “rule of law” in global affairs; (3) the demonizing and barbarization of the incomprehensible “other,” especially Muslims (witnessed daily again in the US/Israel attack on Lebanon 2006); (4) the rewriting of (and distancing of the public from) historical facts and understanding in the interest of US power; (5) the hyper-masculine, superman-like and brutal hardness of individual soldiers along with the heroizing of those soldiers; (6) the cathartic and spiritual nature of violence; (7) portrayals of offensive actions as defensive in nature; (8) the glories of nationalism, jingoism and patriotism; (9) the individualization of systematic policy; (10) the obfuscation of historical and institutional prerogatives, plans, policies and practices; (11) a US morality that is beyond good and evil, i.e. a coded “inhumanity” that places the US in the realm of angels or Gods, ascendant beings above the dictates of law and reason, rather than in the murky and muddy, barbaric and bloody gutters of law governed and reason shaped humanity.

In Stuart Klawans' phrase these multimodal/multi-indoctrinal militarized films are "a continuation of war by other means,"<sup>234</sup> in that they perform a pedagogical role in preparing a culture and population to either accept and endorse, or remain indifferent to and apathetic toward US war crimes and aggression and the pain and suffering of the victims. Klawans' "war" is generally a "war" against the values, attitudes, allegiances, concerns, interests and opinions of the US population, carried out with the intent of distancing the public from their own moral beliefs and values, political attitudes and allegiances, and individual opinions and hopes about the use of military force and public expenditures (as noted in the PIPA study, the public, in general, is opposed to the unilateral use of force and to massive military budgets). The pedagogical goal, conscious or unconscious, is to ensure public ratification of elite military and economic decisions and, in James Madison's phrase "to protect the [enlightened] minority of the opulent from the [ignorant] majority." To do so it is necessary to engineer those beliefs, attitudes and opinions, and reshape concerns and interests, in the direction of either willing or tacit support for criminal US military actions on the one hand, and on the other to inspire, often through offering up external threats to induce fear and surrender, continuing support for a largely Pentagon driven neoliberal-military-industrial-media global complex. In short, the public must be pedagogically maneuvered to subordinate itself to existing power structures in the interest of the power structures and in general remain bystanders and spectators to history while the foundations of life become liquid beneath our feet.<sup>235</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*).

### **Why "We" Hate "Them" and "They" Hate "Us"**

Screening again (post 9/11 and post US attack on Iraq) *Rules of Engagement* (written by James Webb, former US Secretary of the Navy<sup>236</sup>), starring Samuel L. Jackson as Marine Colonel Terry Childers and Tommy Lee Jones as Colonel Hayes Hodges, opens up numerous questions and answers regarding "why they hate us" and "why we hate them." *Rules of Engagement* was the number one US box office movie for two weeks in April 2000, when its scenes of mass murder of

Arab civilians were greeted by cheers and laughter.<sup>237</sup> A critical look at the film will, in the interest of protecting against distorting and falsifying history and making the film live in history, link the atrocities displayed in the film (and others like it) to the atrocities playing out in Iraq and elsewhere. We should also link the images of the 1968 My Lai massacre to photographs of massacred Yemeni civilians displayed in the film and note how suspiciously and hauntingly reminiscent are both sets of horribly blood drenched photographs.

The film's prologue set in 1968, as noted, replete with war crimes in Vietnam, sets the stage for a reframing of history that suggests that the mass murder of civilians carried out by good men, in bad conditions, driven by an ideology of hardness, confronted by an America hating enemy, is justified. Additionally, the film proper reinforces stereotyped assumptions about Arabs and perceptions in the US that all Arabs are driven in life by a search to find renewal by following Allah's command to "kill Americans, and plunder their possessions, both civilians and military."<sup>238</sup> In short, as stated absurdly in the film, "to kill Americans is a duty...for every Muslim who is able." From where this duty comes, other than the intimated Koran demand for "jihad," we are provided no idea, "but since even the children are consumed by it, we suspect that it is somehow engrained in the psyche of the Arab."<sup>239</sup> In addition, Arabs are rarely presented as individuals, but rather as a frenzied out-of-control group protesting violently outside the US embassy, thus making them easier to kill. They religiously and robotically repeat over and over an un-translated ear-piercing shouted chant that we can only presume might be, in the context of the rest of the film, "Death to All Americans, Death to All Americans, Death to All Americans, etc."<sup>240</sup>

The linking of US war crimes in Vietnam with US war crimes in Yemen 30 years later in the context of the latter's pretension of US innocence built on motives of self-defense against an America-hating enemy out to destroy us and everything we stand for works not only to legitimate the "rule of force" over the "rule of law" but retrospectively links the demonized and barbarized Arabs to the Vietnamese thus suggesting that they too were demonic barbarians out to destroy us and

everything we stand for, which in turn globalizes the idea of “them hating us.” This reinforces the standard Hollywood “Western” trope that we are “the innocent good guys” in a world of “evil guilty savages.” The linkage then works to justify the war crimes in Vietnam, provide catharsis for the “stain” of Vietnam, recompose Vietnam as a US defensive action, and further celebrate the tough-minded, brutal hardness of the hyper-masculine US soldier sacrificing for our defense against “ultimate evil.” When linked to the later “not guilty” courtroom verdict in *Rules* and the salutary and subordinating salute proffered by Vietnamese Colonel Cao (who solidifies the “innocent” verdict) that closes the film, it deeply inscribes the notion that an immoral US is somehow beyond good and evil and operating at a level of ascendant engagement closer to that of angels and Gods rather than human beings.

While this inscribing of stereotypes, xenophobia, immorality, bigotry and racism is not new in US cinema, it is now, in line with US goals and actions in the Middle East and concomitant with the collapse of the Soviet Union, more frequently exploring a new aesthetic of sounds, images, and characters in which the Middle East is, and Muslims are, a central location and progenitor for anti-US hatred, social disruption, cultural outrage, representations of pathology, commitments to violence, foreboding threats, and moral malfeasance all at the expense of the United States. It thus works to generate support for Pentagon policies in the region.<sup>241</sup> (*See footnote for comment*) Godfrey Cheshire, writing for the “Independent Weekly,” noted “...Hollywood’s Arab-bashing smells to high heaven, but this film [*Rules of Engagement*] manages to stun nonetheless.”<sup>242</sup> Writing for the Toronto Star, Bruce Kirkland added “it has something to offend every political sensibility... Little attempt is made to humanize Yemeni people ... they are stock villains, human cattle ready for herding and slaughter to demonstrate the right and might of the US policeman's role.”<sup>243</sup> All of this repeated negative representation and stereotyping, in turn, works to legitimate US intervention to quell the barbarism of “the nasty natives,” to protect and expand US interests, to prop up and advertise hyper-masculine visions of US military heroes, to exert and impose US civilization (in the

interest of the natives and “democracy,” of course) through massive military might and mass murder. In short, it supports and encodes the US culture of militarism.

After the opening sequences in the steamy and murderous jungles of Vietnam wherein Childers’ war crime execution of a Vietnamese prisoner of war saves the life of Hayes Hodges, *Rules* moves forward nearly 30 years to Camp Lejeune for Hodges’ retirement party from the marines after 30 years of essentially lawyerly desk duty. Childers appears from across the world to present Hodges with a “symbol of the warrior” sword (harkening back to the marine’s earlier Battle of Tripoli against recalcitrant Arabs) and to announce to a cheering crowd of soldiers “he knows how to fight, it is in his blood,” thus intimating another link between human nature and killing. Hodges has spent the last 28 years behind a desk, while Childers continued in Vietnam, and then moved on to other US war zones, including Panama and the first US attack on Iraq in 1991, another example of “an unnecessary affirmation of [US] military might as the ground of international order.”<sup>244</sup>

The film moves to the Indian Ocean, and the US helicopter carrier “Wake Island,” where Childers is informed that the US embassy in Yemen is surrounded by protesters. Childers is advised to conduct a “baby-sitting” operation to ensure the safety of the US Ambassador and his family. A critical audience might ask the question, “What is a US warship doing floating in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Yemen, and what is it doing sending heavily armed helicopter gun ships and marines to fly into the capital city of Yemen?”<sup>245</sup>

In *Rules* the US embassy in Yemen is under verbal and physical assault as part of a regularly scheduled protest and the mission transforms from a “baby-sit” to an embattled rescue mission. The closest we get to an explanation for the crowd’s protesting and anger is in the form of the Ambassador’s wife’s answer to her young son’s question “why are they angry?” She says, “They are trying to get attention.” It leaves the audience with the impression that the protesters are simply irrational, uninformed and childlike. In the background the crowd’s chanting is colored by the

banshee-like sound of high-pitched ululating dark and mysterious women lending further fodder to the notion that these are crazed barbarians. To further inculcate the notion of Arab unconcern for life, black-clad women cradling babies in their arms accompany Yemeni snipers on rooftops. The banshee wails are soon overcome on the soundtrack by the sound of heroic military drum-beats and trumpet calls harking back to “US cavalry to the rescue” themes from endless Hollywood western narratives in which the US military ride in to slaughter the unruly and threatening “natives” and protect the innocent. In the process of dozens of heavily armed marines rescuing the Ambassador and his family three marines are shot, and one killed in action by rooftop Yemeni snipers. With no explanation, and no tactical reason, the marines man the rooftop of the embassy and remain even after the rescue is complete. Childers’ greatest hazard during the mission is his rambunctious and risky rescue of the bullet riddled US flag floating high above the embassy fortress. He presents the flag to the Ambassador prior to his delayed departure. The Ambassador utters coyly “I’ll never forget this,” which means several scenes further into the film he will “forget this” as he becomes a career-protecting toady in court.

Seen in the context of the massacre of civilians that soon follows, the double-rescue (of the cowering, swarthy Ambassador and his family, and, more important symbolically, the bullet shredded flag) reinforces the earlier scene in Vietnam by suggesting that our “war crimes” are carried out for the “right reasons:” (1) “self-defense” in the narrow individual sense of protecting soldiers in the immediate dangerous circumstance of being confronted by gun-wielding crazed, America hating Arabs; and, (2) “self-protection” in the larger nationalist sense of protecting our enlightened, freedom loving, democratic, pluralistic “civilization,” and some spiritualized “City on the Hill” entity, “America,” from a hateful, dogmatic, orthodox, terrorist, darker skinned, dark ages enemy. After the flag rescue, Childers moves to the roof of the embassy at which time he sees a fellow marine under his charge shot and killed. Childers becomes murderously and vengefully wild-eyed and enraged (exactly as he did in Vietnam) and tells his second in charge “deadly force is

authorized.” It is clear at this point that the order is an act of vengeful retaliation. His Lt. refuses the order because, “there are civilians, including women and children in the line of fire, sir!”

Furthermore, it appears unmistakably clear that snipers on rooftops and not the crowd below initiate all incoming gunfire. Childers screams venomously, “What part of the order don’t you understand? ...Waste the motherfuckers!” The order is given and civilians are “wasted.” As noted, 83 are killed and hundreds critically wounded. A hard-hearted Childers stands stoically, heroically and symbolically above the slaughter, and from on high atop the embassy he gazes down determinedly at the My Lai-like blood-soaked incident below, and casually orders medical evacuation units, not for the hundreds of wounded Yemenis, but for the three US soldiers. Here again is the reinforcing of the notion that US lives are far more valuable than the lives of our victims, a point that might raise the questions: why do they hate us, and why do we hate them?<sup>246</sup>

There is a visual transition from Childers’ resolute, “business as usual,” above the slaughter, visage, to a “stoic” US capital building (shot from street level looking up), perhaps suggesting that the root of the slaughter lies not in the actions of one crazed soldier but in policies emanating from Washington, or, that Washington, the root of policy, too is “above” the slaughter, or simply letting the audience know we have returned to the safety of the Empire, and all is well. In Washington, the self-important and presumptuous National Security Advisor, Sokal (Bruce Greenwood in a slimy and slippery performance) in damage control mode scans newspaper headlines from across the world announcing the massacre. He does utter a phrase tending toward the moral in response to a Marine General’s angry proclamation, in defense of the massacre, “We lost three marines!” by noting, “They lost 83.” Moral pronouncements, or exercises, carry little weight over the course of the film as the only thing that seems to matter for the NSA is protecting the image of the US in the Arab world (surely a difficult task given the history), and one crucial goal for the film itself is protecting: (1) the right of the US to carry out war crimes; (2) the heroic and patriotic status of those who carry them out; and, (3) our patriotic duty to be very suspicious of anyone, even National Security



Advisors, who criticizes the US military. There is not a hint that the US will do anything to compensate the Yemenis for the slaughter; no reparations are suggested for the loss of life, and no support offered to tend to the critically wounded who are rotting away and dying in unsanitary, squalid and undersupplied alleyway clinics in Yemen. The pain of an entire people is left behind and the film refocuses audience attention on the pain suffered by the perpetrator of the crime, Childers, who weeps, not because he ordered the murder of 83 people, but because the crime is not properly celebrated. It is not emotional or psychological pain resulting from guilt, but an angry pain because they might take away his uniform. He says, “If they take away my uniform, they might as well just shoot me.”<sup>247</sup> Here it is intimated that the only reason for a US marine (and symbolically the US) to go on living is to express power by exercising the “right” to kill, and if that reason for living is removed life is meaningless, finished. Here the film reveals a real fascist ideology of hardness streak where the US freedom to kill supersedes the right to life of others.

### **Soldier as Symbol**

*Rules of Engagement* plays on several codes built into US culture since Vietnam to evoke sympathy for the “soldier hero/victim” and redirect attention from institutional crimes, including a scene in which Childers, accompanied on screen by Watergate criminal and far right “kill federal employees” spokesperson J. Gordon Liddy (on the car radio), is accosted by angry protesters shouting “baby killer,” waving signs adorned with slogans such as “psycho” “stop the madness” “baby killer,” “guilty,” etc. And, of course, Childers is spit upon by one of the protesters, reintroducing and re-inscribing one of the myths of the Vietnam-era. The scene functions in the film, and in US mythology, to demonize protesters, shut down dissent and redirect attention from the real target of protester’s anger, criminal US policy, whether in the Middle East, Vietnam, or elsewhere. In *Rules* the individual soldier, Childers, performs several representative roles: (1) as victimized soldier who is punished for carrying out policy; (2) as war hero who took difficult action to protect his fellow marines; (3) as tough, “born again HARD,” superman, hyper-masculinized,

rugged individualist rebel, who is willing to violate “Rules of Engagement” orders from above to carry out what is necessary in the streets where a different set of rules of engagement apply (the focus on the individual’s crime again absolves the military itself of guilt); (4) cathartic figure who sacrifices in order to cleanse the stains of Vietnam by teaching us that “we were right;” and, (5) a symbol of the US military who is always right, regardless of criticism from multiple quarters. All of this alludes to a another myth from the Vietnam era: “If the politicians would have simply let the military run the war the US would have ‘won,’ but because the politicians were too dovish the military was left to fight with one hand tied behind its back.”<sup>248</sup>

Furthermore, Childers, perhaps most importantly, serves as a symbol for the supremacy and justified use of US military power and the continued proliferation of the culture of militarism. This is made especially visible in the closing scenes where Childers is not only exonerated for his crimes in Yemen (even though his own eye-witness soldiers testified against him),<sup>249</sup> but, because of the reintroduction of Vietnamese Colonel Cao (whose radioman was executed point blank by Childers in the Vietnam sequence 28 years earlier) to testify on Childers’ behalf and legitimate his actions, the United States is symbolically exonerated for its ferocious and destructive military attack on Vietnam, attacks accompanied by war crimes of an indescribable nature. In short, it serves as a palliative for the infamous “Vietnam Syndrome.” Additionally, because Cao’s stated position in the courtroom is equalized with that of Childers,<sup>250</sup> it suggests that Cao legitimates the war crime in Vietnam, and US actions in Vietnam were therefore justified. Furthermore, there is another intimation of equalization in the closing salute scene in which the “mutual” salute gesture suggests, absurdly that we were, and are, on equal footing in war.<sup>251</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

The power of rewriting history in the interests of US power through omission and commission is demonstrated quite powerfully in these closing scenes which not only cunningly “teach” us who the “real” barbarians are (not us), but also impress the idea that the rule of force in

defense of patriotism and nationalism does supersede the rule of law (so long as we are carrying out the force and aggression).

### **Indifference**

Before the trial Colonel Hodges visits a clinic on a “fact-finding” mission, sees the suffering and mutilated children, and is told “there are clinics like this all over the city...most of the people [in the clinics] will die [because of the US massacre].” Hodges is not moved to offer assistance. His only interest appears to be in taking photographs of a video monitoring camera (hoping to demonstrate that the events under contention, the killings, were recorded on videotape) at the embassy and collecting audio-cassette tapes that we find out later serve as pedagogical devices to rouse the “largely illiterate” (read “unenlightened”) Yemeni population to “jihad against the [enlightened] Americans.” These scenes of callous “official” US disregard for and indifference toward human suffering tend to subvert whatever audience sympathy and concern for the victims might be generated by seeing rooms filled with bloodied and suffering children. It is especially subverting when coupled with the “Jihad” audiotapes that adorn the floors around the clinic (and the looted and burned out “sacred” US embassy), suggesting (after we hear the “kill Americans” decoded messages from the tapes), that the victims deserved their punishment “from on high,” and, in Rumsfeldian Middle-East (and LBJ Vietnam) logic “if we don’t kill them over there, we will be fighting them over here.” To remind the audience of the vital lesson of how much *they* hate *us*, and how much *they* are committed to shedding our blood, this scene is followed by a “flashback” to the Vietnam horrors (i.e. the slow motion Vietnamese obliteration of US soldiers under Hodges’s command).<sup>252</sup>

Prior to Childers’ “war crimes” trial, a decision is made by high-ranking government and military officials that the massacre must be blamed only on the actions of one out of control, bad-ass black marine, Terry Childers. It is assumed that this will tone down protests from the Arab world and redirect attention from US policies in the region. The assumption, or implication, is, of course,

that people in the region are too “unenlightened” to notice US policies that have been consistently repressive over many decades, and that one massacre in Yemen is really just more of the same (true), in fact, just a footnote to a long list of much worse atrocities (true).

When Childers is first told he is accused of murder, (“war crimes” in the original, but that phrase is excised from the DVD version), he seeks out his old grizzled desk-jockey friend Hayes Hodges to serve as his attorney. Childers is potentially on trial for his life, for war crimes are punishable by death according to the 1996 US War Crimes Act. Hodges informs him “I am a good enough lawyer to know that you need a better lawyer than me.”<sup>253</sup> The Hodges/Childers relationship is designed to represent a military code of ethics that runs deeper than the Uniform Code of Military Justice, “the Rules of Engagement” designed in safe offices in Washington, standard “warrior code,” or even international law. The code is expressed in the title of a US Army videogame: Full Spectrum Warrior. A “full spectrum warrior” is a code word for “terrorist,” willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for his fellow terrorists/soldiers, his “band of brothers.” At its heart, *Rules* is educating an audience to identify with terrorism, a code of military ethics that is illegal and immoral, and the individual warrior (good for recruiting), but more importantly for the culture of militarism, and the criminal policies of state.

### **Confused Positions**

In the courtroom drama, unveiled in the second part of the film, Guy Pierce plays Major Biggs, the Stanford trained by-the-book lawyer representing the government’s self-protective case against Childers. From every angle of the case Biggs sees it as open and shut: Childers is guilty of 83 acts of murder. The only real question is “whether to seek the death penalty.” The audience, of course, literally “sees” it differently, as we are privy to images Biggs cannot see, i.e. images that demonstrate that the marines were fired upon by civilians below. This clearly stacks the deck against Biggs for the audience is positioned to know that if justice is truly served in this case it will not be because Childers is convicted of war crimes, but because he is found innocent.<sup>254</sup>

A critical pedagogical engagement of the film will note that the disturbing machine gun-toting, rock hurling, Molotov cocktail launching, battering ram carrying, images of crazed Arab men, women and children portrayed in *Rules* preview and meld into the proliferating real life representations of anti-US violence and resistance and anti-Iraqi aggression, violence and occupation that circulates through the multiple sites of public pedagogy in various forms of electronic media, and thus use the film as a teaching vehicle.<sup>255</sup> The cinematic portrayal in *Rules* of young children, old men and women wielding guns against the far superior fire power of US marines suggests a nihilistic willingness in Arab culture to sacrifice the innocent for a cause no more significant than some mysterious, unfounded, illogical and criminal “duty to kill Americans.” Furthermore, this serves to redirect the blame for the US slaughter of 82 civilians, and the critical wounding of more than a hundred, back onto a homogenized, demonic and monolithic Arab culture. This works to reframe the US war crimes in Vietnam, as well as current US war crimes in Iraq, by suggesting that: (1) US soldiers, rather than US air power, are the primary purveyors of US military might and, (2) they are only good men placed in hellish circumstances amidst groups of men, women and children who possess an irremediable hatred for, and desire to eliminate, Americans, and therefore, US soldiers actions, though perhaps grim and bloody, are justifiable in both the immediate and wide angle lens of history.

This symbolic representation of Arab culture in *Rules*, when coupled with the regular portrayal of Arab on Arab violence in Iraq in the US media, more deeply inscribes in US culture the notion that Arabs have little respect for human life, whether it is US lives or fellow Arab lives, and this contributes profoundly to the continuing ideological barbarization of Arab and Iraqi culture, the material destruction of Arab, Muslim and Iraqi lives, and the legitimization of US attacks and occupations.<sup>256</sup> (*See footnote for comment*).

This coded representation of Muslims serves not only to divert attention from the roots of US sponsored, supported or perpetrated violence in the Middle East and much of the world, but also to

suggest that the real cause of violence is pathologies inherent in Muslim culture. Regarding *Rules*, Bill O'Driscoll writing in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, notes that the film is “unconcerned with probing the politics of U.S. imperialism in the Middle East (or in Vietnam...)” but it incorporates a filmic discourse of “militarism, racism and jingoism” that both safely distances US viewers from responsibility for violence and aggression by masking institutional and historical policies and practices, and engraves notions of anti-Arab racism that provides US viewers a sense of moral superiority.<sup>257</sup> That sense of moral superiority locates the US outside and above both the fabric of a Muslim “totalitarian ideology that hates freedom,” and the outrage and violence, and, as a consequence, ultimately, removed from moral or political responsibility. The regular lack of historical contextualization in cinematic presentations of conflicts in the Arab world work to inculcate assumptions of stereotypes regarding nihilistic, fundamentalist, America hating, crazed, suicidal and pathological Arabs that mirror the expanding social disorder, fury and violence regularly portrayed in other “real” media, especially following the US attack on Iraq. When coupled with regular “official” pronouncements about Muslims aiming to “remake [the world] in their own grim image of tyranny and oppression...by exporting terror,” this leaves US audiences with the impression the “terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens,” therefore we have to confine the “disease” before it spreads to the shores of America.<sup>258</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

### **Freedom to Kill**

The US freedom to kill plays itself out insidiously in *Rules*. Colonel Childers is not only exonerated for the slaughterous wasting of Arab civilians but the exoneration is used to both celebrate the ultimate goodness and nobility of the United States and its trained killers, and also to suggest that US actions in Vietnam should not only be celebrated by us (the “victims” protected not by “US war crimes,” but by what is reinvented as a courageous act of “self-defense”), but that they are celebrated and respected by our former Vietnamese victims represented in *Rules* by both Colonel Cao’s testimony in defense of Childers earlier war crimes in Vietnam and also Cao’s reverential

salute, beneath a waving US flag, of Colonel Childers that closes the film. Cao's whitewashing gesture suggests Jimmy Carter's proclamation that in the Vietnam War, "the destruction was mutual,"<sup>259</sup> and is made "as if to sweep away piles of real corpses."<sup>260</sup>

Additionally, the prologue of *Rules* is staged in such a way as to suggest that the primary source of violence in Vietnam was Vietnamese attacks against ambushed US soldiers who were really in no position to defend themselves against such jungle-savvy savages. It is somewhat ironic, for a number of reasons: (1) the primary source of violence in Vietnam was not ground attacks by either the Vietnamese or the Americans, but US air assaults; by 1969 the US had used the equivalent of 500 pounds of air ordinance for every citizen of Vietnam, and total tonnage for all the attacks on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia exceeded 15 million tons, i.e. 30 billion pounds; (2) the war crime perpetrated by Childers is represented as being carried out under conditions for which the Vietnamese are ultimately responsible; (3) Childers kills one Vietnamese radio operator on the grounds that it will save dozens of US soldiers by compelling Cao to order his troops to withdraw, which Cao does after Childers points the gun at Cao and threatens to kill him too. The murder of the prisoner of war radio operator saved only one US soldier, Hayes Hodges, for the other US soldiers had already been graphically killed in a swamp ambush. This representation suggests that most of the casualties suffered in Vietnam were suffered by the US, when in fact it was grotesquely and overwhelmingly inverted. Though there were more than 58,000 US soldiers killed as part of the criminal US attack, estimates run as high as 3-5 million Vietnamese killed, mostly civilians, with a total of more than 6 million people killed when Laos and Cambodia are included.<sup>261</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

*Rules* ups the ante of distorted and deceitful cinema sound, image and language by intimating that it is a documentary representing real historical events and characters, thus confusing further cinema "truth" inside the frames, from material "truth" outside the frame, where real people suffer and die as a result of US policies and actions. Furthermore, this intimation of documentary

filmmaking, further deepens the impact of the representations, and more deeply inculcates both the identification with the purported courage, willingness to kill to protect ultimate good, and robust masculinity of Childers, and also the hateful depiction of all Arabs as driven by a duty to waste Americans.<sup>262</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

Viewing a film such as *Rules* with the knowledge of the harsh conditions in much of the Muslim world and with the knowledge that the United States arms, supports and trains brutally repressive regimes across the Muslim world while US power publicly proclaims support for the spread of democracy and the abolition of tyranny, opens up critical pedagogical possibilities for engaging *Rules* politically, ethically and historically in ways that locate the Arab anger and violence outside of cartoon-like and demonically crazed representations. Knowing that the United States is arming and supporting undemocratic regimes in ways that enhance tyrannical power and enable horrific human rights abuses opens up possibilities for raising new questions about the film regarding guilt and innocence, victims and victimizers, along with creating possibilities for critical challenges to both the insidious and hateful presentation of Arabs, and the glorification of US massacres and war crimes. This in turn raises questions about the pedagogical motives that lie behind the film, how it plays out in an increasingly militarized US culture currently engaged in aggression against Iraq, and how the story of the film shapes attitudes, values, beliefs and identities in US culture regarding combat, aggression, intervention, “defense,” slaughter of civilians, and war crimes. The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee argues that the primary reason for the existence of the film is to “deliberately and systematically vilify an entire people,”<sup>263</sup> a vilification that demonizes Muslims, redirects attention to the victim and away from the victimizer, elevates the United States to not only a role as defender of freedom and democracy but as supreme moralizer, and in the end again legitimates and justifies the ferocious US use of military force and the culture of militarism.<sup>264</sup> (*See footnote for comment*)



*Rules of Engagement's* depiction, and legitimating, of the brutal slaughter and mutilation of Arab civilians, including many young children, as noted, points backward to Vietnam and My Lai, but also forward to Iraq, and, as noted, especially to the monstrous and criminal assault on Fallujah (and then again at Haditha), portrayed with equally grim and blood-soaked depictions in the global media, and even in modified forms in the dominant US media.<sup>265</sup> (See footnote for discussion)

After the platoon of Special Forces marines, with unrelenting noise and violence, carry out Colonel Childers' order to "waste the motherfuckers" in *Rules*, the audience is greeted with "silence...no sounds of...life," reminiscent of a "post apocalyptic wasteland" with bloodied and obliterated "corpses piled up" across the plaza suggesting some outrageous scene "on the other side of Armageddon."<sup>266</sup>

### **Questions for a Culture of Cruelty?**

In the midst of outrageous, violent, abusive and dehumanizing images arising from US cinema, for which *Rules* stands as an especially pernicious prototype, and through other forms of media that portray the numbing and traumatizing realities of the US attack on and occupation of Iraq, including the Abu-Ghraib atrocities and the fateful villainy in Fallujah, a number of critical questions arise regarding the ways in which US audiences are able to receive these images and derive pleasure from them, view them at a detached voyeuristic distance, or experience them as a scintillating spectacle. For example, what public pedagogical conditions must be in place in a culture in order for people to view violence as just described (i.e., as spectacle, as pleasurable, as titillating porn, as curious detachment), and what pedagogical conditions would have to be in place to provide people the moral and political tools, intellectual and emotional skills and Gnostic insights to complicate their reception of these images, and screen them through multiple historical, ethical and political discourses, so that they could engage in critical dialogues and interrogative discussions about how it comes to be that we, as a culture, and as individuals, are able to participate in mind and gut wrenching acts of physical and mental abuse, torture, summary execution, and mass bombings of

tens of thousands of civilians; how we are able to embrace racist suppositions and denigrations and then externalize those appropriations in acts of dehumanizing cruelty and life altering depravity; how we come to accept and perpetrate orders and commands that are clearly in violation of international conventions and US laws, as well as in violation of basic codes of human morality and decency; how we are able to remain apathetic, unconcerned and willing to look the other way in the face of atrocities and abominations; and how we are able to view as unpatriotic and anti-American views that challenge these inhumanities.

Answering these questions will require that people in academia, the media, various forms of cultural work, journalism, the arts, community organizations, government, etc., work in small groups locally and in larger groups collectively to interrogate and scrutinize the political and pedagogical mechanisms that work through sounds, images, language and other texts to embed and legitimate particular ideological and material formations and representations of both our victims and of ourselves. We must ask how cultural workers and educators, working across the multiplicity of social and cultural sites in which public pedagogies are carried out, can equip students, teachers, citizens and themselves to critically work through and overcome: (1) stereotyped representations of the violence and inhumanity of “the other,” so that we can recognize our humanity in others [in order to] recognize it in ourselves, and, (2) the aggression and barbarism of US militarism, so grimly and despicably depicted in *Rules*, in order to meaningfully understand our militarized culture and selves in ways sufficient to engage in critique, challenge and when possible transformation of the conditions and institutions that give rise to aggression and barbarism.

## CHAPTER 5: No Man Left Behind: *Black Hawk Down*

*“If you see someone with a cell phone put a bullet in their f---king head.”*  
-- US Commander in Iraq<sup>267</sup>

Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001), “A cowboy and Indian flick made for post 9/11 America,”<sup>268</sup> produced by Jerry Bruckheimer<sup>269</sup> provides a hyper-real Hollywood account of the torturous events surrounding the October 3, 1993 fourteen hours of street combat in Mogadishu, Somalia, engaged between embattled US soldiers and local militia. The bloody events unfolded when a mission to abduct two Lieutenants of the local warlord Mohamed Aidid went awry in the area of the heavily populated Bakara market. That the area was heavily populated seemed incidental to US planning, and is a crucial moral point mostly absent from the film depiction of events. The mission was part of the larger US “Operation Restore Hope,” in Somalia, a mostly made for TV event to implant “humanitarian intervention” as the new cause for US military actions in the world.<sup>270</sup>

The film, starring Josh Harnett as Ranger team leader Matt Eversmann, Tom Sizemore and Lt. Col. Danny McKnight, and Sam Shepard as Major-General Garrison, is divided in three acts, with a prologue and an epilogue. While the courage, mettle, confusions and character of these men are well developed, there is, once the bloodshed begins, a “general homogeneity of soldiers in battle [that] serves to highlight mainly a minimalist ‘us against them’ [‘with us or with the terrorists’] mentality.”<sup>271</sup>

The ghastly prologue languorously sets up the haunted suffering of mostly ghostly and emaciated people in Somalia. It slowly builds, without historical context, audience sympathy for the horrors of so much disease, starvation and death. Floating silently beneath the somber and wrenching soundtrack and images is the question, “What can be done to help these poor people?” It is a question that lingers, and sets up the audience for the purported “humanitarian” US military intervention to follow.

**Act I** covers events leading up to the October 3<sup>rd</sup> raid on the Olympia Hotel, including several scenes of murder carried out by local militias against civilians, the violent chaos surrounding food distribution among brutalized and famished people, conflicts between Washington bureaucrats and US officers in the field over appropriate rules of engagement, gathering of intelligence for the operations, suggestions of “genocide” in Somalia resulting from the actions of the tyrant Aidid’s forces, conflicts between Army Rangers and the more elite Delta Special Forces troops as part of the exploration of the hyper-masculine culture of militarism inside the lives of the troops preparing for battle, and finally preparations for what seems an ill-conceived, confused and not properly supported raid. Col. McKnight, regarding the imminent raid and the various pressures from Washington, wryly and ironically notes, “No Specter gun ships [for protection and demolition],<sup>272</sup> daylight instead of night, late afternoon when they’re all fucked up on khat [a local hyper-activating drug], [carried out] in the only part of the city Aidid can mount a serious counter-attack on short notice... what’s not to like?” This helps to establish the embattled, abandoned and unsupported soldier theme that directs audience attention to “support the troops,” and in turn, the culture of militarism they represent.

**Act II**, in non-stop hyper-ventilating cinematic fashion, concentrates primarily on the grim, bloody and chaotic fighting in dusty and narrow Somalian streets. It begins with the rather non-conflicted, but tense, abduction of Aidid’s aids. It then moves on to the initial two hours of blazing and degenerating “defensive” battles that follow the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters by Somali militia and includes the dangerous, bloody and confused attempts to save and rescue trapped pilots and soldiers. Additionally, Somalis, in the face of valorous rescue attempts by fellow Rangers, capture one of the downed and injured pilots. Along the way, there is much bloodshed, many grotesquely mutilated and eviscerated bodies, an ear-thudding and heart-pumping soundtrack, and several bloody and heroic but often futile attempts to save the lives of severely injured or abandoned fellow soldiers.

**Act III** hunkers down more earnestly with trapped US soldiers struggling to survive as night falls, ammunition is depleted, communications break down, and well-armed and angry Somali forces surround them. Hours later they are finally rescued, survivors and deceased return to base, and there are practical questions about “goin’ back in [because] there are still men out there,” and philosophical ruminations on the nature of sacrifice, courage, heroism and war. Eversmann offers, “I think everything has changed...Nobody asks to be a hero. It sometimes just turns out that way.” The grueling battle and harrowing rescue efforts allow Eversmann to extend his earlier stated belief that he was in Somalia “to make a difference,” (an expression of the “humanitarian intervention” theme - called “idealistic” in the film), and achieve what is considered, in the film, a more “realistic” perspective based in survival of the self and one’s fellow warriors (the solidarism of soldiers theme). US soldiers are finally rescued and led back to base but not before walking past smiling, thankful and cheering Somalis, all captured in heartrending slow-motion and accompanied by swirls of blood warming martial music.

Received by audiences soon after 9/11, this double-theme *Black Hawk Down* message of “humanitarian intervention,” and soldierly solidarism and survival, i.e. self-protection and protection of those closest to us, carries political and moral weight that could easily compel audiences to justify “Homeland Security” operations domestically, as well as US military operations in foreign lands designed to kill those who have designs on killing us. Furthermore, it feeds into legitimating the naïve implication of the George Bush question “Why do they hate us?” if the audience accepts the notions of our “humanitarian” intentions and “peaceful nature?”<sup>273</sup> This transference of film pedagogy to support for military institutions proceeds on the simple grounds, again, that individuals (i.e. film audiences) are not in a position (they lack the training, resources, and perhaps courage and wherewithal) to defend against: (1) those “who hate us;” (2) the sort of violence depicted in war films; or, (3) terror attacks carried out in the world. On the other hand, the audience recognizes that large institutions such as the Pentagon and the US military branches, ostensibly dedicated to

protecting us, are in a position to defend against these threats. So, in a sense, in order to self-protect, the audience has little choice, given the picture of the world they receive, but to support the Department of “Defense.”<sup>274</sup> In this way, the film transforms what appears on the surface to be an anti-war film, given (1) the “harrowing danger and insurmountable odds”<sup>275</sup> faced by outnumbered and outgunned soldiers, and (2) the notion that we are not invading as an act of aggression but as an act of humanitarianism, into a film supportive of US militarism and the powerful militarized institutions of power that develop the plans and initiate the policies that are then waged by the US military around the world. In short, who would not support helping poor, hungry, starving, helpless, oppressed, victimized people along with the courageous soldiers aiding them; and, who would not support protecting the “homeland” against “evil” enemies who not only “hate us for our freedoms,” but also wish to terminate us?

The Mogadishu operation is infamous for the well-publicized image of Somalis dragging a US soldier’s body through the streets,<sup>276</sup> for the 18 US soldiers killed in action, and for the rapid withdrawal of US troops from Somalia by the Clinton Administration soon afterward. The withdrawal threatened to invoke memories and feelings of giving up the mission in Vietnam, and what many considered a US defeat and military failure there...a scar on the national narrative and psyche of the invulnerable, supreme and omnipotent global Superpower in need of repair.<sup>277</sup> *Black Hawk Down*’s rewriting and narrowing of history offers a pedagogical palliative for the scar, while feeding powerfully into the “war on terror” propaganda circulating at the time of the film’s release.

*Black Hawk Down*, through its use of hyper-real cinematic aesthetics to construct audience perceptions of the bloody combat events, provides a powerful cinematic representation of the re-writing of history, the disappearance of the pain and suffering of the victims of US military actions, the individualization of social forces, a linking of militarism and moral fortitude to justify violence, the re-invigoration of US victory culture, the narrowing of audience vision regarding the realities of military conflict, an emphasis on our ability to endure pain and continuous combat until the mission

is finished, and the disappearance of institutional power and prerogatives behind individual soldier's courageous battles to stay alive under harrowing conditions. The cinematic narrative, within the peculiar wrappings of an ostensibly "anti-war" film (the anti-war theme is suggested by a number of reviewers),<sup>278</sup> works to legitimate and entrench the pro-aggression US culture of militarism. Its "pro-defense" and "humanitarian" sentiment serves as both a hidden stimulant for supporting soldierly sacrifice and as encouragement for US military aggression, especially in a post- 9/11 world.<sup>279</sup>

The film provokes the question of whether it is really possible to make an anti-war film and simultaneously celebrate the soldiers who fight, die and, especially, kill in combat? The simple answer is "yes," if (1) the moral implications of one component of the trilogy are largely absent from the soldierly mission, i.e. "killing," and (2) explanations for the complex political and historical factors involved in why "they [really] hate us," are suppressed. One of the moral implications of "killing" is that victimized people learn to hate the killers and tend to seek, and sometimes find, ways to defend themselves against further killing with whatever means are at their disposal (shoe bombs, backpack bombs, car bombs, hijacked planes, suitcase nukes, etc.). Avoiding the moral implication of historical and political factors as well as "the killing," is immoral since it will ensure that those we demonize will continue the actions for which they are demonized because the US actions that induce the "demons" to act violently will continue.

Demonizing one's enemies is itself immoral in that it not only avoids and undercuts investigations into the political causes of the cycles of violence, but it also removes the crucial pedagogical link between morality and politics that aids us in understanding history. Moral appeals do not distance us from, but ground us in, political argumentation. Demonizing people undercuts learning about and understanding people for it moves questions from the pedestrian world of material relations and politics which are potentially answerable to the inauspicious and menacing world of metaphysics where we remain ensconced in too often misguided mystery. If we continue to

“caricature” people as “blood-crazed” and Satanic “beasts,” rather than seeing them as fellow humans driven to desperation by squalid and dreadful conditions (such as those witnessed in the opening scene of *Black Hawk Down*) for which we are at least partially responsible, we will close-off areas of essential moral and political understanding of our “enemies” and of ourselves, a move that will sustain the conditions of poverty, militarism, global danger, and killing.<sup>280</sup> So, while the “simple” answer to the question of whether it is possible to make “anti-war” films in which soldiers fight, die and kill, is “yes,” a more careful look suggests that the answer is “no,” because an “anti-war” film that avoids the moral and political implications of killing and avoids material explanations for actions will only assist pedagogically in maintaining conditions that lead to war and terror in the first place.

While there is much killing in *Black Hawk Down*, the mostly dehumanized Somali victims of US violence, who are always frenziedly wielding guns and viciously attacking US soldiers, essentially disappear as entities with any depth, histories, and families, or beings who may feel pain, suffer and die. The more complicated and grim reality of the events in Somalia paints a much different story as again the primary victims of the attack were Somali civilians and the primary cause of killing was not US soldiers on the ground, but US rockets from the air.<sup>281</sup> (*See note “424” for discussion*)

The re-writing of history is necessary not only to prevent a re-awakening of notions of “moral” and military failure and defeat in the national psyche lingering post-Vietnam, but to re-affirm that the US is still “standing tall” after the purported “victory” in the Cold War. Additionally, *BHD* calls on the wounded soldier theme from “Vietnam” films, in order to remind audiences that soldiers need popular and bureaucratic (i.e. a larger Pentagon budget) support if we are going to avoid failure and defeat in the future.

The real events in Somalia, however, are problematic because they largely left an image in public memory of failure, confusion, ambivalence and defeat, and that scar requires healing and the



memory redirection. Mark Bowden, author of the book *Black Hawk Down*, writes, “[US soldiers] risked their lives in an ancient African city, killed for their country, took a bullet, or saw their best friend shot dead. They returned to a country that didn’t care or remember. Their fight was neither triumph nor defeat.”<sup>282</sup> If the operation itself is embedded negatively or ambiguously in popular consciousness a cinematic portrayal that valorizes combat and camaraderie, and inscribes the notion of “the good fight” not as one bound by ideology but one bound in benevolence, brotherhood, sacrifice and solidarity, it can redirect attention and reshape perceptions of not only how the particular events in Somalia are held in public memory but how military aggression and foreign policy are positively understood and supported. Film pedagogy inculcates these lessons by linking emotions to memory that in turns implants ideology. In short, “purpose,” for the audience, is redirected from what may be remembered as a senseless, failed and even purposeless engagement and retreat, i.e. the real fiasco in Somalia (absent the mass killing of civilians in the public mind), to an emotionally charged cinematically created purpose from which it is difficult to extricate oneself and for which it is easy to empathize: staying alive and helping others. What may have been a negative or ambiguous embedding of events in public memory evolves into a positive and directed support for the engagement.

### **Fighting for Ourselves and Others**

In representing “war” as more of a fight for ourselves rather than against an enemy *Black Hawk Down* continues a pattern of post-*Saving Private Ryan* (1998) US “war” films. These films, like many US war films of the past, concentrate audience attention on US soldiers, their struggles, pain and suffering, their heroism, sacrifice and courage, their commitment to “the good fight,” and their unmitigated and untrammelled solidarism and brotherly commitment to protect one another against savage enemies, misguided policies, an unsupportive public, and callous bureaucrats. Under extremely trying and troubling conditions for the soldiers, this is all accomplished for the audience by cinematically emphasizing, through graphic hyper-real techno-spectacles, the gruesome, frightful,

unpredictable and bloody nature of the combat in which US soldiers engage in Mogadishu. The strategy is carried out to stimulate audience support and empathy for the individual “doing the right thing” soldiers, and US soldiers in general, with the concomitant impacts of: (1) distancing the audience from engaging in critical reflections upon the economic and political institutional structures and policies that drive US military aggression, the reasons for and history behind international US military engagements, or the rightness or wrongness of those interventions; (2) generating audience support for the very policies and institutions that place soldiers in the kinds of brutal conditions of killing and maiming so graphically simulated in the film<sup>283</sup>; (3) intensified public support for both the US culture of militarism and increases in military spending and technological development in order to protect, in the future, against US soldiers being placed in conditions where they are out-manned, unprotected, outgunned and brutally killed; (4) largely deflecting, if not disappearing, the pain and suffering of the victims who are, in reality, killed and maimed in much greater numbers<sup>284</sup>; (5) revalidating, as an overarching theme, the US commitment to oppose tyranny (so as not to sever ties with and build upon the deeply inculcated indoctrination from the Cold War propaganda that suggested the US was dedicated to fighting tyranny<sup>285</sup>); and, (6) developing positive ethical assumptions built on a mantle of moral superiority about the humanitarian character of US interventions and thus falling into the repeating clutches of the mythic US narrative of national greatness where all true believers accept the US mission as one of altruistic sacrifice in which US military power is employed to both confront and destroy all enemies of democracy and freedom, bring peace, and to liberate victims of totalitarianism, across the globe.

The “humanitarian intervention” seed is planted early in the film not only with images of emaciated, withered and empty-eyed Somali “creatures” dying in the streets amidst a deathly pall hanging motionless in the stale air, but with an emphasis on the oppression, killing and suffering of helpless and starving Somalis at the hands of a vicious and tyrannical warlord the US is out to capture and destroy. It works to legitimate, for the audience, “Operation Restore Hope,” the rescue

mission at hand, and the “just” cause for which the US soldiers are risking and sacrificing their lives throughout the film. The first time we see US soldiers in Somalia, we (and the soldiers) witness the brutal murder of Somali civilians by members of a local militia serving the tyrant Aidid. The US Rangers (along with the audience) are morally and physically shocked, and want to intervene to protect the screaming defenseless victims. They are instructed, however, that all local militia attacks on civilians are outside of US jurisdiction because the area is under UN control. The soldiers, and the audience, are forced to standby helplessly while starving and forlorn people are executed thus building expectations and justifications for later US military engagement and humanitarian rescue. That murder is soon followed by a larger slaughter of starving civilians at a Red Cross food distribution center, where again, because of “international rules” the soldiers are prevented from acting. We then hear US Major-General Garrison (Sam Shepard) suggest to Mr. Atto, a local elite Aidid supporter, that “genocide” is being perpetrated by Aidid in Somalia, thus intimating to Atto (and the audience) that the US belongs in Somalia as the only moral and global force that can stop the mass slaughter and starvation. It is also shown that Aidid’s forces are stealing the food from the people in order to supply the US hating militias, thus doubling their depravity.

This sequence of scenes establishes for the audience not only the ostensible humanitarian necessity and nature of the US mission (hardly true in reality) and the legitimacy of the US military presence, but it also implants the notion of US moral superiority as compared to the rest of the world (the UN and the savage Somalis), and the need for the US military to act independent of international laws, constraints and norms (the UN) if it is going to carry on its noble and benevolent “peacekeeping” tradition of intervening on the side of the weak, tyrannized and abused.<sup>286</sup> In other words, the rest of the world is weak and lacks the moral fortitude to rise-up in the interest of the oppressed, but the US is strong and, as shown in the film, in need of becoming stronger to truly achieve the noble goals. We are left to believe that it takes a strong-willed, morally superior, and

strong-armed US to overcome this moral weakness on the part of the rest of the world, of course, in the interest of the rest of the world.

**“War is fighting and dying [and killing].”**

Ross Perot, in his “Foreword” to *Mogadishu: Heroism and Tragedy*, instructs the reader that war is presented in the dominant media as a “sterile and sanitized environment,” but we have a responsibility to always “Remember, war is fighting and dying.”<sup>287</sup> Curiously absent from Perot’s admonition to responsibility for remembrance is “killing.” Yes, “war is fighting and dying,” but in terms of US aggressions war is mostly about “killing,” and as argued herein, it is the “killing” that is crucially and immorally absent from US film narratives about war and aggression. *Black Hawk Down* remembers the fighting, dying and killing, but arranges them in such a way that they serve the interests of US militarism. The Somali victims, frighteningly visible early in the film when they are “worthy victims” killed by the US enemy Aidid, later become cinematically disappeared “unworthy victims” in the face of the fighting and dying US soldiers taking center stage. The “truth” of events (*see footnote 32 for context*), that included massive killing of Somalis by US gun-ships and rockets, is reworked so as not to paint the US military in a morally questionable or negative light.<sup>288</sup> Furthermore, the suffering Somalis and the humanitarian mission to stop “genocide,” visible early in the film, largely disappear onscreen (until re-invoked in the closing scenes of thankful and cheering Somali children dancing in the streets) while audience focus is riveted upon US soldiers heroically and agonizingly struggling to survive in the danger-ridden and blood-soaked streets of Mogadishu. This shift in moral, emotive and narrative focus is evidenced in Garrison’s later comment to US Ranger McKnight, after a Black Hawk helicopter has been shot down in the middle of the city and in which several US soldiers are trapped. Garrison informs McKnight, regarding rescue operations, “Danny, no one gets left behind. You understand me, son? No one gets left behind.” Needless to say plenty of Somalis “get left behind,” not only in the narration but also in the historical accounts. In fact, according to CIA estimates up to 10,000 Somalis were killed in the US intervention.<sup>289</sup>

The “No one gets left behind” film slogan is reflective of the Army Ranger creed “Leave No Man Behind,” used in the film’s promotional campaigns and repeated in various forms, aurally and visually, throughout. It is also reflective of the core element of the film’s pedagogical maneuverings to center audience attention on the courageous character of US soldiers in need of public support. Lingering in the background of the slogan and haunting popular culture’s portrayal of Vietnam is the idea that US soldiers were “left behind” in Vietnam, not only in terms of MIAs (largely a myth<sup>290</sup>), but also in terms of a lack of bureaucratic and popular support. The lack of popular and government support myth has been used insidiously to suggest both that the US “lost” the attack on Vietnam (difficult to fathom given kill and destruction ratios, etc.), and that a larger and more powerful military will be required in the future to ensure that the US never again fails in its mission.<sup>291</sup>

The pedagogical impact of planting “humanitarian intervention” seeds early, helps to produce “what distinguishes Americans from citizens of past empires [in that it instantiates, reifies and then concretizes an]...eagerness to persuade themselves that they are acting out of humanitarian motives,” thus deflecting the reality that policy is driven by power-interests such as protecting and increasing economic access, buttressing political stability, stimulating Pentagon budgets, selling weapons overseas, and solidifying and augmenting US control.<sup>292</sup> While the Somali victims disappear through most of the film, leaving in question the humanitarian lessons surrounding US interventions, there is a very thin but powerfully emotive attempt at the end of the film to suggest that the US mission, along with the bloodshed and sacrifice, was ultimately successful in liberating the Somalis from their pain and suffering. Implied is that all of the suffering, pain and death endured by the soldiers was not only about sacrificing for one another, but also about sacrificing for the Somali victims of Aidid, entrenching the idea that “humanitarianism” is that for which we truly intervene and sacrifice. In essence, it is a militarized version of the Christian salvation narrative: sacrifice for the weak, suffering and sick. As the soldiers finally escape the blazing and bloody horrors of central Mogadishu, and as the hopeful morning sun ascends on the horizon, weary,

sanguineous, battle-worn, tear-stained and physically and emotionally drained US soldiers struggle in heart-wrenching slow motion through dusty streets lined with cheering, smiling, happy, and we are led to believe “liberated,” Somalis. The simple implication again is, “*the sacrifice was worth it.*”

Intimated is that we really are heroes, even though we were just doing our job. We are heroes because we fought gallantly and valiantly to protect our fellow soldiers from harm and to free the Somalis from the brutal militia. Again, these are themes, solidarism and humanitarianism, against which it is difficult to quarrel (and in other contexts should be celebrated and encouraged), hence their simplistic power to shape public memory and allegiance. On the one hand, the simplistic ending leaves the audience satiated. Everything is fine. The sacrifice is justified. Somalis are happy. We can leave the theatre feeling safe, proud, morally satisfied, vindicated and victorious. We are in good and brave hands; therefore, there is no need to worry or to significantly alter anything in our larger social lives. Still, on the other hand, there is the body of the film itself that seems to contradict the maudlin ending. Everything is not fine. What about the Somalis off-screen who might not be cheering? The tyrant is still loose. What about all the devastation left behind? Soldiers were killed. Soldiers were brutalized. And, the killing and brutalization was accomplished by a ragtag group of street-thug, dark-skinned African terrorists. The victory makes us proud, but the sacrifice is bothersome. “Can’t we win future victories without so much sacrifice? Can’t we catch the tyrant next time? How?” Easy, better equipment, better weapons, unilateral action that does not allow the UN to disrupt our mission, and more support for the military machine that supports the soldiers.

### **Sentimental War: Feeling Good when we ought to Feel Bad**

*Black Hawk Down*, and other films like it, performs an individualizing, sanitizing and sentimentalizing pedagogical function similar to that of other media coverage and Pentagon depictions of “war.” It is witnessed in the intense but narrow imagery, the inflated and heroic emotions, the absence of critical reflection or interrogations, the concentration on individual

personalities (sometimes leaders, sometimes soldiers) of the sort regularly seen in media representations and Pentagon press-briefings or recent propaganda productions from Iraq, and the miraculous disappearance of the agony and screams of the Somali victims. As in real war, so it is true in war films, it is much easier to destroy others when we don't hear their screams or witness their pain; hence the ease of using cruise missiles and the ease of watching militarized films. Making visible, audible and palpable the pain of others, materializes the brutality of war, relativizes our humanity (they scream too!), and points perhaps too closely to what we share with the rest of the species: the body. "It is," as Terry Eagleton notes, "because of the body that we can speak of morality as universal" and imagine the possibility of social justice and peace.<sup>293</sup> *Black Hawk Down*, and other US military films, concentrates graphically on "our" body, its suffering, pain and vulnerability, while disappearing "the body" of our victims, except when it serves to promote the notion of our beneficence. It is the sleep of justice and universality that produce the monsters of war, a sleep that permeates *Black Hawk Down*, as it does virtually every other Hollywood war film.

The impact of the individualizing, sanitizing and sentimentalizing "war" also works to divert attention from failing policies and corrupt institutions and narrowly focusing on invented conflicts between inflated personalities.<sup>294</sup> Sentimentality, employed powerfully in the *Black Hawk Down* film spectacle, especially in the early scenes of helpless Somalis, the scenes of soldiers dying in the arms of their comrades, the cheering Somalis and their dancing children at the end, is similar to charity. Both sentimentality and charity are vertical and safely distancing, and both refuse the "radicality" that would address that which calls forth the sentimentality and charity in the first place: unjust conditions and criminal actions of state. Both offer the possibility of feeling bad for people, and good for ourselves for helping (nothing wrong with that), but we don't feel bad for the conditions that create the needs in the first place.

In US "war" films, and the media in general, critical reflections and prudent interrogations into policies and institutions are not only disappeared and discouraged they are simply deemed anti-

American and un-patriotic. The mission in *Black Hawk Down* is represented, at best, as a charity mission, and is laced with the liberal sentimentality that rightly wants to help suffering people, but wrongly wants to do little or nothing to overcome the conditions which cause the suffering. The audience is left with the liberal lesson: charity is enough, and we can therefore wallow in sentimentality. They are never offered radical lessons that might help to work through questions and answers around the causes of the conditions that call for charity. Engagement with the causes of human suffering would allow for very little time to be sentimental.

A key point buried in the narrow focus of *Black Hawk Down* is that if the United States is going to act “meaningfully” in the world, it will require that the US act menacingly in the world, and that will require a shedding of our assumed moral innocence and a recognition that menace and moral superiority are not at odds, but one and the same, so long as the menace is deployed in the hands of the morally righteous, i.e. the US. For example, we must admit that even though we are good and righteous there actually are “bad guys” out there who are always trying to undermine our benevolence and magnanimity. The problem with this is that while we are taught to feel good about ourselves we do not learn to feel bad about what we do, i.e., impose ourselves violently on and kill others, because we never see the consequences. By removing the “feeling bad,” we lose a crucial component in the capacity to perceive accurately for the simple reason that perceptions are conditioned not only by intellect but also by feelings and neither ideas nor feelings are the possession of the individual – hence the failure of film narratives that individualize institutionally driven military aggression.

Therefore, there is a critical social and pedagogical responsibility for making audible, visible and palpable the consequences of our actions. War films, like cruise missiles, create death, but conveniently, for the viewers and perpetrators, evacuate the experience of killing. Watching most war films is like launching a cruise missile attack. Both have the ability to create painless death, even when thousands are killed. Because in both cases the technology safely distances us from the



pain and knowledge of the brutality and trauma that follow for the victims, it severs the link between how the world is and how we ought to act in it because it disrupts the link between who we are, what we do and how we should behave. In both cases, moral judgment is undermined, and in a sense unnecessary. If we never know or feel the consequences of our actions, acting one way is as good as acting another way [for the victimizer]...pressing or not pressing the button has the same impact; erasing people or not erasing them as the same impact. A culture that is both apocalyptically militarized, is taught to “feel good” about militarism, and also de-moralized, is a threat of monstrous proportions not only to others, but also to itself.

### **Demonstration Effects**

*Black Hawk Down* inculcates Peter Beinart’s idea that “America’s challenge lies not in recognizing our moral superiority, but in demonstrating it,” which can only occur, of course, on the assumption that the US is already morally superior.<sup>295</sup> *Black Hawk Down*, in working to reaffirm the assumption of our moral superiority, follows a threefold pattern of co-opting audience support for US militarism: (1) it celebrates and glorifies combat, even in the midst of graphic depictions of combat carnage, because in the end the combat is carried out to serve, save and protect; (2) it taps into audience/human anti-war sentiment (in Bush’s words “we are a peaceful nation”)<sup>296</sup> by showing the horrific sacrifices the soldiers endure at the hands of the “evil others” designated as responsible for “war.” *Black Hawk Down*, however, uses that sentiment to build identification with the US perpetrators, and thus the perpetration, of mass killing. In other words, because of the harrowing and foreboding conditions, and heartless savage enemies, faced by the soldiers the audience embraces soldierly violence that is cinematically employed for self-protection (while in the background silently lurks the “genocide” the US is ostensibly there to prevent); (3) by using the notion of “humanitarian intervention” as a moral vehicle to build audience allegiance, it reverses the role of attackers and attacked by shifting audience focus onto US soldiers as victims of a Somali attack when in fact it is the US that is attacking Somalia. In short, *Black Hawk Down* uses images to trump

issues, slogans (such as “I am here to kick some ass” “leave no soldier behind”) as a substitute for morality; and, individuals to hide institutions. Meanwhile, politics get lost in the spectacle, the exercise of power disappears in soldierly camaraderie, and all features work to positively shape audience perceptions of US military pursuits and global policies.

The sutured nature of the *Black Hawk Down* cinematic narrative, claustrophobic in its concentration on combat and gore, heightened by the surreal and scintillating visual and aural experience, draws the viewer into the vortex of confusion and chaos into which warfare typically devolves, while simultaneously disappearing the complex political and historical contexts in which decisions are made, policies implemented and goals rarely achieved. In short, historical and political facts get lost in military and individual values leaving the audience emotionally and intellectually drained and also without epistemological tools to pursue, or engage in, critical dialogue around the morality and politics of US interventions, the events in Somalia, or similar events that persist in the streets of Iraq in the present, and surely elsewhere in the future.

### **Pro-soldier: anti-war or pro-war?**

It has been argued that films such as *Black Hawk Down* and *Saving Private Ryan* represent a “new patriotism”<sup>297</sup> that celebrates and sanctifies the sacrifice and courage individual soldiers endure to ensure the survival of fellow soldiers. The symbolic intimation for the film audience is that the sacrifice and courage is also endured to ensure the survival of our way of life, to protect our freedom and democracy. So, not only is the audience thankful, but by necessity, in order to protect ourselves, supportive of the mission, which, again, in turn, means, on limited understanding, we must support the institutions of violence and imperialism the soldiers represent.<sup>298</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

Marc Bowden argues, “We can’t expect to accomplish our military goals around the world without facing the likelihood that American soldiers can get killed,” an unpalatable consequence of war. He suggests the US public must be properly prepared for this likely outcome or we will “run the risk” of losing the patriotic public support required to “accomplish our military goals around the

world.”<sup>299</sup> *Black Hawk Down* provides some of the required ideological preparation needed to garner patriotic public support for US military goals primarily by “featuring almost exclusively the ethic of the soldier...without regard for the complexities of military policy,” without any suggestion that US “military goals around the world” should not only not be accomplished, but should not be initiated, and without any mention of the threatening contradictions that follow the culture of militarism. (see note 416)

*Black Hawk Down*'s emphasis on the solidarism of soldier culture and on soldier's courage under fire arouses a jingoist spirit and “encourages [the] audience to uncritically embrace [military] policies” on the grounds that it is their patriotic, and human, duty to do so.<sup>300</sup> The filmic portrayals appear to work on the logic that while people can easily learn to betray “war,” it is difficult to learn to betray soldiers (the human face of war). “War” is in some sense an abstraction (i.e. an abstraction when absent social and soldierly support), and when not an abstraction, a brutally destructive reality, so it is easier to oppose. It is much more difficult to betray flesh and blood soldiers (especially when they are “like us,” even though, to some extent, they are the face and perpetrators of war), and therefore it is easier to learn to support the mission of the soldiers. Supporting the mission of soldiers translates into supporting the mission of the military = support for militarism, violence and aggression.

The pedagogical goal of *Black Hawk Down*, and similar cinematic war narratives, is to produce filmic conditions so that the audience conflates support for soldiers with support for the institutions of war. It is a brilliant pedagogical maneuver that produces support for the victimizer (war/Pentagon/culture of militarism) on the grounds that it is support for the collateral victims of US aggression (soldiers). Not surprisingly, this maneuver is lubricated by the morally distancing disappearance of the primary victims in Somalia (and elsewhere), civilians. The “new patriotism” argument suggests that patriotism is cinematically individualized in order to nationalize it in order to arouse support for militarism. In other words, allegiance to soldiers is constructed in order to build

allegiance to a nation at war.<sup>301</sup> The intimation is that filmmakers, by narrowly focusing on and celebrating soldiers and how they are driven to “do the right thing,” can avoid any form of ideological confusion around US military engagement.<sup>302</sup> Audience identification with soldiers builds a powerful and sympathetic allegiance to flesh and blood “brothers” that in the end, without presenting it directly, builds a powerful and supportive allegiance to the ideologies of US military power for which the soldiers are sacrificing, to the war machine that directs and carries out US military goals around the world, and to the “abstract” concept of war that requires social systems and soldiers to bring it to material reality.

*Black Hawk Down* follows the clever trajectory of films that enlist audience support for soldiers, US militarism’s humanitarian goals, and at the same time suggesting anti-war themes. These “pro-soldier, anti-war” films convey, “anti-war messages by depicting the experiences of the war felt by soldiers...”<sup>303</sup> In short, war is portrayed negatively; soldiers are portrayed positively. *Black Hawk Down* follows the “support the troops” pattern, and like *Saving Private Ryan*, and other films in the cycle, in the end it functions on one level as an anti-war film, because it depicts the hell of war for US soldiers. But, more importantly for the culture of militarism, on another level it works as a pro-war film, because, as noted, it uses audience identification with the soldier’s courage, sacrifice, heroism, and humanitarian accomplishments, to build support for the very culture of militarism and institutions of military aggression that place the soldiers in hellish battle. And it does so by celebrating the virtues of sacrifice, killing and ultimately moral victory over evil.<sup>304</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

So, *Black Hawk Down* is not, and cannot be, in the Hollywood universe of war and troops, an anti-war film for that would necessitate being anti-troops as well. The only form of pro-troop and pro-war sentiment that can arise from Hollywood’s insular scenario is to call for conditions that protect troops from the terror inflicted by typically inhuman savages attacking US soldiers who are often the only humanized beings in the war films. It follows from this that the audience should

support the Powell Doctrine approach, i.e. massive force against any threats to US soldiers, for it is a call to support the human against the anti-human.

In the end, when all of this is decoded, the pattern suggests we can feel bad for the soldiers because of the suffering they endured, but feel good for war, because it is the category “war” that permitted the soldiers to accomplish what they did, i.e. rescuing embattled comrades, liberating oppressed Somalis, and also, (underrepresented) killing a lot of people, and thus generate support for US militarism and aggression. Because no other options are presented for reflection, we are left with the only possible alternative to killing a lot of people in the course of protecting US soldiers who in the process suffer rather monstrously: next time, kill a lot more people.

### **Conclusion**

In *Black Hawk Down* the futile nature of military violence is brutally portrayed. It thus distances audience support for “war.” Nevertheless, the deplorable and depressing horror is balanced by the celebratory portrayal of that which is called forth by the horrors depicted, the heroic sacrifice and solidaristic bravery of soldiers who are enmeshed in the quagmire of chaotic Somali streets. The combination calls forth our support and sympathy for the soldiers and in turn builds support for a greater militarization of US society that might next time prevent such despicable suffering and death among US soldiers. Additionally, there is a revelatory depicting of moral victory culminating in the slow-motion celebration of the soldiers by Somalis. Audience identification with soldiers, especially in the midst of horrific conditions of sacrifice and policies presented as “humanitarian,” works in the end to extend allegiance to and support for US military policies. “Support the troops,” in this case does not mean “bring them home,” or “abolish the category of troop,” but celebrate the mission and revel in the victory. In brief, support “war.”<sup>305</sup>

## CHAPTER 6: *Tears of the Sun* and Colonial Tears

*Once a nation decides to go to war, the consequences will be ugly.*  
-- Pamela Hess<sup>306</sup>

*"U.S. troops poured into New Orleans...with shoot-to-kill orders...  
These troops [just back from Iraq]know how to shoot and kill...  
they are more than willing to do so, and I expect they will."*  
-- Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco,<sup>307</sup>

*The motion picture...industry offers...a tremendous weapon  
for education and propaganda."*  
J. Parnell Thomas, Chairman, House Un-American Activities Committee<sup>308</sup>

In Antoine Fuqua's *Tears of the Sun*, (2003), not unlike in *Rules of Engagement* (2000) *Man on Fire* (2004), *Black Hawk Down* (2002) and *Mystic River* (2003), and a long list of other recent film fare, *When We Were Soldiers* (2002) *Behind Enemy Lines* (2002), and to a significant extent *King Arthur* (2004 - a virtual remake of *Tears of the Sun* set in the year 600) and *Alexander* (2005),<sup>309</sup> US aggression, of various sorts, is predominantly portrayed as: defensive; based in humanitarian goals; promoting freedom; spreading light and democracy; rationalized violence; rescuing savages from their own savagery; individualized and de-historicized in order to distract attention from an understanding of the institutional mechanisms at work; and, a form of Christ-like salvation for those unenlightened "colonial" subjects unable to save themselves. In contrast, the violence of US victims is represented as based in offensive projections, irrational violence, anti-Americanism, unenlightened ignorance, metaphysical de-historicized "evil," weakness in the face of superior moral and violent power, and senseless, uncontrolled and savage cruelty. These films, and others, reflect one crucial component of the reality of US aggression seldom addressed in commentary, a reality that has become normalized by its repetition in films and in reality: the violence is perpetrated in, and the victims are brutalized in, the land of the "victims" whether it is Mexico in *Man on Fire*, Nigeria in *Tears of the Sun*, Vietnam in *Rules of Engagement*, Bosnia in *Behind Enemy Lines*, Somalia in *Black Hawk Down*, Yemen in *Rules of Engagement*, Persia in

*Alexander*, etc.<sup>310</sup> This continual cinematic location of US violence in foreign lands tends to naturalize and normalize US interventionism.

While television and other media frequently refuse to air images of the everyday carnage, suffering and bloodletting resulting from US military aggression, one can visit a local theatre or video store to watch an endless stream of hyper-violence in films such as *Tears of the Sun*, *Sin City*, *Man on Fire*, *Rules of Engagement*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Kill Bill Vol. 1 and Vol. 2*, *Flags of our Fathers*, *Saw III*, etc., where beheadings, mutilations, eviscerations, amputations, mass murder, and impaling are the norm. Robert Fisk calls this “a connivance” between the media and the imperatives of economic and political institutional power, part of a public pedagogy project to arouse in the population support for the application of sadistic US military violence at a time in history when “what is at stake...is not the control of a particular part of the planet...but the control of its totality by one hegemonic economic and military superpower, with all means—even the most extreme...violent military ones---at its disposal.”<sup>311</sup>

### **The Politics of Experience and the Experience of Politics in Films**

In alluding to the politics of experience of films and the experience of politics in films,<sup>312</sup> Terrence Rafferty, writing in the *New Yorker*, notes how “the complex emotional responses [films] evoke...can lead us, if we allow them, to a kind of tragic understanding of American life — tragic in the original and the fullest sense, in which the spectacle of unspeakable calamity produces pity and terror and then an unforeseeable and penetrating clarity.” What Rafferty does not note is how this “unforeseeable and penetrating clarity,” particularly in militarized films such *Tears of the Sun* suffused with the normalized and normalizing ideologies of the hegemonic US culture of militarism and its civilizing mission, in this case in Nigeria, circulating through audiences conditioned by that same US culture of militarism, in the end, use the political experience of pity producing calamity to produce an insidious politics, the purpose of which is to: (1) use the calamity and pity to redirect and re-confirm victim-hood to and on “us,” (or our Nigerian Christian surrogates in *Tears*) the

victimizer, rather than allowing it to focus on “them,” the victims of US policies;<sup>313</sup> (2) generate support for large scale US military violence, the growth of a culture of militarism, pursuit of Empire through military superiority, public subsidies for the private profit Pentagon system, and an increasingly militarized society, on a scale far more barbaric and destructive than anything possible from the ranks of the often demonized and barbarized “enemy;”<sup>314</sup> (3) create “justifications” for killing and abusing “the enemy,” increasingly portrayed over the past twenty years, in line with “official” planning and policy, as Arabs and Muslims; (4) produce a culture of fear and inculcate Old Testament style vengeance as an appropriate response to violence on the grounds that our violence is “good” and defensive violence and their violence is “evil” and aggressive violence. As noted, this taking of violence into simplistic metaphysical realms of “good” and “evil” functions to rob audiences of meaningful moral engagements which require a careful and sensitive examination of the historical conditions and political circumstances in which people live and interact.

*Tears of the Sun*, is a culturally complicated filmic experience of politics and calamity that opens, through visual, textual and aural devices, audience options for pity and empathy, critical engagement or passive reception, contentious argumentation or myth-endorsing acceptance. The politics of experience that often leads to the experience of insidious politics is demonstrated quite clearly in Fuqua’s emotionally wrenching, Jesus in the jungle doing the right thing, US “cavalry”/air force to the rescue, Muslim demonizing, genocidal, Vietnam-syndrome erasing, hero worshipping, humanitarian military spectacle, vengeance fest, and “impressionistic nightmare,”<sup>315</sup>

Decisions to employ military force and violence, with predictably “ugly” consequences, whether at home or abroad, along with issues of sometimes equally “ugly” geopolitics and power, are not separate from the productions of popular culture and the ways popular culture serves to promote policies and practices of State, whether cinematically represented through Navy Seals mass murdering demonized Nigerian militia (*Tears of the Sun*), Marines slaughtering demonized Yemeni civilians (*Rule of Engagement*), a Special Forces mercenary perpetrating a torture and murder spree



against demonized Mexicans in Mexico City (*Man on Fire*), outraged and frightened US Special forces slaughtering Somalis (*Black Hawk Down*), or a neighborhood “King” eliminating the weak in order to protect his “empire” in *Mystic River*. Political policy and practice is not distinct or detached from popular culture, nor is popular culture distinct or detached from political policy and practice, i.e. they are the cause and effect of one another. Policies of state, especially military policies in the increasingly militarized US society and culture, influence popular culture to generally support, but sometimes challenge, the planning, preparation and implementation of aggressive policies. The productions of popular culture, in their power to shape identity, desires, drives, values, and allegiances, prepare the ground for and condition the participants who conduct the often “ugly” policies of state, and also those who produce, distribute and receive the creations of popular culture. Popular culture and political policy and practice are both crucially linked to national identity; and, national identity in turn is linked to the ability of State power to carry out military policies and practices internally and externally as it is linked to the productions of popular culture. The ability of the State to carry out policies and practices is partially determined by popular support and vitality for those policies, and popular support for policies is often shaped through the productions of a supportive and vital popular culture industry as they are circulated through already deeply inscribed notions of national identity, myths and dynamism that in some cases create an “ugly” willingness, and normalized expectation, to “shoot to kill.”

Twenty-five years of demonizing Muslims and Arabs, and “little brown brothers,” in both political and popular culture, along with US interventions in the Middle East and Latin America, created the ideologies and identities, thoughts and identifications, emotional attachments and detachments, and psychological affirmations or rejections, through which films such as *Tears of the Sun*, *Man on Fire*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Rules of Engagement* (and to a lesser degree *Mystic River*) were produced, distributed, received, engaged, internalized, supported or challenged. The four films are contemptible in their overt racism and xenophobia and their pro-militarism, pro-violence stances.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, the overt nature of the presentation opens possibilities for counter-responses and counter-arguments that challenge the myths, and critical argumentations with the films that development empathy with the victims.

*Tears of the Sun*, like the other films in the cycle, creates scenarios in which out-manned and outgunned US troops (rarely the case in reality) in the Nigerian jungle, led by a morally empty and emotionally scarred Navy Seal Lt. Waters (Bruce Willis) embark on a Christ-like salvation mission to rescue a group of Nigerian “innocents,” (Christians) under attack by savage, murderous “Others,” (Muslims). The enemies are portrayed as not only out to destroy their targets, but out to get “us.” In *Tears*, heroic and embattled US soldiers are under attack. They are portrayed both as victims thus compelling identification with their “defensive” struggle and thus their “necessary” actions, and as humanitarian liberators, thus building support and allegiance to their heroic sacrifices.<sup>316</sup> The heroic US figures in *Tears*, however, are not under attack in the US, but in the land of the people, Nigeria, who are somehow “attacking” us, people who, in turn, are brutally destroyed by the representatives/representations of US power. This constant film portrayal of “justified” and unchallenged use of US force abroad normalizes the use of US force globally and works to both inscribe legitimacy on US foreign acts of aggression in the public mind and also to suggest that violence is a sensible solution to social conflict thus hiding the reality that military power is virtually useless in resolving the turmoil and consequences of larger political, economic and social problems.

*Tears*, like the other films, reinforces the notions that: (1) the US only engages in “defensive” action in its pursuits of foreign policy against recalcitrant others; (2) the US is driven by humanitarian ideals in its interventions against human rights violating “Others;” and, (3) the US has a right to send its military forces into foreign countries to spread some abstract notions of democracy, liberation and freedom. These are suppositions that require serious critical examination, questioning and challenge for the farce of their absurdity and the tragedy of their brutality. A critical stance on such matters and their cinematic representation would question: (1) the legitimacy of US

actions that kill, mutilate and torture people in their own country (or anywhere else); (2) whether US actions are ever really “defensive;” (3) whether the US is committed to humanitarianism; (4) whether the US has the right to unilaterally intervene anywhere, anytime, against anyone, for any reason deemed appropriate by the US (rather than in accord with international laws, principles and conventions); (5) the truthfulness and legitimacy of representations of US power as manifested in films through the actions of individual soldiers, mercenaries, or small units of troops; (6) the pedagogical impact of these representations along with the pedagogical impact of the failure to pose these questions in films and other media.

A critical stance would also examine how racist, religionist, and militarist representations as seen in *Tears* work to: (1) color our perceptions and shape our imaginings of reality; (2) function to create myths of US benevolence; (3) distance us from a recognition and an understanding of the too often violent and destructive US role in global affairs; (4) mobilize allegiances, inculcate narrow notions of violence, politics and morality; (5) undermine critical pedagogical approaches that might help us develop skills and tools to see such films, all films, and other media representations of US militarism, as political, moral, historical and pedagogical texts that can be engaged in ways that help us critique, problematize and challenge both dominant political discourses and the common sense assumptions that shape our knowledge and understanding of events and actions in the world within and beyond popular culture in order to overcome the dehumanization and degradation that accompanies the multiple forms of violence that accrue from ideological and material US policies; (6) internalize racist assumptions that often externalize themselves in acts of sadism and brutality; (7) reconnect our imaginations to objective facts and informed realities.<sup>317</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

A truly critical stance on US foreign “engagements” presented regularly in films such as *Tears* could begin to undermine the National Security Strategy policy that reserves the right for the US to launch preventive strikes against any country or group the US deems, with or without

evidence, a threat or risk. *Tears* offers a heart-wrenching rescue mission of brutalized and innocent people with which it is difficult not to morally and political identify in positive ways. Nevertheless, underneath the tear-jerker heroic and self-sacrificing rescue mission the film taps into national identity myths that have a powerful hold on public memory. *Tears* produces subject positions that link us as individuals to larger National patriotic and jingoistic identities and identifications, so that we can easily come away from the film educated (again) to believe that we, the US, the civilized, enlightened, City on the Hill, humanitarians, have the right to intervene anywhere in the world to spread ideals of freedom and democracy and save the innocent from tyranny and barbarism. These myths and beliefs around US commitments are thinly held in the popular imagination (because reality has a way of creeping in to disrupt the myths) requiring a constant “carpet bombing” of public pedagogies to keep them intact. Generally uncritical and celebratory films, such as *Tears*, provide needed reinforcement to maintain the deeply inculcated, but thinly held, cultural assumptions around the role of US power in the world. Because the assumptions are both deeply inculcated and thinly held, they call out for counter-pedagogies that provide us with proficiencies and instruments for critiquing, challenging and overcoming the assumptions that permit power to pursue its imperial and destructive path.

### **Rescue Missions**

*Tears of the Sun*, creates a moral fabric in which US Navy Seals, led by a morally conflicted and deadened Lt. Waters (Bruce Willis) are called into action to carry out a humanitarian rescue mission in Nigeria after Muslim soldiers, portrayed as a peculiar combination of inhuman savages and neo-Nazi storm troopers, stage a coup to overthrow a Christian president (himself implicated in human rights violations) and carry out ethnic cleansing massacres of people who, in the film’s words, “don’t go to the right church,” i.e. Christians (a trope that serves well to demonize Muslims and ingratiate the audience to their eventual incineration). The film creates a “Good Nigerian/Bad Nigerian” cultural universe, in which the bad Nigerians are murderous Muslims, and the good

Nigerians are covering Christians awaiting salvation from above, a “moral” strategy that plays well in the post 9/11 US construction of good and evil in the world. After Waters decides to assist the Nigerian Christians in their journey to Cameroon to escape the Muslim death squads, the rest of the film is basically an adventure film in which the pursued courageously battle the jungle elements, their own consciences, their own allegiances, their own emotions in the face of brutal massacres, their own questionable will to continue, and the Muslim army in pursuit. In the end, courage, will, sacrifice and superior violence prevails, the hunted reach safe haven in Cameroon, the king of the Christian clan is heroically celebrated, and a wounded but victorious Waters, ascends, literally Christ-like, to the heavens (with the assistance of a helicopter).

### **Alternates**

The director’s cut edition of the DVD, a more complicated and complicating film than the theatrical release, opens with a scene, excised from the theatrical release, in which we see the staging of a coup. “Rebel” Muslim soldiers attack the palace of the Christian President, abduct him and his family (wife and two children), then lecture the President about human rights violations, and then, off camera, kill the presidential family. This opening contextualizes the coup in ways that the theatrical release left unattended, and it presents a small opening for the development of historical and political understanding absent in the theatrical version. While narrowly focused it does give the political and historical impression, again crucially absent in the theatrical release, that the coup is not the result of random, savage Muslim violence and hatred perpetrated by some force of metaphysical “evil,” but a response to a murderous, power-hungry Christian president whose administration has carried out policies, pogroms and programs destructive of Muslims. It may be the director’s backhanded attempt to historically link US policies over the years to the events of 9/11, and suggest that for wars of terror we should seek historical and political explanations somewhere between the extremes of full-bore determinists who proclaim a total absence of individual freedom (i.e. Muslims are inherently or metaphysically evil and therefore incapable of acting otherwise), and full-bore

libertarians who proclaim a total presence of freedom as in the position that everything is a matter of individual free choice (i.e. Muslims are killing Christians because they simply choose to outside of any historical factors that may have conditioned the actions and they are therefore the representation of a truly depraved humanity that deserve extermination). Both extreme perspectives obviate the need, hope, or possibility of finding any reason for terror and conflict in the realities of human social existence, institutional power relationships and historical discord. These positions also have the advantage of clearing US institutions of any responsibility for instigating terror in the world. Sadly, this suggestion that we should examine conditions in order to understand actions, intimated in the prologue, gets lost in the normalized presentation of the remainder of the film, especially the theatrical version that excises the crucial grounding.

In the DVD prologue, the Muslim soldiers confront the king with a universalist morality (tempered by a confused notion of “justice”) by calling attention to his own atrocities, the “thousands you have killed and displaced. Those thousands had brothers, sons. Now we are back for justice. We remember your justice, Mr. President. Your justice brings blood money. The most unimaginable thing is to watch your family die. Something we know well.”<sup>318</sup> The president, off-screen, is forced to watch his family killed. At the sound of a gun exploding, a gun pointed at the head of the President’s young daughter, there is an immediate visual transition to a US aircraft carrier, appropriately named the USS Harry S. Truman. The visual transition is a powerful inducer for US audiences to consider Arab anger, “why they hate us,” and links to US military power (one suspects this powerful linkage may be one reason why the prologue is absent from the theatrical release).<sup>319</sup> Truman, of course, is remembered for his ordering of atomic bombs dropped on Japanese civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, probably the two largest instant death tolls in human history.<sup>320</sup> In the context of international terrorism one suspects that the director Fuqua may be making a not so subtle statement about who is responsible for the most international terrorism since 1945. Subtle moral and historical statements, however, probably lack the pedagogical power

necessary to raise such films out of the gutter of xenophobia, racism, colonialism, imperialism and militarism.

### **Colonial Tears**

*Tears of the Sun* is part of a long tradition of colonial/imperial representations in US cinema sometimes expressed as, in Kipling's phrase, "the white man's burden." Over the years this is partially accomplished through the shallow and condescending representation of third world people, especially Africans, and more recently Arab Muslims. "The burden" serves as cover for the pursuit of self-interest, and any benefit to the victims, like human rights in general, is incidental. The dichotomous formula is simple: "native" people are represented on the one hand as simple-minded, mostly mute, fawning, weak and largely helpless, and on the other hand savage, immoral, brutal, corrupt and heathen;<sup>321</sup> therefore, they require intervention by a superior, strong, righteous, civilized and benevolent United States that is more than willing to bear the "burden" to help the helpless "natives" save themselves from themselves...and if they can't save themselves from themselves we will "save" them in the name of an imperious "freedom."<sup>322</sup> In *Tears* the former category of "weakness" is represented by the Nigerian Christians saved by Waters and his troops; the latter category of "savagery" is represented by the Nigerian Muslims who carry out heinous slaughters while in pursuit of Waters, the Christians, and the Nigerian Christian King.

The US "burdensome" intervention trope often expresses itself cinematically in forms both creative and destructive. The creative end is the aid brought to those who cannot help themselves, the Nigerian Christians in *Tears*, and is thus representative of a creative and benevolent sense of Christ-like colonial US humanitarianism; the destructive end is the violence the US wields against forces that are threatening the helpless natives, typically tyrannical types from within their own ranks, the Nigerian Muslims who are exterminating the Nigerian Christians in *Tears*, or, for example, the bad Iraqis chasing the good Iraqis in *Three Kings*. Off-screen the binary is witnessed in the contemporaneous US aggression against Iraq where it is either inside "insurgents" or outside

“terrorists” opposed to freedom, fighting against “good” Iraqis willing to work with “us” in the name of democracy and liberation,<sup>323</sup> or in Nicaragua in the 1980s where “freedom fighters, the moral equivalent of the founding fathers, upholders of our values,” (Reagan) the Contras were on the side of “good,” and opposed to the heathen, hateful, terrorist, communist Sandinistas on the side of “evil.” In essence this is another expression of US “creative destruction” that leaves absent the destructive consequences of the “creative” use of US military might or the “creative” arming and support for mass murderers such as the Contras.

### **Merger**

*Tears* coyly and coldly brings together both Africans and Muslims as a way to express the dual need for both creative and destructive intervention and in this way taps into long held, and more recent, sanctionable forms of xenophobia, racism and imperial domination, i.e. that against genocidal Africans and that against terrorist Muslims (not ironically in regions of the world where there is oil the US wants to control). This approach carries with it the “advantage” of easily arousing and exploiting long held anti-black racism and melding that hatred to both the condescending outrage toward genocidal “Africans” in the post-Rwanda period, and, especially in post 9/11 US culture, an even more intense form of “officially” formulated and culturally stimulated hatred, anti-Arab/Muslim racism. In US media, even in “respectable magazines and newspapers” it is permissible to attack Muslims and Arabs and say things “you would never dare to say about any other ethnic, [religious] or racial group.”<sup>324</sup> One should note here the conflation of Muslim with Arab. While it is true that most Arabs are Muslims it is not true that most Muslims are Arabs for the Muslim world is now global in reach.

On the one hand, it is *clear* in *Tears* that the enemy forces are Christian hating (code for “they hate us and our way of life”) Nigerians, hence “African” Muslims; while on the other hand this representation still taps into a normalized dislike and distrust of Arabs who are generally seen as representing the Muslim world in the US public mind, more so after 9/11. In fact, the extension of



the code “Muslim” into Nigeria doubles the negative effect in that (1) it suggests to a de-historicized and geographically-challenged US public that Islam (i.e. “evil Arabism”), wherever it plants its feet, will call forth vicious forms of terror, mutilation and destruction, and (2) that “Africans,” naturally “evil” anyway, will remain hopeless and brutal “savages,” unless they are “saved,” by “white” Christianity, from their inherent dark “evil” and the exacerbating “evil” of equally dark Islam (as some Nigerian Christians are represented to have been saved in the film). There is a third effect, beneficial to US militarism: it suggests that the “Muslim problem” is now a global threat; hence, the US needs to increase its global attacks, plant its “feet” across the planet, and increase Pentagon spending, all as part of the global war on terror. So, the long inculcated ideas of “evil” that surround “African blackness” and “Muslims” feed into one another in *Tears* to intensify the impact on US audiences and prompt an increased support for what is called US “humanitarian” intervention,<sup>325</sup> that is more often than not an expression of the US capacity for creative destruction, or direct US military aggression in the Muslim world, and elsewhere.

The levels of blood-drenched horror expressed in *Tears of the Sun* are especially gruesome as is revealed first in a Christian Mission massacre scene in which a priest, pleading against the desecration of the House of God, is beheaded, along with the intimidated rape, mutilation and murder of a young, beautiful, blonde, fair-skinned Aryan novice, and the river running red with blood; and second, in a village massacre in which Nigerian Christians are hacked to death, burned alive, have their throats cut, are shot in the head, and most graphically when we watch a twitching blood and sweat soaked woman, who has had her breasts hacked off, slowly and torturously bleed toward death while her agonized baby, denied life giving milk, cries painfully nearby. In this case, the “liberating” US soldiers actually carry out a mercy-killing by providing the woman an overdose of morphine which is symbolic of the entire film in which redeeming US soldiers figuratively provide the military palliative to put “Muslim Africa” out of its misery by calling in the F18s to incinerate (i.e. redeem in a God-like cleansing by fire)<sup>326</sup> the “evil” Muslim terrorists,<sup>327</sup> a gesture that opens up

the possibility for “freedom” to flourish in a force-free, and it is intimated, Christian based, return of the King, Nigerian future.<sup>328</sup> In addition, when all is hauntingly coupled with an emotionally jarring and psychologically wrenching bathetic soundtrack, it serves to elicit in a US audience conditioned to both fear, despise and distrust Africans and “Arabs/Muslims” and honor US “humanitarianism,” support for US interventions that save the “others” from themselves and save us from their imperious and “evil ways.”

### **Binary**

*Tears*, on the surface attempts to provide a more nuanced view of the complexities of African politics and society, but in effect it resurrects and recodifies the simplistic colonial binary of good and bad natives by painting one group, the Christians, as representative of freedom and “like us” while painting the other group, Muslims, as representing merciless savages and “like them.” Herein, “them” taps into the doubly foreboding tropes of terrorist Muslim and dark hearted African. The interpolation of these multiple figurations limits both “colonized” groups to the level of objectified victims robbed of subjectivity. On the one hand the “innocent” Nigerians are victimized by their own inferiority and helplessness in relation to both a superior and freedom delivering force of US soldiers and a vicious and vile Muslim “inspired” force of mass murderers; on the other hand the “guilty” Nigerians are victimized by both their own improvidence and impotence in the face of Islamic beliefs that drive them to terrorize and, in the end, the incinerating potency of US military firepower. These dichotomous neocolonial ideological formulations not only shut down audience imagination and understanding by tapping into already deeply inculcated US cultural discourses but their use in *Tears* further endorses the necessitation for the implementation of US creatively destructive military force inside and outside the filmic universe of *Tears*.

These representations of Muslims and Africans do little to ameliorate and much to antagonize the deeply inscribed “dark and mysterious” generic image of Africans and Muslims as “evil”<sup>329</sup> especially when coupled with a US media that focuses on the enigmatic terroristic

temperament and bewildering nature of “Muslim” people, and “the chaos and evil of Arab/[Muslim] governments.”<sup>330</sup> As a consequence these delineations engender support for US military intervention in the “dark” regions of the world as is evidenced by recent direct or indirect US interventions in Iraq (1991-2005), Afghanistan (2001-2005), Kosovo (white but with a Muslim component) (1999-2005), Somalia (1993-94), Haiti (1994-2005), Sudan (1998), Panama (1989), Nicaragua (1980-1990), Libya (1986), Iran (1988), Palestine (1967-2006), Lebanon (2006), etc.<sup>331</sup>

### **Tears Seen Through Other Eyes**

There is critical mode in which one might view *Tears of the Sun*. Here one must read in the context of the growing imbroglio in Iraq that is, like Vietnam, raising questions about the legitimacy of the use and abuse of US power, the US role in the world, the growing breakdown in military authority in Iraq (close to 60% of US soldiers report morale as low or very low, and over 70% want the US to withdraw), the legitimacy of the Executive Branch of the US government, not to mention growing distrust of Congress. Thus far questions are focused primarily on the Executive Branch and the intelligence community, on tactics and intelligence not on immorality and criminality, and not the larger culture of militarism and the corporate and military institutions that are part of the Pentagon-Industrial-Media complex. In addition, as Robert Fisk notes, while it is becoming increasingly difficult in the face of growing disaster and dissent “not to ask questions,” the questions are primarily internally directed and largely driven by the de-moralized standard “it is bad for us,” not “we have killed [at least hundreds] of thousands of Iraqis, largely destroyed their country, etc.” The questions, Fisk advises, “are being pondered because the whole illegal invasion of Iraq is ending in calamity [for us] rather than success.”<sup>332</sup>

The process of moral awakening, questioning of assumptions and direct challenges to authority in the face of sadistic brutality, murder and genocide in *Tears* might be perceived as, or opened up to, radical statements on current conditions and a coded call for audiences to challenge authority and begin raising similar critical questions in the face of US criminal aggression. Near the

end of *Tears*, as Nigerian Muslim forces are moving in for the kill, Lt. Waters organizes a democratic circle discussion of what should be done. Visually the scene occurs immediately after crossing a stream. The group, having crossed over, gathers streamside. The visualization suggests both a crossing over into new territory, and a process of cleansing.<sup>333</sup> All agree that the only moral thing to do is continue the rescue mission and try to get the refugees to Cameroon, even if it means dying while trying. This is a radical breakdown of the hierarchical structure inherent to military discipline and authoritarian control, and at this point the film vaguely suggests that these soldiers are no longer responding as soldiers but are now simply representing decent universalized moral human beings acting in solidarity and support with suffering and threatened fellow humans hoping to secure their mutual survival. In this sense the film becomes more emotionally engaging and morally engrossing.<sup>334</sup> Direct orders from above are now considered irrelevant and even immoral and they are courageously violated.<sup>335</sup> There is the hint in *Tears* that the wisdom and power of the people are more attuned to human needs, human support and human desires. In essence, a new community working in solidarity is formed when the soldiers and Nigerian Christians work together on the path to “freedom” from genocide and “freedom” to an intimidated revitalized Nigerian democratic society.<sup>336</sup>

There is a political and moral evolution in the film among US soldiers driven by their experience and their reflections on that experience in the light of new and previous knowledge. In short, they become politically reflective and morally critical. Waters, largely indifferent and pitiless, unable to even remember when he ever “did the right thing,” and his fellow soldiers are jolted into a new consciousness by their haunting witnessing of mass killings in progress, blood on the ground, and the visceral fear etched starkly into the faces of their hunted Nigerian companions. The startling experience politicizes Waters, and in turn, his fellow soldiers. The film suggests a basic lesson: when people know, they care; part of knowing is seeing the truth, i.e. witnessing; once they see and care they often act; and the best way to know is to experience, to witness, and then critically reflect

on that experience in the light of previous knowledge. In effect, we often experience and discover ourselves in the experience of discovering others when we develop the ability to take the experience of the other and reflectively make it our own.

In the case of *Tears* it is the visual and visceral experience of trauma, slaughter and suffering that awakens consciousness and the experience of the pain of the others that opens up doors for Willis to experience himself differently in a rediscovery of a militarily and ideologically suppressed humanity.<sup>337</sup> In this reading, Willis and his troops move from being battle-hardened, morally indifferent, militarily obedient, racially bigoted, ethnically distanced and politically insensitive soldiers insulated from the realities of human agony and suffering that arise from unjust social and political global arrangements to disobedient soldiers sensitive to human suffering, committed to moral and political responsibility, and open to the concerns of a world wider than their previously insular vision. It is a move from self-interest to collective interest, and from obedience to the rules of authority to obedience to a higher set of universal laws of human morality. In short, one could argue toward a more hopeful reading and suggest that the most radical notion alluded to here is the erasing of the deeply engraved “us” versus “them” binary the Bush Administration (and previous US administrations) have foisted on the US population in order to compel support for US military adventurism, and the introduction, not fully realized, of a universal humanist ideal in which to some extent there is an understanding that we are all in this together.

### **Subjective Problems**

*Tears* positions the audience to identify with the cathartic and neo-colonialist figure Lt. Waters, and thus his eventual project, by often locating us as seeing the world through his eyes so that our spectatorship is merged with his engagement with the world represented in the film. This move to visually erase the distance between spectator and participant creates a trajectory that embeds us in the action of the film and produces a deeper identification with both the heroic subject figure of US

soldier and the suffering object figures represented by the Christian Nigerians. By focusing audience attention on that which Waters' encounters, from and through his point of view, particularly his/our view from the helicopters where we see the Christian Nigerians being abandoned to what we assume will be a brutal fate, the helicopter view shot looking down on the Christian Mission massacre that leads to the return to protect the Christian Nigerians as well as Waters' moral awakening, later the over the hilltop shot of the village massacre, and the penultimate scene in which Waters is thanked by the Nigerians who survived the trek and is told, "We will never forget you, God will never forget you," the audience is invited to experience his pain, and to identify with his moral growth and emotional struggles and experience them as our own.

In each scene, we are presented with a general picture of helpless Nigerians, often positioned below and seen from above, dependent on their Jesus-like "colonial" savior for safety and transport to freedom. Herein, the desire of the spectator is mobilized to engage with the narrative development in ways that support not only the neo-colonial rescue mission, but also, more darkly, the moral growth and political development of the initially bureaucratized and indifferent "hero" which is then conflated with support for the use of US military firepower to exterminate the "evil" Muslims we have been taught to despise over the course of the film. Positioning spectators in line with the protagonist while simultaneously mobilizing particular sets of moral desires and emotional allegiances underscores and intensifies audience identification with larger elements of plot, character and narrative development as well as political and moral pedagogies present in the larger terrain of the film.

These linkages are further intensified but simultaneously undermined when linked to the notion of what Robert Ray refers to as "problem pictures," i.e. films infused with narrative and cinematic maneuverings in which protagonists are confronted with moral dilemmas within a larger discourse referencing troubling coincident social and political matters. Among the numerous troubling matters addressed in *Tears* are genocide, tyranny, and imperialism, and US institutional

positions on genocide, tyranny and imperialism. “Problem pictures,” at one level, engage in critical reflection of the larger social and political problems while at another level they undermine the critical reflections with tearjerker feel-good pat happy endings that simplify the complex nature of the larger social and political issues under review and in the end distance the audience from the preliminary critical and moral engagement.

The “problem picture’s” initial attempt to critically problematize urgent contemporary political and social matters is further undermined in *Tears* by the emphasis on the renegade hero who challenges authority, social norms, injustices, and institutionalized moral codes. Such a gratifying renegade hero is one with whom it is easy to identify because one recognizes, at some level, that the renegade American hero Waters is doing what is right, courageous and noble against the bureaucratically indifferent orders of his superior officers and against some authoritarian notion of an immoral institutional America that the audience knows, consciously or unconsciously, is wrong.

The renegade hero is an undermining trope because it suggests that large political, historical and social problems, such as genocidal slaughter, tyranny and imperialism, are easily resolved by heroic individual’s making the right choices, with the crucial assistance in *Tears* from F-18s. Furthermore, it suggests that the issues are somehow distanced from larger political, historical and social institutions and structures out of which the problems grow and proliferate. *Tears of the Sun’s* visual and aural power to create emotional tension and especially to provide all too easy emotional resolution and release also works to undermine perceptions of these momentous issues as parts of a larger social and global history, as well as the gravity of the problems and solutions, by dampening the outrage and disgust, quelling the moral agency, and distancing the engagement that is necessary in order to organize communities and mobilize forces to oppose the institutional structures that produce the kinds of violence and misery represented in *Tears*. The confirmation of the socially popular discourse of individual moral commitment as a force powerful enough to overcome social,

political and institutional wrongs adds to the undermining of collective moral and political commitments necessary to address the larger issues presented in the problem films.

There is another avenue of identification employed powerfully in Hollywood problem pictures and renegade hero narratives, that of the already identified Hollywood hero. In *Tears* it is Bruce Willis, already deeply embedded in the national consciousness as a renegade hero from the *Die Hard* films, among others.<sup>338</sup> Spectator identification with the renegade hero at the level of film icon is established before the film, further enlarged through promotion of the film within a general celebrity culture, inflated by the reverence for military heroism, and intensified within and through the film codes. In addition, any identification with or understanding of citizen complicity in the crimes of state is further alienated in renegade hero problem pictures for a number of reasons linked to viewer identification with a rugged individualist authority-challenging hero.

By directing audience identification with and allegiance to a morally enlightened, genocide-ending and intrepid renegade hero in *Tears* and away from the represented cowardice and immoralities of larger political and military structures or figures, audiences assume a distancing sense of moral satisfaction and superiority in relation to the institutional formations.<sup>339</sup> Because the root of the injustices is linked to faceless structures with which it is difficult to identify, and the root of solutions to injustices is linked to the face of the hero with which it is easy to identify, audiences feel no complicity with the crimes of state because they are morally and emotionally engaged participants in the solutions as carried out by the hero. In the cinematic universe where audiences are directed to identify with individualized solutions to larger political, social and historical conflicts audiences develop a sense of moral victory over injustices; but the cinematic moral victory undermines the potentials for moral victories outside of cinema because it not only simplifies the solutions to the problems and hence the struggles necessary to achieve viable solutions, but it simplifies the morality and immorality of institutional initiations of violence and aggression and the



complex social, political and historical illusions and irrationalities that have blinded leaders committed to aggression for the past 100 years or so.

Growth in individual moral consciousness is not unimportant, but audience identification with the growth in moral consciousness of a cinematic hero should not be confused with growth in the moral consciousness of an audience nor with moral or political victory outside of cinema especially when that individual growth in consciousness is a cover for business as usual in the larger structures responsible for perpetrating the aggression and violence. It is the cinematic equivalent of an aspirin taken to ameliorate the headaches caused by dehumanizing workplace conditions when a democratic union is really what is needed to transform the conditions and hours of labor. While there is a moral victory at the level of the small and personal, the larger social immoralities linked to the culture of militarism remain unchanged, and are perhaps exacerbated.

As part of Parnell's "tremendous weapon for education and propaganda," *Tears of the Sun* continues and perpetuates the pattern of US cinematic pedagogies of war and aggression that keep largely hidden from the US audience the ugliness, brutality and destruction perpetrated by the US, along with the historical, political and economic contexts which drive US aggression and intervention. At the same time it overexposes the carnage carried out by "the enemy" in a simplified "good versus evil" fashion that stimulates support for what is projected as humanitarian intervention and self-protection against threatening enemies, and thus further feeds the culture militarism of which it is a crucial component.

## CHAPTER 7: Man on Fire: “*kill them all*”

*They were torturing us as though it was theater for them...  
I wished I could kill myself because no one was there to stop it,*  
-- Hussein Mutar, US Torture Victim in Iraq<sup>340</sup>

*“We’re training hard-core killers to be more efficient”  
-- Senator Tom Harkin<sup>341</sup> 1986*

*“Cruelties have been...approved by...whole populations;  
yes, even today violence is not always condemned.”  
Georg Gerland “On the Extermination of Primitive Peoples” (1868)*

The “theatre of the absurd” nature of continuing US torture and abuse in Iraq and elsewhere is captured by a manual distributed in the autumn of 2003 by the US Marine Corps that offered its troops the following: “Do not shame or humiliate a man in public...The most important qualifier for all shame is for a third party to *witness* the act. If you must do something likely to cause shame [such as] placing a hood over a detainee’s head...remove the person from view of others...Placing a detainee on the ground or putting a foot on him implies you are God. This is one of the worst things we can do.” One wonders if there are admonitions against placing bombs in “detainees” rectums, or cutting off their fingers one by one by one and suturing them with a car cigarette lighter, or putting bullets into their temple, or slicing off ears, or blowing off fingers with shotgun blasts and placing such actions in the full view of third party witnesses. Does this imply some God like quality? These latter “cruelties” are forthrightly employed, with “approval,” by former US Special Ops soldier and very efficient “hard core killer” John Creasy in Tony Scott’s viciously volatile *Man on Fire* (2004) (*MF*). These scenes of excruciating and humiliating torture perpetrated against “little brown brother” (William Howard Taft) Mexicans were placed in full view of millions of US citizens in public cinemas across the land as part of the long pattern of public pedagogies that condition us to tolerate, celebrate and approve of such cruelties, remain indifferent in the face of such abominations, tolerate them, or at least not publicly condemn them. One further wonders if this third party cinematic witnessing of what serves as a God-like foot upon the cultural

face of the victims produces any degree of shame, compunction or moral outrage in the witnesses or outrage, hatred and disgust in the extended communities of the portrayed victims, or public attempts to link “untrue” on screen torture and executions to the “true” torture and executions occurring at the same time off screen?

In April 2004, just prior to, during and continuing after, the Abu Ghraib torture “revelations”<sup>342</sup> that exposed a U.S. program of systematic abuse, torture and summary execution, initiated and overseen by the Pentagon, and carried out by US troops, private contractors and Special Ops personnel in Iraq, the local cinema was awash in the hyper-militaristic aesthetic, ideology of hardness and “culture of sadism.”<sup>343</sup> At the top of the chart was Pentagon friendly Tony “Top Gun” Scott’s excruciating and experimental torture-fest *Man on Fire* (2004). As Deborah Hornblow elaborated in the Hartford Courant, “American filmmakers seem to be nursing the fantasy that a lone former U.S. Army Special Forces operative is all that is required to set some seriously bad things right...the Special Forces Op [i.e. counter-insurgency specialist, i.e. assassin and torturer, i.e. terrorist<sup>344</sup>] is the new cowboy, the one-man [omnipotent] militia, [the new Rambo, Dirty Harry, and Terminator], and humanity’s last chance for salvation in a messed-up, corruption-plagued frontier.”<sup>345</sup> What Hornblow fails to note is how the “frontier” has moved from “Indian Territory” to global territory.

In Scott’s *Man on Fire*,<sup>346</sup> soul-searching black man Denzel Washington, plays an initially angst and guilt ridden, reticent, morally confused, scripture-quoting, alcoholic and eventually Christ-like former Special Ops assassin who speaks in Bush-like monosyllables. Denzel’s character, **John Creasy**, also undergoes a miraculous Bushian conversion where he literally puts down the booze and picks up the Bible...and, simultaneously (so that we don’t miss the Jesus as Avenger message), he picks up the gun. The intimation is that the truth of the “good book” is only truly realized through the truth of the gun, or literally the bullets that “always tell the truth,” to quote Creasy’s mentor Rayburn (another “man on fire”). Denzel/Creasy performs an important cinematic pedagogical role:

make cruelty “cool,” torture “hard core,” violence a representation of turgid manhood, inscribe the notion that it is OK to be “down with” mutilation, all within a highly theatricalized, sensory overloaded and stylish presentation lending itself to cultural approval so that humiliating violence is not condemned but cheered and celebrated. Creasy is, and the cinematic witnesses are, “born again HARD,”<sup>347</sup> and able to endure the inflicting of unbearable pain, sadistic debasement, and still remain indifferent. Herein a hyper-violent masculinity is portrayed as competitive sport in which pleasure is maximized through the imposition of degrading pain on “the other” and ritualized in a glamorized aesthetic reminiscent of fascist spectacles.<sup>348</sup> This born again HARDNESS, what Adorno called the “ideology of hardness,”<sup>349</sup> has potentially grave moral and human consequences when the theatrical presentation is real and the victim’s only thought amidst the unbearable pain and humiliation is “I wish I could kill myself” because there is, within a US elite culture of callousness and indifference, no one there to stop the abuse.

### **Hyper-hell**

*Man on Fire (MF)* opens with a prologue in a chaotic Mexico City. It quotes, onscreen, facts about kidnappings in Mexico City giving the film an aura of documentary “truth,” but at the same time we are immersed in a hellish MTV-like post-modern, hyper-active, violent, disruptive, disjointed, and furious sensory overload filmic-style of speed ups, slow-downs, overlaps, jump cuts, flash cuts, super close-ups, washouts, overexposed film stock, fragments of dialogue, imagery out of sequence, subtitles in varying fonts drifting and bouncing across the screen (sometimes used to reinforce and heighten English dialogue), and, quickly altering and maladjusting moods expressed as much by the unrelenting and unfamiliar visual stimulation as by the rapid changes in music selections (Chopin piano preludes, Nine-Inch Nails, Verdi opera, folk music, hip-hop, Santana, salsa, etc.) which often settle as much as they unsettle the scenes they underscore. It is all distorting and disorienting, locating and dislocating, and dissimilar to what we know “here.” The disorientation is used to orient the viewer to a Hobbesian world of south of the border chaos, mayhem, corruption,

decay, confusion, violence and fear. The violence is decontextualized, but it is a form of violence and chaos for which the Jesus-like sacrificial hero **John Creasy**, coming from ‘above’ (adopting the typical Latin America is beneath “us” perspective) will provide some form of ameliorant, truth and salvation. The convoluted, unnatural and hyper-active imagery of “the streets” of Mexico City contrasts with a more placid, natural, and enriching color combination and focused style used when representing the lives and culture of the wealthy protagonists. This creates a binary identification pattern that repeats throughout the film. The pattern is standard: the world “out there” where “they” live is bedlam, hellish and a threat to our civilized and “cultured” lifestyle. The “us/them” binary pattern, aside from echoing the “you are either with us or against us” dichotomous and fundamentalist view of the world works in a well inscribed pattern to legitimate our violence carried out against them to destroy their demonic uncivilized threat to our superior civilized existence.

Three themes, repeated later, dominate this abysmal and disruptive prelude to the film proper: (1) **Religion**, introduced through repeated images of a church, along with Jesus and Mary religious iconography, a foreshadowing of the Creasy as Jesus/Pita as the Virgin relationship, and later Creasy’s regular reading of and quoting from the Bible; (2) **Violence**, as expressed through an abduction, replete with a brutal scene in which the victim’s ear is sliced from his head.<sup>350</sup> Here we have the first linking of “killing and torture as art”<sup>351</sup> with the allusion to Van Gogh in the slicing of the ear and the sending of said ear through the mail as evidence of the victims presence in the hands of the kidnappers expecting ransom payment. In addition, the violent imagery subverts the “truth” of the statements about family and love of son being everything.<sup>352</sup> “The Voice” (the lead kidnapper) reminds the family to “be professional,” thus intimating both that the kidnappers are simply performing a job in order to maximize wealth production, \$10 million per kidnapping, in the most professional manner possible and thus mocking our deeply embedded work ethic, and intimating that their actions are colored always by a hint of Hannah Arendt’s “just doing our job,” “banality of evil” fascist monsters; and, (3) an undeveloped look at **class division** and civic strife,

through the suggestion that the bourgeois class is under threat by a seedy, exploitive underclass of kidnapers hoping to cash in on the kidnapping insurance for which most of the wealthy families pay. The mood underscoring this introduction is one of volatility, fear, disruptive uncertainty and despair in a nightmare world of civic crisis, street war, disappearances, prostitution, social polarization, family decay, and ideological conflict. In short, it is a threatening and disobedient world that needs correction, not as rectification and remedy but as discipline and punishment of the sort Creasy, trained in the “art of killing” in the US military will deliver. The ameliorant code is not “an eye for an eye,” but “dozens of eyes for an eye.” In other words, the lesson is that disproportionate response is not only acceptable, but also necessary, and that our violence must outdo their violence, many times over...in the interest of justice, of course.<sup>353</sup>

Creasy, former globe-trotting U.S. Special Ops counter-insurgency specialist (i.e. torturer, killer, assassin, terrorist), who has literally lost his touch with guns and bullets (there are a number of scenes in which Creasy drops a bullet he is trying to catch<sup>354</sup>), travels to Mexico, to visit former Special Ops mentor and finger-licking friend, Rayburn, played jauntily, vaingloriously and unctuously by Christopher Walken. The royal Rayburn, who lives “like a King down here,” and addresses his subordinated and silenced Mexican wife with condescending, imperious and subjugating commands such as “Obey me, and I will love you,” provides well protected transportation services up and back between the U.S. and Mexico for Japanese “they think [Rayburn is] John Wayne” businessmen taking advantage of “the cheap labor” and unmentioned high profits in Mexico. In *MF* love is conditional upon obedience and subordination, morality is conditional on self-interest or self-debasement, and death is conditional on either the truth of the bullet or sacrificing for a “higher” cause both Biblical and nationalist; or, death is conditional upon your place in the race, class and national hierarchy.<sup>355</sup>

Creasy’s crossing-over the border in the opening of the film proper immediately exacerbates the portrayal of Mexico as corrupt, violent, intoxicated, hellish, lascivious and for sale. Rayburn sets

up Creasy in a hired-gun/body guard job with the Ramos family who inhabit an ostentatious mansion that is a strange mix of museum, music hall, castle and cathedral (in stark contrast to the sordid and oppressive slums in which the primary kidnappers live). Creasy is an unemployed, morally lost, unshaven, alcoholic, unsociable, reticent, unattached black man, just returned from doing “special work” in Colombia, but “it didn’t work out.”<sup>356</sup> In an apparent attempt to make sense of his career as a killer and torturer in service to Empire, Creasy asks Rayburn, “Do you think God will forgive us for what we’ve done?” Rayburn’s answer is a non-chalant and ironic, “No.” Creasy agrees, “Neither do I.” But, in this world of corruption, violence, and distrust, we learn that the God to whom these men look for guidance is not a God of forgiveness, but a God of vengeance, the god of the self-righteous and destructive neo-cons.

We soon discover that Creasy has been engaged within a moral dilemma over his past services: Is killing right or wrong? He is an off-mission “lost sheep,” as he tells a nun when she asks, “Do you ever see the hand of God in your work?”<sup>357</sup> Creasy quotes for the nun from Romans, Chapter 12, verse 21, “Be not overcome by Evil, but overcome Evil with Good.” This sets up the Manichean version of the world in which we, the United States, represent ultimate good and everyone “other” than us, represents ultimate Evil, further justifying and legitimating the use of military violence.<sup>358</sup> The simplistic Biblical binary sets up another standard trope in US cinema: overcoming “Evil” with “good” means employing what is represented as “self-defensive” and “innocent” levels of indiscriminate “good” violence far more brutal and destructive than anything for which offensive and guilty “Evil” is capable. The “lost sheep” Creasy is found only when his violent self is reawakened, when he is back on-mission, and his gun is his shepherd’s staff leading him (and us) to safety and the incendiary light.

Innocence that requires defense is embodied in nine year old Lupita’s Aryan blonde and blue-eyed “like us-ness,” a childhood innocence we naturally wish to protect.<sup>359</sup> All of our empathy

is centered on the one angel of whiteness amidst the degradations of the darker world “beneath the United States,” (in Lars Shoultz telling phrase).<sup>360</sup>

The key pedagogical problem of the Manichean version of the world is that it eliminates the possibility of critically examining the social, political, cultural and historical complexities that create conditions that shape lives and out of which people take actions. Furthermore, it prevents us from understanding that things are the way they are because they got that way, not because they have to be that way, thus subverting questions bent on discovering how things got to be the way they are, and why they are the way they are.<sup>361</sup> Among other things, this simple insight lays the groundwork for individual and collective agency and an understanding of our unfinished nature and of the accompanying ethical responsibility for the future. And that opens into the question of how ethical responsibility will be taken up. In the sutured world of *Man on Fire*, the ethic is reduced to “kill ‘em all” retaliation where bullets speak the truth, and where an aesthetic of torture and the art of death color choice.<sup>362</sup> Furthermore, justice, rather than being linked to improving social, economic and political conditions, is dangerously militarized and reduced to vengeance, violence and bloodshed. Rayburn tells Mexican intelligence agent Manzano (Giancarlo Gianinni) that Creasy will “deliver more justice in a weekend than 10 years of your courts and tribunals... a man can be an artist... Creasy’s art is death... he’s about to paint his masterpiece.”<sup>363</sup>

Creasy finds emotional and spiritual release when he comes to understand that the bible and the gun are really teaching the same lesson, “The bullet never lies,” a drill-sergeant’s “violence is freedom” lesson he teaches Lupita. Creasy tells Lupita, “The sound [of the gun] will set you free,” with the intimation that it is violence, and not a fear of violence, or a reluctance to employ violence, or a questioning of violence, or an abhorrence for violence, or options other than violence in human affairs, that creates the conditions for substantive freedom.<sup>364</sup>



## **The hate us for our freedoms**

Without intending to do so *MF*'s "the gun will set you free" ethos opens up possible conversations around notions of "freedom" for which U.S. power is deplored and hated by billions of "others" around the world. Bush is correct when he says "They hate our freedoms," (perhaps this is why they are being eliminated?) but he doesn't understand, or doesn't care to express, the freedoms they hate. They, the people outside the borders, don't hate "us," but the criminal, oppressive, and murderous policies, the effects of which they suffer, carried out, often under the Orwellian umbrella of "freedom," by sectors of state power in the U.S., some of which we witness in *Man on Fire*. For example, it is expressed in Creasy's assumed "freedom," one we should question critically, to unilaterally carry out "criminal" investigations, take the law into his own hands, arm himself to the teeth, declare "war," blow up buildings, mutilate, torture and murder in a foreign land, abduct people and hold them hostage, take no responsibility for his actions, remain unaccountable for the violence and destruction, and to assume, on the standard falsely dichotomous argument that freedom from violence can only be achieved through freedom to employ violence, that only the gun will set you free.<sup>365</sup> Creasy's drill instructor lessons in "courage" and "freedom" for Pita are reduced to several military bumper-sticker maxims: "do not flinch when you hear the sound of the gun;" "welcome the sound of the gun;" and "the gunshot holds no fear." With drill-sergeant intensity he forces Pita to repeat the latter phrase, over and over, louder and louder until, we are to assume, she too is "born again HARD!" thus making the murderous "ideology of hardness" attractive even to young girls.

Pita's father, Samuel Ramos, in some kind of "business trouble," and his wife Lisa hire Creasy, apparently because it is "nice that he's an American," to protect their no-trace-of-Mexican daughter from swarthy and sweaty Mexican kidnappers.<sup>366</sup> Pita's parents have recently purchased kidnap insurance from a smarmy, corrupt North American lawyer played viperishly by a punch-drunk Mickey Rourke. Lupita is kidnapped in front of a wounded and demobilized Creasy, and

assumed killed after violence erupts when the ransom for her release is exchanged and the cousin of the “family is all that matters” ringleader is killed. Creasy, nearly killed during the kidnapping, and slowly and cathartically dying while he is in the process of recovery, vows vengeance of the most lethal sort. When Lisa asks Creasy, “What are you gonna do?” he responds in his best Bushian “Smoke ‘em out” delivery, “What I do best...I’m gonna kill ‘em...anyone that was involved, anyone who profited from it...anybody who opens their eyes at me,” which gives new meaning to the phrase “nice that he’s an American.” She offers up her American frontier wisdom and applause line: “kill ‘em all,” and to hell with any collateral damage.<sup>367</sup>

Like Childers in *Rules of Engagement*, the Navy SEALs in *Tears of the Sun*, and the marines in *Black Hawk Down*, Creasy embarks on a “take no prisoners” mission to “waste the motherfuckers,” including anyone even remotely linked simply by virtue of being “one of them.” These oft repeated tropes have two consequences: (1) they suggest that everyone, including civilians and innocent bystanders, are part of the group of “motherfuckers,” all of “them” are a threat to “us,” and therefore deserve to be “wasted;” (2) it inscribes, reinforces and tends to legitimate the criminal US policy of employing massively indiscriminate violence and excessive force against civilians.<sup>368</sup>

To prepare the audience to support Creasy’s killing and torture spree, *MF* goes to great lengths to draw emotional attachments between the troubled, pitiable and conflicted black man Creasy and Lolita-like Lupita (Dakota Fanning), i.e. “the Little Virgin of Guadalupe,” the pre-teen leggy (when in her swim-suit) blonde, blue-eyed, Aryan, precocious All-American (i.e. North American) angel-like daughter of blonde North American “Kill them all” Lisa and dark, deprived and delinquent Mexican factory owner Sam Ramos. The strong and manipulative emotional attachments are developed, between Creasy, Lupita and the audience, especially the “white” North American audience, for the purpose of building approval for Creasy’s spree of brutality and destruction in defense of the “master race.”<sup>369</sup>

The point of all of this cinematic pity and emotional manipulation surrounding the kidnapping and purported death of Pita becomes clear when Creasy embarks on his murderous spree of death, torture and destruction: We, and Creasy, needed our license to kill, our license for revenge, our license for criminality. We are set up, i.e. manipulated, so that “the violence can be construed as ‘just,’ [in order for] our perverse entertainment [to be] less despicable,”<sup>370</sup> and so that any sense of guilt, responsibility for or complicity in the cinematic violence, or the aggression as entertainment ethos that pervades our un-witnessing of the tragedies of mass violence, is stripped away. It is a powerful pedagogical device that perpetrates violence and achieves victory without emotional, moral and psychological risk, and without blood on the hands (but with plenty of “blood in the streets”). Lupita’s kidnapping, and purported death, is a great tragedy in its own right, and especially for U.S. audiences regularly educated to see themselves as the innocent victims of some evil “other,” whether represented as aliens, monsters, zombies, Vietnamese, Somalis, Nigerians, Arabs, Muslims, Latinos, Mexicans, etc. Furthermore, as both the myth of US innocence and regular military policy demand, the kidnapping is deserving of a response most deadly. In Creasy’s quest to “kill ‘em all,” even those who “open their eyes” at him, we wonder how he will distinguish between “good Mexicans” and “bad Mexicans,” or the blind and the insightful? In the Manichean world that echoes Childers “choice” in *Rules of Engagement*, he doesn’t have to. Forgiveness is not part of his plan (this is Jesus as Rambo). He tells an elderly couple, out of whose window he targets a caravan of cars with a shoulder held streets crunching rocket launcher, “Forgiveness is between them and God. It’s my job to arrange the meeting.” Translated, Creasy is regurgitating a standard US position: “there will be no negotiations.”<sup>371</sup> No forgiveness, only vengeance, no negotiations, only aggression, with the President McKinley-like hint that we are doing “the savages” a favor by arranging the meeting, and the unmitigated arrogance to assume that we are in the God-like unilateral position of determining who lives and who dies, outside of the constraints of law or convention.<sup>372</sup> What the applause and laughter inducing cinematic slogans erase in their extolling of violence and destruction are the

human costs in pain, suffering, mutilation, and death, and the dehumanization of both the victims and the victimizer. The regular on-screen presence of violence and killing without the “witnessing” of the painful consequences and human costs deflate our capacity to empathize with the human experience of violence and humiliation.<sup>373</sup> Lawlessly murdering numerous people, and blowing up several automobiles, in broad daylight, on a busy street in the heart of Mexico City, using rocket launchers, grenades, and pistol fire, seems to cause little discomfort among U.S. viewers, and prepares them for the “apocalyptic” street scenes of crushed bodies and neighborhoods reminiscent of a Hollywood version of “Armageddon,” that occasionally leak out of Iraq.<sup>374</sup>

### **Man on Fire’s Redemption Myth**

It turns out in the end, that Creasy’s killing spree was generated by false information. Pita, the Aryan angel, is alive. Creasy, nor anyone else, ever thought to seek evidence demonstrating that the girl was dead before launching the murderous attacks.<sup>375</sup> “Man on Fire,” may be “the first authentic American action blockbuster in which the hero doesn't just go on a killing rampage, but a torture spree as well.”<sup>376</sup> Because of that, it is necessary that the torturer is portrayed not as a depraved villain but as wounded Savior-hero, and by Denzel, a “Do the right thing” Hollywood matinee idol. It is also necessary to couch the character in some sort of redemption myth, one of the sustaining myths of US national symbolism that brings relief, catharsis and a sense of victory rather than conflict, compunction and turpitude to the torturous proceedings. *MF* accomplishes this in a number of ways: (1) by mediating the violence through “scenes of Creasy [(always bleeding from a Christ-like wound in his side)] absolving himself in ritualistic baptismal immersions;”<sup>377</sup> (2) most egregiously by portraying the torturer as a suffering salvation-bringing Christ figure; (3) the “resurrection” of Pita; (4) Creasy’s putting down the bottle to pick up the Bible and the gun which is part of the transformation of Creasy rising from “loser ass” black man to “bad ass” black man to “sacrificial animal” black man;<sup>378</sup> (5) Creasy’s highly emotive, recruiter friendly, black man’s willingness to give his own life so that the very white, blonde and blue, and superior Pita may live.

Pita's Aryan superiority must be preserved and restored and its Olympian nature is demonstrated in her "born again HARDNESS" that manifests itself in her obsessive training regimen, fearlessness in the face of "the gun," and victory in a swimming competition; and, (6) Creasy's John Wayne "hardness" where he embodies the John Wayne/Ringo Kid *Stagecoach* lesson: "There are some things a man just can't walk away from." The "thing" is the option to incorporate mass violence in the pursuit of "justice" as part of redeeming or preserving the moral imperative of the civilizing "great nation of futurity" (John L. O'Sullivan) mission in the face of foreboding threats to "true" civilization imposed by terrorizing agents of malevolence who appear regularly in many threatening guises. The "Ringo Kid" lesson further inscribes the standard notion that the only reliable method for resolving conflict and preserving our providential future is aggression, again a theme that plays well for those committed to international aggression.<sup>379</sup>

When a physically disheveled and spiritually "lost" Creasy "rides into town" his spirit is renovated when his temporarily repressed violent reflexes are reawakened and his life is tethered to the production of death (including his own). This allows him to articulate "appropriate" violent and humiliating responses in offensive defense against the "brotherhood" of intractable Mexican "evil doers." Creasy's "This is war" violence not only brings what is presented as "security" and salvation to the innocent, but at a larger level works to rescue and preserve our "family values" from the dirty and corrupt "little brown others" who mock "the importance of family" and to open up a future in which our Puritan destiny (reliant on "higher" powers, represented herein by Creasy/Christ) and civilized virtues (as represented by the remaining all-white family of mother and daughter who will, it is assumed, ascend to the "Land of the Free") will be fulfilled back in the US. It serves as another expression of regular US cinematic "rebirth" "coming-of-age" myths. *Man on Fire* represents an "our right to life" vision that establishes who does and who does not have claims to the righteous use of deadly violence, and therefore makes a God-like and presumptuous claim on who has a right to live and who deserves to die.

And what is “reborn” repeatedly are regressive and reactionary notions including: justice in the world can only be realized through a will to violence; our freedom is best expressed and preserved through our righteous right to aggressively attack the “other;” the “other” that we attack is representative of an obstinate, ungovernable and unremitting evil that must be extirpated and abolished; a hierarchical organization of superior and inferior human beings; our losses deserve careful reflection and regret and must be mourned and avenged as they circulate widely across the wide-collective consciousness of the entire population while their losses are forgotten and fortunate and mysteriously confined to the immediate victims only and must go un-mourned and un-avenged; and, the only method for successfully resolving conflict, especially of the international sort, is through the overwhelming use of force, thus tapping into and celebrating the one clear advantage the United States has in the world, the force and destruction advantage, while hiding the major disadvantage of the US, diplomacy.<sup>380</sup>

Additionally, one suspects that the ease with which the US public supports “retaliation, revenge and warfare may come more from decades of popular entertainment[‘s redemption through violence myths] than from sustained reflections on history and morality,”<sup>381</sup> linked to the growing authority of US culture to engrave its own cinematic moral and political codes and myths onto a US (and global) audience and therefore suppress if not cancel out the more complicated political concepts, historical understandings, social impressions, cultural attitudes and moral ideas both circulating across much of the world and necessary if we are to develop the moral compassion, political intelligence and social commitments to realize a form of global justice rooted in human well being and solidarity.<sup>382</sup>

These basic themes are summed up in *Man on Fire* through a neo-fascist fascination with violence and destruction bumper sticker sloganeering in lines such as “the bullet never lies,” “kill ‘am all” and “the gun will set you free,” that imply that their “blood in the [their] streets” is our self-preserving and self-defensive<sup>383</sup> bonding factor that legitimates our appropriation of their lives.

What Creasy's frontier expanding violence "establishes is that violence is a redemptive act of justice by which [white] civilization is secured and advanced [and] is central to appropriation, legitimation and the self-identity of America."<sup>384</sup>

### **Denzel is Creasy/Creasy is Denzel/Guns 'r Us**

Denzel is John Creasy, and Creasy, of course, is Denzel, and Denzel by virtue of his post-hip-hop "matinee idol" status in US culture, lends a suspicious and deplorable air of credibility to the murderous and vile character, and acceptability and permissibility to the excruciating actions in which he engages. Creasy's bible toting scarred hands and sacred initials, "JC," are no accident as Creasy takes on more and more "neo-con" reactionary Christ-like qualities as the film progresses. In Bush II's "New World Disorder," the answer to the question "what would Jesus do?" is, in *Man on Fire*, loudly, arrogantly, mercilessly and furiously proclaimed: Jesus will "kill 'em all," to protect blonde and pale skinned innocence, i.e., "us." And the message echoes into the streets. The "we are the innocent people guided by Providence and carrying out the will of God" trope is deeply inscribed and plays out repeatedly in US cinematic discourse and cultural mythology.<sup>385</sup> "The self righteousness and insistence upon innocence began as the US began, with invasion and murder."<sup>386</sup> This is a standard rhetorical tactic deeply enmeshed in the orthodox American narrative: blame the victims for the victimization perpetrated by the victimizer.<sup>387</sup> Lewis Lapham asks "I wonder how a society can long endure by defining truth as the acceptance of untruth?"<sup>388</sup>

Denzel/Creasy launches, not surprisingly, with emotionless, cold-hearted and Rambo-like efficiency, a shocking and awful "one-man campaign of righteous payback against a diabolical [and highly corrupt] gang of kidnappers in Mexico City."<sup>389</sup> *Man on Fire*, on the other hand, is "dead serious about its revelry in Old Testament eye-for-an-eye killings."<sup>390</sup> In his hide our guilt, Jesus as John Wayne, glorification of vigilante justice persona Creasy/Denzel becomes an embodiment of the American frontier "take no prisoners," "protect the innocent at all costs" ethos of conquest, insult and domination for which we Americans ostensibly have a sacred right and duty.<sup>391</sup> Again, it is a

restatement of the classic “regeneration through [military] violence...gunfighter nation”<sup>392</sup> frontier myth in which white civilization is protected, promoted, preserved, progressed, identified and legitimated through a series of vicious acts of redemptive justice against a savage and ethnic Native American “other.”

The film follows, in torturous “militainment” fashion, a long line of triumphalist and chauvinistic Hollywood blood-fests seemingly committed to civilianizing the political and imperial ethos of militarism and Manifest Destiny in a continuing attempt to prepare us for Dick Cheney’s “war that may last generations.” Aside from cementing the notion that it is only through violence of an especially ruthless sort through which conflict can be engaged and resolved, these filmic paeans to regenerative and redemptive militarism and violence teach that: (1) the un-mourned vanquished victims are by definition, and by virtue of the ease with which they are brutalized, dismissed and forgotten, less than human demons, thus providing a cover for the real cruelty and inhumanity of the actions;<sup>393</sup> (2) justice, rather than being linked to equality, freedom, dignity, empowered citizenship and inalienable rights, is always tethered to an authoritarian willingness to destroy; and, (3) that liberty is defined and understood not as the freedom to engage and resolve conflicts from a fundamental base in equality through collective work and negotiation for the benefit of all parties concerned, but as the freedom to arm oneself and then use the armaments to protect unassailable Good (i.e. “us”), through eradication, from unredeemable Evil (i.e. “them”). Furthermore, the constant invocation of and reliance on God, and other religious imagery, as is the case in *MF*, to ratify and validate heartless violence against the demonized other, may be in recognition of a need to create illusions to mask what would be intolerable human action given a world in which conditions did not require illusions.

*MF* reaffirms a number of our founding myths including the notion that a “Shane-like” savior will manage to surface whenever needed to defeat omnipresent forces of evil and mayhem,<sup>394</sup> and that resolution to any conflict, especially conflicts with third world “savages,” is best achieved



through monstrous and unremitting violence, i.e., “the gun will set us free.” Furthermore, it re-informs standardized national symbolisms, deeply inculcated over the years through Hollywood’s insatiably violent mythmaking machine. These include: the notion that regeneration, purgation and transcendence are best accomplished through militarized violence and sacrifice; “the conviction that religion [mostly of the Old Testament sort, is] virtually synonymous with American nationalism;”<sup>395</sup> with God on our side, violence is “an occasion for personal growth, [transcendence] and self-realization,<sup>396</sup> and authentic ‘justice’ (i.e. extra-legal killing, a.k.a. summary execution),<sup>397</sup> is found, for US “*ubermenschen*,” outside the institutional norms of law and order that attempt to constrain us in our noble and propitious pursuits.

**Other Abductions**<sup>398</sup> – (*see footnote for an extended discussion*).

### **Torture as Entertainment**

Along with the racism and xenophobia, *MF* embraces hyper-masculinized emasculating violence<sup>399</sup> as an ennobling form of human pursuit; it glorifies and sexualizes sadistic violence as pornographically attractive in its own right; embraces the restorative spiritual values of war and violence, all the while inculcating hyper-militaristic, martial, jingoist and sacrificial values appropriate for a U.S. power structure intent on pursuing imperial global domination through military force. Alex Cox’s suggestion that *MF* is “the first authentic American action blockbuster in which the hero doesn’t just go on a killing rampage, but a torture spree as well,” opens up opportunities for asking, “What can we teach from the film?” The film could be viewed in the context of both the immediacy of the US “torture” problem in Iraq, Guantanamo, Europe, Afghanistan, etc., and the long history of US imposition of torture and support for and training of torturers around the globe.<sup>400</sup> The torture in *MF* includes an audience-arousing perverse scene in which Denzel, using silver gaffer’s tape, tapes his victims hands to a steering wheel, fingers extended. He then tells his victim “I’m gonna cut off your fingers, and use the lighter to stop the bleeding.” He proceeds to cut off fingers one by one, and cauterize them with the cars cigarette

lighter, to the strangely unsettling strains of Santana's rendition of "Oyo Como Va." It is painful to watch.<sup>401</sup> Less painful to watch, but perhaps equally suggestive, is a scene in which Denzel appears wearing surgical gloves. We soon learn that he has placed a C4 bomb inside the rectum of the corrupt police investigator. The man is tied, spread-eagle, across the trunk of his car. He is also the president of "La Hermandad/The Brotherhood," a corrupt group of policemen involved in extortion, kidnapping, profiteering and murder. Creasy sets a timer for five minutes and asks for information while we watch the time tick away at the bottom of the screen. Creasy's last words to the inspector are "I wish you had more time." The bomb explodes. Disconcerting applause erupted in the theatre.

Creasy, the "brotha" violently takes out the "brothas" of the "brothahood." There is an implicit suggestion that "brotherhood" of any sort is to be avoided, and that transcendence is achieved only through an "Army of One," rugged-individualist, pursuit of militarized sacrifice, disciplined commitment to plans and goals no matter what the costs or facts are, and surrender to a higher Bible-inspired cause.

Another unsettling feature of the film is that Denzel is not playing torturer as "scumbag," someone to be reviled as reprehensible, but "torturer as lionized hero," torturer as matinee idol, someone we look up to for guidance and inspiration, the way Creasy looks to the heavens for grisly guidance and insolent inspiration. Seldom have we witnessed finger-severing, ear-slicing, temple-puncturing, digit-obliterating, rectum-wrecking torture perpetrated with such glee, professionalism, and matter-of-fact efficiency, by a "matinee-idol thug."<sup>402</sup> One of the not-so-secret secrets of U.S. "special" operations over the last 60 years, whether in Southeast Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East, is systematic torture. At minimum, that basic knowledge, along with its consequences in the lives of the victims, should accompany any screening or critical discussion of this film. There is a common feature of the torture: it is almost invariably "the torture of dark-skinned, foreign people, by American counter-intelligence experts," and its emotional, physical and psychological pain last a lifetime, if the victim survives.<sup>403</sup> A number of critics have also noted applause in the theatre during

the torture scenes.<sup>404</sup> This suggests that there are segments of U.S. culture that have so dehumanized the “other,” or witnessed so repeatedly the dehumanization of the “other” in films and on television, that they have been robbed of a full understanding of their own humanity, a full humanity that requires a recognition of, among other things, not only the suffering and pain of others, but our pathetic failure to assume the role of moral agents committed to “stretching [ourselves] towards the Other, being for the Other and endowing the Other’s needs with causal power over [our] own endeavors.”<sup>405</sup>

Along with its fascistic reverence for violent action, individual sacrifice for a “higher cause,” subjugation of the “other,” obsession with physical fitness as it is linked to the warrior ethic, sublimation of gun-culture, and self-abnegation, *MF* employs a resurrection myth that intimates that violence can undo past violations, including murder, and restore our purity, a notion distinctly attractive in a vengeance prone, and redemption seeking, post-9/11 United States. In the film narrative, often confused, convoluted and non-sensical, we are led to believe that Pita’s life is “restored,” as a result of Creasy’s commitment to mass violence and torture, as if aggressive vengeance resurrects the dead. It is a comforting, but perverse, inscription in the aftermath of 9/11. It is after many people have been killed, and Creasy has used an emasculating shot-gun blast to remove the fingers from the hand of the brother of “the voice,” (the man holding Pita), that a “life for a life” arrangement is made in which Creasy will give his life to “the Voice” for the safe return of Pita to her now single mother. It is revealed that Pita’s father was involved in her kidnapping in an attempt to skim some of the ransom money to pay off debts. While it is still assumed that Pita has been killed in retaliation for the killing of “the voice’s” cousin, Creasy discovers the plot. He confronts Samuel and Lisa with the information. Lisa, imbued with the killer spirit, advises Creasy to “kill him or I will.” Creasy provides Samuel with the magic bullet that Creasy himself used earlier in a suicide attempt in which the gun did not fire. Rayburn informed Creasy “the bullet always tells the truth.” In a US culture of criminal militarism it is a convenient mantra suggesting,

“If people are killed by US ‘bullets’ (or more likely, US bombs) it is a truth that cannot be challenged,” i.e. the bullet/bomb knows who is guilty and who is innocent, giving new meaning to “smart bombs.” The bullet miraculously “knew” that Creasy was “innocent” of his previous Special Ops violence, knew that he had a “higher” mission, thus it did not fire when he attempted suicide; but, the bullet knew that Samuel was guilty and therefore fired. In this *Man on Fire* moral universe one suspects cruise missiles never lie either. Creasy gives Samuel a gun and “the bullet” and shares with him the same words of wisdom: “the bullet always tells the truth.” As Creasy leaves the room, a chapel filled with religious icons dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe (after whom little Pita is named), Samuel kills himself. At the sound of the bullet Creasy does not flinch, manifesting one of the lessons he imposed on Pita, i.e., “don’t flinch at the sound of the gun,” indicating that he is, and we are, truly redeemed, i.e. “the sound of the gun has set us free.”

## **CONCLUSION**

Chalmers Johnson writes “Most Americans are probably unaware of how Washington exercises its global hegemony since so much of this activity takes place either in relative secrecy or under comforting rubrics [often reinforced in cinematic inventions].”<sup>406</sup> Films such as *MF* that reinvigorate the frontier myths provide “comforting rubrics,” as they distance us from engagements with, and understandings of, the world, thus providing power with a cover for its secrecy, and a barrier to the formation of public resistance and opposition to power’s agenda. Given this, and the violence ensuring dialectic between a retreating, fearful, and stigmatized citizenry on the one hand, and a military/political/economic complex in pursuit of global hegemony on the other, it seems safe to say that the most pressing problem we face is not a problem of terrorism, but a crisis of democratic citizenship fueled by many factors in U.S. culture which compel a retreat of the citizenry, not least of which is our immersion in films and media which consistently distance us, and deny us access to, crucial elements of the world in which we live, and on which we too often impose forms of oppression and violence.

*MF* seeks to remind us that we are the good guys, we are the victims, that violence, even the most despicable torture, when done by the masters, i.e. “us,” is really “art,” and when done as it is meant to be done, i.e. the way we do it, guided by a higher power, it can be a “masterpiece.” This simplification of the complexities of international violence, distances us from the rest of the world, adds to our retreat from understanding the world and thus undermines grounds for morally resisting and opposing power at a mass scale of political agency, and thus, ominously, contributes to furthering the cycle of violence.

Furthermore, films such as *MF*, seek to inculcate notions of redemptive violence and violence as the only possible resolution to conflict. This approach not only glorifies and sanctifies violence, encourages individuals to surrender to its force and to sacrifice for its victory, but it undermines democratic pursuits and options in that negotiation, diplomacy, skills in reasoning and tools of persuasion, are neglected and suppressed, i.e., not part of the offering. If it is true that civic courage, social responsibility, reasoned thinking, empathy for the other, and ethical understanding are foundations for democratic possibilities and human hopes for a preferable future, then vengeance, and vigilantism carried out by messianic redeemers, like **John Creasy** in *MF*, and endless others in the pantheon of filmic redeemers, whose relatively easy, quick and always conclusive victories replace and obscure notions of the patient, collective, committed, often rigorous, and never concluded labor required of democratic politics, betray a profound suspicion of democracy, create conditions for the de-citizenship of citizenship, and lay the groundwork not only for “totalitarian fantasy,” but for fascism.

*MF* is a lone-hero vengeance film portraying a Messiah-like figure, “an armed redeemer,”<sup>407</sup> who with great “courage” and conviction unavailable to the average citizen, operates outside the constrictions of law and the tempering forces of democratic institutions. The hero protects and saves a helpless, victimized and alienated figure from evil outsiders (inside their own country) with whom we are constantly at war and, with whose humanity, because of the threat of having to identify with

our own “evil,” we are never permitted to identify. These are particularly dangerous messages at a time when the United States has publicly committed itself to violations of international laws regarding abuse, torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace and a seemingly endless “war of terror.”

We produce heroes who are willing to sacrifice all, descend into the mean streets of foreign lands, confront unscrupulous child-kidnapping savages and brutes, spill-blood in order to protect the innocent from terror and violence, and find personal salvation and transcendence. One wonders how such gunslinger, blood soaked, xenophobic, torture laden fare as *MF* plays in other countries, particularly countries that have been most victimized by U.S. violence, exploitation, and oppression, and especially in a period in which the United States has made it clear to the world that we reserve the right to carry out wars of aggression, excessive use of force, and indiscriminate killing and torture on our terms, outside the purview and prescriptions of international and even domestic laws, in pursuit of global hegemony.

The noted cheering by film audiences when Denzel cut the fingers off of one victim, then cauterized the bloody stumps with the car’s cigarette lighter, and then sodomized another with a bomb, suggests that we may want to agree with the CIA. One doesn’t want to over generalize, but this tends to suggest that the CIA torturers in Iraq were correct in “expressing confidence that the American public would back their view,”<sup>408</sup> so that cruelties may continue to be “approved by whole populations,” and thus ensure that no one will be there to stop the torture. This gratuitous celebration of humiliation, degradation and torture, may tap into the deep darkness of a U.S. culture long awash in vengeful hate and aggressive violence.<sup>409</sup>

In wondering how others take up films such as *Man on Fire*, one suspects that what we see as virtuous, others see as depraved. What we see as ennobling, others find disgraceful. What we glorify, they despise. For example, the former Special Ops assassin, John Creasy, has killed people all over the world, for 16 years, from South America, to the Middle East, to the Far East, and Africa.

It would not be unreasonable for viewers who have not suffered the indoctrination we have suffered, to view this mass killer and assassin as anything but heroic, and wonder why the film goes to such emotionally manipulative lengths to exalt the character and his heinous actions. What we read as self-protection and security, the rest of the world reads as aggression and arrogance. A film with a primary lesson, and a celebrated message, of “violence will set you free,” i.e. “don’t be afraid of violence,” may play well in the land of the hegemon, but in the lands the hegemon has dominated and destroyed, or wishes to dominate (seemingly all lands at this point), the lesson is hardly worth celebrating. A critical film pedagogy about US militarism and violence would consider how these films play into the dialectic of violence on a global scale.

If films are “influence machines,” as Pentagon Hollywood liaison Phil Strub calls them,<sup>410</sup> and films are now globalized, we must ask what kind of influence these films have in a world where there is already widespread disgust, anger and hatred directed against the U.S. obsession with, and imposition of, violence and aggression in global affairs. After Abu-Ghraib, a Hollywood film that glorifies, aestheticizes, spectacularizes, and celebrates torture and murder of a most reprehensible and vicious sort, will, for much of the rest of the world, be seen as an indicator of the darkness in the heart and soul of America. What to us means protection and security, to them means, “You have to die.”

In the U.S. articulation of human interaction as witnessed in films such as *Man on Fire*, we are operating in a Hobbesian world of violence, chaos and destruction; but, it is a Manichean world as well, one of simple good and evil, and there is only one proper response to evil: unmitigated and ruthless brutality. Those who threaten the future course of Good, manifested in the film by Lupita, must be dealt with accordingly: humiliation, torture, and violent death. Unless we can develop a re-articulated view of human interaction and human worth, outside the standard myths produced through decades of U.S. cinema, we may soon face “ultimate doom.”

U.S. cinema has consistently offered no alternatives to violent resolutions to social conflict; it has precluded any real discussion or presentation of progressive social goals, functions or democratic possibilities; it has not developed an ability to critically reflect upon, or tell the truth about, the enormous costs and consequences of war's immense and stultifying carnage, its profoundly disturbing disruptions of human lives, and its political disasters; and, it has relied on a consensus view and conviction that the system can operate successfully while constantly preparing for and engaging in violent international conflicts. This narrowing of possibilities increases the likelihood of real world errors that endanger public and social cohesion and become potentially fatal to the existing order. Unless we develop a view that recognizes that we live increasingly in an interconnected and interdependent world in which our fate is critically linked to the fate of others, in which we are ethically responsible for one another, we will have extremely limited possibilities to choose between a human future rooted in the solidarity of our common humanity, and a future cut short by the catastrophe of our mutual destruction. The scales are drifting toward the latter. If we allow ourselves to remain trapped in cycles of untruth, hateful mythologies, escalating violence, and a growing culture of militarism, of which *Man on Fire* is a perverse projection, we must seriously consider Lapham's question, "How long can a society endure by defining truth as the acceptance of untruth," and then recognize that Lisa's admonition "Kill 'em all" may soon become a self-fulfilling prophecy.



## CHAPTER 8: Mystic River's Blood-dimmed Tide

*“the blood dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere,  
the ceremony of innocence is drowned.”*  
--Yeats, “The Second Coming”

*“Daddy is a King. A King knows what to do even if it is hard. That is all that matters.  
Everyone else is weak, except us, we will never be weak.”*  
-- Annabeth in “Mystic River”

Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River*, (2003) opens in a working class Boston neighborhood in which three young boys, Dave, Sean and Jimmie are playing street hockey. “Save!” shouts Dave. After losing the ball down a sewer, the three boys indulge in writing their names in wet cement.<sup>411</sup> Jimmie and Sean succeed, but before he can finish Dave is interrupted when a rough-speaking “detective” appears, accuses the boys of defacing public property, then orders Dave into the back of the car, ostensibly to be taken to his parents and admonished. The moment is tense; something is amiss. Dave is taken to a dark basement dungeon and molested by the phony policeman and a priest, for four days, before escaping as “damaged goods”<sup>412</sup> with his “innocence drowned,” and his life haunted and interrupted forever.

The film flashes forward 30 years to the present. Jimmy (Sean Penn) is remarried (his first wife died from cancer while he was in prison) with three daughters, one, Katie (Emmy Rossum), from his first wife, is the light of his life. He runs a neighborhood grocery store, apparently a façade to hide illegal activities that have continued since his release from prison 15 years earlier. Sean, (Kevin Bacon) a reticent and staid state policeman, who keeps his emotions under wraps, is partnered with wily Whitey Powers (Laurence Fishburne). Sean is having difficulty communicating with his wife who calls him daily only to say nothing – part of a repeated theme of silence, emptiness, and miscommunication, as well as missed communication in the film. Dave (Tim Robbins) is adrift, a doting father but a “dead-man walking.” He is unsteady in employment and conversation, clearly haunted by the pain of the past, walks as though the gravity of the world is

pulling him into its perilous depths, and is a source of anxiety and confusion for his wife Celeste (Marcia Gay Harden).

A 911 call to the police changes the focus of the film. Jimmy's daughter Katie is found...beaten ...shot...murdered - in a local park. Sean (and Whitey) is brought in to investigate, and Dave, who came home covered in blood and telling a story about beating a mugger, becomes a suspect in the eyes of his increasingly suspecting wife, and then in the eyes of others. The three boyhood friends reconnect and in unmistakable but unspeakable ways the crimes of the past continue to plague their present. Jimmy vows revenge for his daughter's murder and launches his own investigation headed by his two thug companions the Savage Brothers. We discover skeletons in Jimmy's past, and there are intimations that they may be linked to his daughter's brutal murder through a gun used in an earlier crime. Katie's lover Brendan (Thomas Guiry), whose father Just Ray owned the gun, is a suspect. Suspicions about Dave increase in the eyes of Celeste, the police and Jimmy. Celeste, after a series of bizarre, torturous and harrowing episodes with Dave, finally confesses to Jimmy that she believes Dave killed Jimmy's daughter. Meanwhile, Sean and Whitey finally listen to the 911 tape in their possession and hear the incriminating phrase uttered by a young male voice: "he wants to know her name." Meanwhile, on extremely thin circumstantial evidence, Jimmy kills Dave in an ugly scene of forced confession, knife to the gut, bullet to the face murder, only to discover the next morning that he killed an innocent man, (innocent in regards to killing Katie, though Dave had ruthlessly beaten and killed a pedophile the evening of Katie's murder – in this film no one is clean). Sean and Whitey, simultaneous to Jimmy's killing of Dave, visit the real killers, two young boys. One, Ray Jr., a mute, brother of Brendan, is the namesake son of Just Ray who Jimmy had killed 15 years earlier (what goes around, comes around).

The next morning Sean discovers that Jimmy killed Dave (Sean already knows that Jimmy killed Just Ray). Jimmy tells Sean that the last time he saw Dave Boyle was 25 years ago going up the street, abducted, in the back of the car (insinuating that Dave was already dead, at least in spirit).

Neighborhood solidarity proves stronger than the law. Jimmy's crime, murder, it is intimated, will go unpunished by the law. But, in the merciless world of *Mystic River* Jimmie Markum owes God "a marker," and at some point, we suspect, God will collect - again. Jimmy expresses to his wife Annabeth (Laura Linney) a modicum of guilt for having killed Dave, but that is assuaged by her praise for his strength, wisdom, love and Kingly powers. A Columbus Day parade ensues and the film ends with the camera diving into a dark and then sanguinary "Mystic River" while the film's unrelenting theme swells perilously on the soundtrack.

*Mystic River* is a conflicted film, a violent film, a commanding film, and, in the end, an unforgiving film. It challenges and ruptures the glorification of violence spectacles that haunt much of contemporary cinema, but then uses the horror and pain of violence to arouse sympathy for the *victim*, Jimmie, in a way that, in the end, insidiously abuses that sympathy to compel identification with Jimmie, the "Imperial" *victimizer*. In the post 9/11 world, in which the Bush Administration has used the terrorist victimization of the US to promote and justify a policy of attacking anyone, anytime, anywhere for any reason,<sup>413</sup> to pursue the "rule of force" above the "rule of law,"<sup>414</sup> to extend the US culture of militarism and expand the militarization of society, and to "openly say that nobody else's sovereignty means anything to us at all,"<sup>415</sup> this MR tactic of arousing sympathy for the victim in order to justify killing can be read in two ways: (1) as part of a reproduction of the national consciousness that sees our own victimization as justification for the victimization of others (even if the wrong people are attacked and killed, and even if the attacks are outside the law),<sup>416</sup> i.e. the "yea, but what about 9/11" argument for US attacks on Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.; or, (2) as a challenge to the national consciousness. The former carries much weight if one focuses on the "Imperial" justification for violence scene, the latter if one reads *Mystic River* as an "eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind" "violence begets violence" warning against cycles of violence that in the end leaves everyone drowning in the "blood-dimmed tide."

The “Imperial” justification for violence scene occurs before the final ominous descent of the forward panning steadicam into the darkening and finally sanguinary mystic river of blood, and before the patriotic Columbus Day Parade celebration amplified by an “I’m King of the world” “bring ‘em on” gesture from Jimmie, the murderous, stand above the crowd, overlord. The Imperial scene has been frequently compared to Greek or Shakespearean tragedy.<sup>417</sup> In the scene, one part of the double coda and foreboding denouement, Jimmie’s wife Annabeth arrogantly glorifies her “King” who “is never wrong, no matter what [he has] to do [even if it is murdering his friend, Dave].” Because he has so much love in his “never wrong” imperious “heart” his “girls,” she intones with a sycophantic air of religious mysticism, are able to “fall asleep in peace,” and one suspects the implication is “and so can everyone else,” as long as we have leaders, like Jimmie, whose “love is so big” they are willing to do whatever is necessary, even if it “is hard,” so that we will “never be weak.” It is important to note that this scene opened with Jimmie rather tepidly questioning whether he was mistaken in “killing the wrong man,” Dave, his childhood friend. The scene appears to suggest a double reading: (1) it is right for the strong to kill the weak, and if we have misgivings, we are among the “everyone else is weak” category, i.e. you are either with the strong or you are with the weak, i.e. “you are either with us, or you are against us;” and, (2) the standards that we might normally apply to others, do not apply to the strong, to the “King,” to the rulers of the neighborhood, or, by implication (particularly potent in a world in which the US pursues “Full Spectrum Dominance”<sup>418</sup> and “grand imperial strategies”<sup>419</sup> in the global arena that the US increasingly militarizes), to the rulers of the world.

While *Mystic River* does elicit sympathy for suffering and pain, that which appears on screen, in the lives of the characters, conflicts. Their interactions are frighteningly cold and distant, and lacking in any sympathetic consciousness for others' distress or any desire to alleviate the anguish. People not only “Do the dying alone,” but they do the living and suffering alone. The killing, at least the killing perpetrated by “the King,” is, of course, not done alone. In a film drowning in so much pain,

suffering, agony, hate, abuse, and death, there is but one loving embrace,<sup>420</sup> and it arrives at the end of the “Imperial” scene in which Annabeth reconfirms Jimmie’s “imperial” capacities. She seductively whispers into his ear “you could rule this town,” and they fall into a salacious embrace. The implication? “Power [and violence],” in Henry Kissinger’s words, “is the ultimate aphrodisiac.”

The film, of course, is much more complex than this reduced reading. The conflicts in *Mystic River* are complicated and copious, the violence is discomfiting and torturous, the command is sublime and subversive, enrapturing and enraging, and the vindictiveness is inexorable.

The numerous conflicts float unresolved and tension-filled beneath the surface of what appears to be a standard police murder-mystery thriller. The conflicts entangle the characters and enmesh the viewer in: the pains of the past and the burden of the present; loyalty driven by fear and betrayal driven by ignorance; the loneliness of secrets and the secrets of loneliness; extended family ties and extinguished friendships; an unquestionable yet questioned rule of law and a questionable yet unquestioned rule of force; vile, yet valorous, redemption and valorous, yet vile, retribution; corrupted innocence and calculated guilt; victims as victimizers and victimizers as victims; honorably honor less vengeance and contemptible and consummating forgiveness; the weakness of strength and the strength of weakness; the truth of death and the death of truth; lies that kill, and murder that lies; the power of corruption and the corruption of power. In spite of these relentless complexities, and many more, that bring a profundity to the film that is lacking in the violent spectacles that frequently adorn the local cinema,<sup>421</sup> there is a rupturing message of reflective simplicity that floats hauntingly just beneath the surface of every grimace, every wince, every silence, every confusion, every agony, every loss: violence traumatizes, brutalizes and destroys real human lives, and those left behind, those who survive, are, in some way, for the long term, “damaged goods.”<sup>422</sup> It is in its presentation of the affects of violence that *Mystic River* provides a radical critique of the spectacularizing of violence in media culture. *Mystic River*’s representation of

violence disrupts the *violence of representation*<sup>423</sup> in that we feel and understand the real suffering, turmoil and damage that accompany personal and social violence in numerous forms.

The unflinching on screen violence is piercing...one flinches...but not gratuitous, not mere spectacle, but is violence unfetishized<sup>424</sup> and accompanied by emotional torment, psychological distress, physical outrage and moral confusion. The violence in *Mystic River* appears not as innocent and distanced representation but as guilt-ridden and pain-drenched reality, quite an accomplishment in the violence as spectacle, violence as entertainment culture. *Mystic River* unleashes violence, and then pain, that makes one uncomfortable. It hurts. *Mystic River* feels honest, and honesty is a bold move in a post 9-11 world awash in dissimulation and deceit.

The filmic presentation is haunting, magisterial, and forbidding...commanding in ways the Adagietto from Mahler's fateful 5th Symphony is commanding in its sublime and mournful melodies and torturous and augural unresolved harmonies. Cruelty and confusion rage beneath calm, yet tightly clenched, surfaces. Torrents of agony and despair are portrayed powerfully with the twitch of Dave's (Tim Robbins) nervous and retracting face, the clenching of Jimmie's (Sean Penn) teeth to hide both the pain of a gnarled and knotted gut and a consciousness struggling not to accept that there are, perhaps, unrelenting forces stronger than life, powers, vengeance and death, over which he has no control. Roiling, and ready to explode, above controlled depths is a flood of outrage and pain. One feels it in the pacing, the cinematography, the oft repeated, and slightly modulating, musical theme, the confined spaces that seem to weigh down on people, the coiled intensity that sits just behind every character's eyes. And it erupts. It is witnessed in Brendan's brutal face-smashing attack on his brother's friend Pete, Dave's ferocious pummeling of the pedophile, Sean's (Kevin Bacon) verbal explosion in the interrogation room, the savage beating and murder of Katie (Emmy Rossum), the "policeman's" sudden outburst "get the fuck in!!!" that portends Dave's abduction, and Jimmie's callous and calculated murder of Dave.

*Mystic River* attempts, to its credit, on the one hand, to regard the pain, vulnerability and suffering of others, and to portray the emotional, physical and psychological anguish, outrage and torment that accompany abuse, violence and murder. On the other hand, one gets the eerie feeling that the pain and suffering is being used in insidious and manipulative political ways to produce identification with the temporarily vulnerable strong male lead character for the purpose of legitimating his final act of savagery. Jimmie is, after all, the neighborhood “don,” and he must maintain his credibility. He has suffered an attack, and he can’t let it lie, he must retaliate. We identify with Jimmy, the traumatized victim (made doubly potent by the powerful, magnetic, stomach-in-knots performance of Sean Penn) who overcomes his victim hood not through forgiveness, compassion, understanding or love, but through damnation, retribution, malevolence and murder. Again, credibility must be maintained, a notion that plays powerfully in the post 9-11 US in which the US, in order to maintain “credibility” has become victimizer after its victimization in what was surely a retaliatory act for past US violence driven by the US culture of militarism.<sup>425</sup>

Additionally, the film explores the power of past violence to haunt and color the present and perhaps shape the future, but it is presented in a way that suggests that the violence is intractable and unappeasable, and therefore we are doomed to live within endless cycles of pitiless violence. The only hope, the film appears to suggest in its peremptory and arresting coda, is to be among those who are “never weak,” an idea that is particularly attractive in a time of US “imperial grand strategies,” and threats of global violence and domination. “This immersion into a totalizing environment” that shapes us as consumers of violence often “before [we have] had a chance to develop our souls” creates dangerously common sense notions of human interaction based in domination, vengeance, violence and control.<sup>426</sup> But, this message too is conflicted as the film makes an attempt to hold up to critique, albeit minimally, subtly and all too dimly, this all too common “war of all against all” view. It avers that violence is an abomination, a barbarity that must be stopped, and then intimates a warning, an admonition that says if we continue along this current,

this cycle of rancorous conflict, remorseless violence and imperial conquest, then everyone, “everywhere” will be “drowned” in “the blood dimmed tide.”

Despite the moral, emotional and intellectual pull of the conflicted elements, despite the “coiled intensity” of the acting, the “gripping and unsparing” narrative, the “grace and gravitas,” the “sober and imposing” aesthetics, despite “the hushed certitude and wicked fortitude,” and the “emotional power [that] resonates long after you’ve left the theatre,”<sup>427</sup> there is a lack in the film, a lack that is most striking, most ominous, most needed, a lack that screams to be filled. It screams the way Jimmie screams when he finally realizes that it is “my daughter in there,” dead, mutilated, and destroyed. But, the film, like Sean, the reticent police investigator, remains silent in the face of “the scream,” and *Mystic River* fails to address crucial questions: what are the other forms of violence that crush possibilities, limit aspirations and frustrate futures in so many working class lives; what is it in US culture and society that might produce such damnable actions; what to do about the cycle of human suffering and violence; what to do to repair the damage of the past; what to do to ameliorate the suffering of the present; and, what to do to prevent further suffering and calamity in the future? To portray violence tells us nothing about how to rescue people from the violence, or to comprehend and understand the conditions that may have given rise to that violence. Similarly, “to designate a hell is not...to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell,”<sup>428</sup> nor does it instruct us in how to quell the flames, to abolish the conditions, or transform the institutions that give rise to, call forth or perpetrate the violence. And that, given the enormous threats we face both on and off screen inside and outside the US culture of militarism, is a “lack” of potentially profound and shattering consequence. To designate only hell is to cancel all imaginings of heaven.

### **Mystic River: Drowning in a River of Hopelessness?**

The “mystic” in *Mystic River* is possessed of little spirit, imagination or transcendence, but rather is necromantic, inscrutable, and unfathomably dark. *Mystic River* presents a discomforting and pathological picture of working class life mired in despair, hopelessness, abuse,



violence, vengeance, and distrust. In the film, the streets are mean streets where children are abducted and raped, young women are brutally beaten with hockey sticks and murdered with a bullet to the brain, pedophiles are taken from their cars and punched to death; the innocent are stabbed and then shot in the face, there is betrayal, the rule of force above the rule of law, suspicion of even one's closest intimates, betrayal by family members, and a cycle of violence that is inexorable.

The violence in *Mystic River* is presented either as random or inexorable, completely individualized, detached from any larger social, economic, political, or historical forces (except as a history of individual victimization – not a small horror). It is thus largely meaningless in assisting viewers in understanding violence in society as anything beyond individual pathology, individually driven vengeance, or as an immutable and unremitting force of nature. There are no hints to suggest that institutionalized greed, vengeance, militarism and violence might, at least in some ways, contribute to the violence in the everyday lives of working class people.<sup>429</sup> Not one national commentator of the more than 60 read, outside of Jonathan Rosenbaum at the Chicago Reader,<sup>430</sup> bothered to locate *Mystic River* in relation to social, economic, militarized or political conditions outside the film. One might question why, even if the film is an aesthetic masterpiece, as repeatedly noted in reviews, there was no critical ideological or social commentary directed against or linked to the film. If nothing else there might have been questions about whether the film is celebrating violence, if it is suggesting that violence, even when the wrong person is killed, is justified so long as it is carried out for the right reasons? Reviewers might ask questions about the violence of authority and the authority of violence in the film and how that reflects and shapes the larger militarized culture of “authorized” violence in which the film was produced, distributed and viewed. One might ask whether the film tends to legitimate violence as a form of retribution for past violence, thus justifying murderous vengeance. After all, each murder in the film is committed as an act of revenge for another act of violence: for example, Dave kills the pedophile as an act of vengeance against his earlier victimizers; Jimmie kills Dave as an act of vengeance for his

daughter's murder; Ray Jr., apparently kills Jimmie's daughter because Jimmy killed Just Ray; Jimmy killed Just Ray as revenge for having been sold up the river by Just Ray; and it is intimated at the end that Dave's son will join in the cycle of retribution in response to Jimmy's murder of Dave.

*Mystic River* is considered an aesthetic "masterwork," because of masterful direction, beautiful cinematography, tight ensemble and impassioned individual acting, its haunting score, suspenseful mood, brooding qualities, deep textures, unhurried pacing, subtle artistry, stripped down elegance, architecture of storytelling, etc., but not because of what it says, or refuses to say, or could suggest, about violence in the context of a broader culture of militarized violence, fear, terror, and increasing national and global threats, or because of what it might suggest about the gloomy and dooming prospects we face if the cycles of militarized violence continue. Given that a 911 emergency call is central to the tension and resolution of the plot, and that violence being met by further violence is a motivating force of the film, it is somewhat surprising that the 9-11 terror attacks and the US militarism aggression that followed in the wake are nowhere mentioned in any of the reviews or criticism. Nowhere is it mentioned that the cycles of vengeance in the film might reflect the notion that 9-11 was an act of vengeance for US acts of violence in the world, or that the US attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, were acts of vengeance for the 9-11 terror attacks, or that attacks in Saudi Arabia and Turkey were vengeance attacks in response to the US attack on and occupation of Iraq, etc., or that these cycles of escalating violence paint an ominous picture for the future, perhaps one soaked in a "blood-dimmed tide?" "That the menace of great and violent power in our own times is...accepted by celebrated [artists], and by many of those who guard the gates of...criticism, is [apparently] uncontroversial."<sup>431</sup>

Without these broader links to history, politics, militarism and the social, any sense of what Henry Giroux calls a "pedagogy of resistance" that might challenge aesthetic and ideological conventions, not to mention political, military and economic conventions, both inside and outside the film, is undermined and hindered. When these absences are placed into the deterministic and

fatalistic context of *Mystic River* we are led to believe that we are “free of any obligation to act differently.”<sup>432</sup>

### **Inexorable Force**

A seemingly inexorable force, vengeance, borne of a human nature ruthlessly “red in tooth and claw,” drives *Mystic River* forward to its remorseless and adamant conclusion. No one along the way considers asking Dave, for example, why he is experiencing such unremitting and debilitating pain, why he can’t get his thoughts straight, why he is out taking late night walks, or sitting at home watching vampire movies, or why he can’t seem to get it together. Distress and pain are individualized. In Dave’s case it is not only the pain and distress deeply embedded because of savage childhood abuse, but the agony and despair that accompanies the perpetration of violence as well. Dave killed a man, viciously, bloodily, brutally, and it did not rid him of his demons, it only awakened them. Perhaps we are meant to see Dave as weak, as compared to Jimmy who is “strong.”

King Jimmy is “strong” in relation to everyone else who are “weak,” in the words of Annabeth. As one character puts it to Jimmy, “you’re a man!” Needless to say, the weak Dave is eliminated by the strong Jimmy, and Jimmy, Reagan-like, is “standing tall,” above the celebratory crowd, at the end. While Jimmy is permitted to express pain, suffering, even tears, in response to his daughter’s murder, it is portrayed as a sign of his strength, for Jimmy’s response is not to wallow in confusion and despair, but to lash out vengefully and violently. The point is that it is OK to feel pain, to agonize, to be outraged, when you have been victimized. We should suffer, we should be outraged, when we are the victims, but we must know the proper response – revenge - brutal, unforgiving, murderous revenge. When we are the victimizer responding to victimization, we must be resolute, strong, noble, unflinching, and imperious. Dave’s error was that he agonized, he flinched, not only over his own victimization (permitted) but over his victimization of another (not permitted), and that sort of weakness, in the post 9-11 world, it is intimated, will not and cannot be

tolerated. The gunfighter ethos, present so frequently in “war” films and Westerns, expressed herein taps strongly into the unilateralism of US military policy that shoots first, and doesn’t ask questions later.

Surely, these are not the only problems faced by Dave, and others, in a collapsing social order. Individual and collective agency, except as expressed through violence, wither in *Mystic River* under a brutal, and ultimately fatalistic, determinism. It reflects the national agency of a militarized United States that expresses itself through international violence, while domestic problems fester in neglect. In watching this film, one comes away with the dooming idea, absent of morality,<sup>433</sup> that humans are driven only by some innate biological urges that determine both a psychology of vengeance and an insatiable thirst for violence with little hint that social circumstances might condition behavior, choices, possibilities, sufferings, etc.<sup>434</sup>

There is no sense of an obligation to engage critically with other citizens in organizing to fight back against demeaning and demoralizing social conditions or to overcome the cycles of violence that burrow deeply into the lives of the characters in *Mystic River*. Power is expressed through violence not through mobilized and organized collective struggle. Problems that might be assuaged or ameliorated through publicly organized action are suffered privately. Mobilizing is carried out, but only in the pursuit of violence. And this gesture feeds into a national consciousness that is mobilized not to fight against growing political corruption or economic and social disruption and displacement at home, or the massive redirection of social funds into the Pentagon budget and away from funding for social needs, but to support and impose massive violence abroad, a national and international agenda that undermines working people, and to circumscribe all attempts at democratic social organization.

So, again we can examine *Mystic River* not only for what it brings to the screen, but for what it fails to bring to the screen. The absences can be explored to uncover realms of consensus that limit what is and what is not seen on screen in most popular cinema, and more importantly what

political, economic and historical issues are included and excluded in discussions, debates, plans, actions and criticisms outside the screen in the broader culture. The conflicts inside the film are not powerful and clear enough to challenge the political consensus and mass consciousness outside the film. *Mystic River* ends up reproducing that which it may be attempting to critique – the culture of violence and vengeance, and in turn the culture of militarism that has fed upon and nourished, and continues to feed upon and nourish, those values.<sup>435</sup>

That “American society was built on violence,”<sup>436</sup> and continues to impose and export violence on a global scale, should hardly be a controversial position. Films such as *Mystic River*, because they provide no outlets from the cycle of violence and no larger context in which to place the filmic violence, especially given what we know, or should know, about our continuing history of violence, dance dangerously close to recreating and reinforcing the cynicism and despair that permeates much of contemporary US society and undermines the engagement and agency necessary to overcome the conditions that produce the cynicism, violence and despair. This production of cynicism plays well into the hands of power, for “producing cynicism in the population...make[s] politics disappear.”<sup>437</sup> When popular politics disappear, the social collapses, and, as evidenced in *Mystic River*, resistance manifests itself not in solidaristic challenges against power, but in socially convulsive and consolidating attacks against the weak and “damaged,” the already victimized. If violence is our only substitute for understanding, vengeance our only substitute for compassion, cynicism our only substitute for politics, and military aggression our only substitute for negotiations, we have fallen into an abyss of tragedy and despair from which it will be difficult to extricate ourselves.

*Mystic River* reflects these problems while it inculcates the problems as both a problem and a solution. It works emotionally to elicit sympathy for the pain of others who have been victimized by violence within a US culture largely desensitized to violence, but then co-opts that emotion to carry forward a reactionary agenda that legitimates murderous violence. In a neutral world, *Mystic River*

might be powerful art, but surely not engaging or empowering politics. In a world of grotesque disparities of power, advancing and crushing inequalities, growing militarism, and ever increasing threats of mass violence on a large scale, the power of the art in *Mystic River* is submerged in the power of its ideology, both because of what it does, and what it does not do that it could do. The “only the strong survive” ideology of hardness and the aura of cynicism and hopelessness that permeate the film, when placed inside the culture of militarism, the national consciousness of vengeance, the US pursuit of “unilateral global domination, through absolute military superiority,”<sup>438</sup> makes *Mystic River* stand as, at most, a weak indictment of the maladies and malaise we face, but more stringently and sadly, as a powerful justification for, identification with, and acceptance of the continuing pursuit of militarism, vengeance and “imperial grand strategies.”

### **Beyond the Blood-Dimmed Tide**

*Mystic River* serves, in a number of direct and metaphorical ways, as a reflection on and a reflection of crucial contemporary political and cultural problems (violence, fear, alienation, vengeance, imperialism, etc.), with domestic and global implications, but without penetrating to the depths of the metaphors or the problems that are sure to arise in the larger society where violence of a far worse sort creeps ever closer. Nor does it suggest any solutions (other than a rather insipid but pro-imperialist and very dangerous “survival of the most vicious” doctrine) or provide any visions of anything other than the turmoil and torment of life in a violent, corrupt, cold, ruthless and alienated society.

While problems and questions of personal politics, interpersonal power struggles and the consciousness of personal pain remain important in our daily lives, as demonstrated through the lives portrayed in *Mystic River*, if the problems of the personal are not engaged with, linked to and worked through problems of the political and social a number of dangers arise, then: (1) we fail to understand that social and collective problems require social and collective solutions; (2) egoism and retreatism may be emphasized at the expense of social engagement; regressive and reactionary alienation may undercut progressive and transformatory commitment; individualism may supersede individuality and

collectivism; guilt may undercut understanding; solipsism may overshadow communalism; (3) what is will continue, and what could be will wither in scornful despair, leaving us awash in a culture of militarism the mobilizes the social in the interests of private power and at the expense of the public.

As suggested, *Mystic River* is not a simple film, it is filled with complexities, emotional, psychological and interpersonal, and it offers aesthetic pleasures not easily found in many Hollywood films. In addition, as noted, there are multiple possible readings of the film that can lead us into domains of critique concerning contemporary issues of terrorism, violence, fear, vengeance, war, imperialism, and hegemony. It is a deeply textured film that resonates emotionally and aesthetically. The agony and pain, distress and conflict, are etched deeply into every performance, every shadow, every gaze, and in Eastwood's simple and haunting score. The satisfaction that accrues from an appreciation and knowledge of the power of the film aesthetic to move one emotionally, to inspire one to see, think, feel and empathize with human pain and suffering, a power *Mystic River* possesses in significant portions, is a satisfaction that can be mobilized into other domains of appreciation, reflection, understanding, politics and critique outside the film.

Identifying with the pain of others can be a springboard to an understanding and amelioration of that pain, especially important in a world wracked by pain. Reflections upon the pain of others can inspire social critique and political action that could lead to the prevention of further violence and pain. *Mystic River* conditions our understanding of suffering, vengeance, violence and power and because it provides no easy answers to its contradictions it may compel us to attest to our own political and ethical struggles, and the political and ethical structures that shape the lives of people caught in the webs of violence that plague so much of contemporary life domestically and internationally.

Additionally, however, *Mystic River* seems to suggest, in its fatalistic logic, that we are deeply ensconced in impenetrable and inevitable cycles of violence. To the extent that this view reflects dominant ideological positions, positions that are dismal and hopeless, we must raise crucial questions about the ways *Mystic River* augments and fortifies these positions and perceptions. Perhaps, more

importantly we should ask how does *Mystic River* dispute, confront and challenge these positions, and if it does not (or does, as suggested, only in limited and very subtle ways), how do we as teacher, student, citizen viewers and critics carry out that task? Engaging such works with, and situating such works in, the broader political, ideological and social context, on a local, national and global scale, allows teachers, students and citizens to think into and through the ways in which films, culture, audiences and society and the politics, economics and ideology of film, interpenetrate, influence and interconnect within and between one another, even when those interpenetrations, influences and interconnections are indirect, speculative or even far-fetched.<sup>439</sup>

So we might ask how Dave's murder for a crime he did not commit (though he is guilty of another crime) could be linked to the US attack on Iraq (guilty of crimes) but not the crime for which they were attacked. Or, we might ask how Jimmie's "either way you answer I will kill you" non-choice in the scene in which Dave is murdered, reflects the way the US is currently operating unilaterally on a global scale in terms of its interactions with the UN, and its attack on Iraq. Or, we might ask, if, in an increasingly militarized US culture, we would expect the reproduction and increasing inculcation of values, loyalties, attitudes, allegiances and beliefs linked to the positive value of violence as a form of protection, a method for the amelioration of problems, and as an expression of authority, masculinity, domination and power, how is this carried out or ruptured in MR? Given that Dick Cheney's proclamation "the US must hold global power and a monopoly of force,"<sup>440</sup> is apparently being pursued, how does the "Imperial" scene play out in the context of the crime that preceded it, and the parade that follows it? The driving point behind interpenetrating analysis and interconnecting criticism of film is not so much a better understanding of the film, though an aesthetic pleasure may accrue and should not be under-appreciated, but a better understanding of ourselves, our culture of militarism, our militarized society, our increasingly militarized world, in ways that allow us to use those understandings to pose serious, challenging and surely complex questions about what kind of world it is in which we wish to live and survive.



## Conclusions

*Mystic River* is a deeply emotional film. What is strikingly absent in the film's emotionalism, however, is any notion of compassionate, forgiving and loving hearts. Rather there is suspicion, secrets, lies, betrayal and vengeance. We might ask how this can be linked to an increasingly secretive and suspicious political culture in the US, and to a culture living under the threat of increasing interrogation, invasions of privacy, and creeping dishonesty. Do films so drenched in fear and suspicion work to inspire solidarity or undermine it, or do they work to keep "the public fearful and ignorant"? Does the film, so soaked in loneliness, despair, and malaise, inspire or cancel any sense of agency? Absent as well in the emotionalism is any notion of tolerance, or climate of respect that is born of open, serious, and generous relationships, and any sense of humility and solidarity that provides a willingness to listen, to share the truth, to share the pain and suffering. In that sense, it is a joyless film that respects power over life, determinism over possibility, and celebrates retributive justice rather than fair justice. We might ask how, in a global film market, those features play out in other cultures that see the United States, because of its "enormous superiority across all... dimensions of power [as] the prime rogue state today"?<sup>441</sup> The film's emotionalism is not liberating but oppressive. It is these absences present in the film's hollowness that linger long after the film ends.

Nevertheless, by revealing a kind of penetration of pain and agony into human psychology that disrupts, disturbs and sometimes destroys the "behavior and communication patterns in everyday life,"<sup>442</sup> and by providing access to the enduring distress and suffering that accompanies violence, *Mystic River* alienates us, i.e. protects us, from an identification with the pleasure of violent representations that permeate so much of Hollywood cinema and the dominant culture's media formations. This alienation/protection allows an identification with the human side of violence, and hence an identification with our own and other's humanity. These two identifications provide opportunities to: reflect upon the affects of violence in real lives; recognize and feel the deadening and dehumanizing features of violence; think through the problems of the selling of violence in the culture; resist repeated

calls to violence that penetrate further and further into every corner of our lives both inside and outside of media spectacles; and, allow our natural senses of compassion and concern to be awakened and activated. Put simply, when film texts are analyzed and criticized in the broader context of the political and the social, opportunities and possibilities open to bridge the divide between the aesthetic and the ideological, the personal and the political, the filmic and the social, what is and what could be, and between “private and public discourses.”<sup>443</sup>

The effect is to open up prospects to uncover and challenge various forms of consensus that dominate social and aesthetic expositions, and work to question, discuss, and overcome what is crucially lacking in films such as *Mystic River*, including: what to do to understand the causes of violence in society; what to do about addressing the cycle of human suffering and destruction; what to do to repair the damage of the past; what to do to ameliorate the suffering of the present; what to do to prevent further suffering and calamity in the future; how to resist dominant ideologies, social structures and institutions; how to develop individual and social agency that opens up the possibility to struggle against, challenge, and overcome illegitimate forms of authority and domination; how to see, think and feel beyond what is, into what could be. All of these questions, at some level, point to the need for careful analyses of the US culture of militarism and the growing militarization of society, mutually enforcing causes, agents and effects of violence in society, cycles of human suffering and destruction, horrors of the past, pains of the present, and calamitous shadows hanging over the future. During a time of war, expanding Pentagon budgets,<sup>444</sup> increased international violence, and when an “imperial ambitious”<sup>445</sup> United States has embarked on a policy of “unilateral global domination through absolute military superiority,”<sup>446</sup> the inculcation into the mass consciousness of the justification for, identification with, acceptance and pursuit of violence becomes all the more crucial. The success of “moving the project of American empire into the center of political consciousness” depends “on the acquiescence of a public kept fearful and ignorant, [and] subject to manipulation by...power.”<sup>447</sup>

Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River* in the post 9-11 world, is a film that on the one hand challenges and disrupts our identification with the acceptance and pursuit of violence by working to expose the suffering and trauma that accompanies violence, a potential challenge to the US culture of militarism, while at the same time serving to move and solidify the role of the US as "an imperial nation...engaged in the exercise of power for its own sake [in order to extend] the American 'presence' to the farthest reaches of the earth..."<sup>448</sup>

## CHAPTER 9: The Public Pedagogy of Presence and Absence in a US Culture of Militarism

*"The essence of a nation is that all its individuals have many things in common, and also that everybody has forgotten many things."*  
-- Ernest Renan<sup>449</sup>

*"We have an obligation to carry forward the lessons of Nuremberg. Those accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide must be brought to justice. There must be peace for justice to prevail, but there must be justice when peace prevails"*  
-- Bill Clinton.<sup>450</sup>

*"Each word has an echo. So does each silence."*  
-- Jean Paul Sartre<sup>451</sup>

Writing in *Jump Cut* about "Images after 9/11" Chuck Klenhans notes that when "analyzing image culture, you can't just talk about what images [and narratives] exist, you have to also discuss which ones are absent."<sup>452</sup> In other words, each image and narrative that is present, or absent, has an echo. This is a critical point in critical cinematic public pedagogy where present or absent visual images and historical narratives are primary components in what is told or not told. The dialectic between the categories of present and absent images and narratives, and what they tell and do not tell by their presence or absence, is always a complicating factor in film pedagogies and cultural analysis both for what they reveal about the film, about audiences and about the historical and political world outside the film, and how they direct our perceptions of reality. To know what is present is not to illuminate what is absent, but to know what is absent is to illuminate what is present. The discussion of presence and absence, in terms of images, narratives, knowledge, histories and public actions or inactions, is central to a critical pedagogical examination of militarized cinema, ideology, public pedagogy and the culture of militarism. The analysis of what is present and absent in US militarized cinema is not removed from the questions of the absence and presence of other texts, of knowledge and political and military action in the culture. The presence and absence of images that undermine the development of critical understandings of larger institutions and social structures, historical and systemic patterns of planning, policies and actions, as well as weapons developments and military

strategies, impede possibilities for making the political more pedagogical, and in turn the pedagogical more political.<sup>453</sup> In short, the act of impeding suppresses our capacities and limits our abilities for critically understanding the social and cultural world in which we circulate that in turn suppresses moves to politically engage the militarized public discourses, the weaponization of the world and global events that bear down on our lives in all pedagogical settings.

The analysis of presence and absence of images reveals a set of codes used to maneuver US audiences to affirm US military might and identify with US aggression, power and nationalism in ways both celebratory and justificatory that stifle not only knowledge of history, including the historical failures of US technological military superiority, and the horrifying results of policy, but also, perhaps more importantly, public political actions that might organize citizens to oppose and stop the injustices and crimes resulting from US aggression. Films can be used to conceal or reveal. If we allow films to conceal, rather than use films (and other means) to reveal the challenges we face in requiring and acquiring a realistic understanding of the increasingly militarized world and its growing dangers, with the purpose of resolving the potential for calamitous conflicts, then “there is nothing more than wars and mankind’s eventual destruction to look forward to.”<sup>454</sup>

In looking at militarism and aggression across the history of US militarized cinema, and more particularly in *Rules of Engagement*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Man on Fire*, and more figuratively in *Mystic River*, we can distinguish between the visibility of individual violence perpetrated or suffered by soldiers or citizens on the ground, often as part of a rescue mission, and the largely invisible, though sometimes present as a saving force, military institutional and social structural violence perpetrated by the aggressive operational forces that represent the primary US advantage in global military affairs: air power and sea power and the concomitant “bomb power,” i.e. nuclear bombs, fuel air bombs, cluster bombs, depleted uranium bombs, cruise missiles, bunker busters, and directed energy “E” bombs,<sup>455</sup> etc.

This emphasis also reveals itself in the ways in which military aggression outside of cinema is screened and contained for US audiences. For example, the visibility of individual military engagements and the invisibility of the larger forms of violence play out in the Pentagon strategy of embedding reporters with military units in Iraq. The embedded reporters naturally form solidaristic relationships and emotional attachments with US soldiers, if for no other reason than the soldiers are protecting the reporters from harm. But in addition, the embedded reporters are literally “on the ground” where the boots are, not in the sky where the cruise missiles are whistling or the B-52s are carpet-bombing and liquefying Iraqis.<sup>456</sup> For US audiences, the images presented reinforce the notion that the war is on the ground being fought out by individual soldiers carrying out or receiving violence. Absent are voices and struggles of the victims. The effect is to humanize the horrors of air war because it both remains invisible and it is superseded by the much easier identification with individual flesh and blood soldiers or small units of soldiers on the ground, rather than complex, supersonic, metallic flying machines, and the carnage they produce. The absence of US air power in dominant US culture is evidenced in a *LexisNexis* media database search for the phrase “air war” in reference to the US military operations in Iraq in the two dominant daily newspapers in the US, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and in the largest selling weekly magazine *Time* during 2005, a time of exponential increases in the use of US air power in Iraq.<sup>457</sup> In each case the search reveals the same answer: zero.<sup>458</sup>

The absence of air war carnage and coverage in film and in media presentations of real US aggression is often coupled, as it is in films, with the violence carried out by brutal terrorizing enemies. In short, their crimes are worthy of coverage while our crimes are unworthy of coverage, while our victims are unworthy of coverage and their victims are worthy of coverage. This coupling removes from public perception the overwhelming and destructive power advantage the US presents in any military conflict, and tends, in the public mind, to place the soldiers in a *Black Hawk Down-*

style *mano a mano* defensive outnumbered battle for survival with the savage enemy who have the unfair “homefield” advantage of fighting in familiar territory, their homeland.<sup>459</sup>

Victory then demonstrates our individual strength and national superiority over “lesser types,” plants in the public mind the notion that the US is always engaged in “defense” against barbarian killers, individualizes militarism, and further inculcates the desire and perceived need for a stronger US military. In scripting the war (to the extent scripting is possible) one guesses Pentagon planners understood existentially and aesthetically that war from the ground-eye view of US grunts in the streets, *Black Hawk Down*-style, works very well to both humanize the experience and to more deeply embed and ensnarl US reporters and viewers in the emotions and spectacle of the events making it that much more difficult to oppose the US military aggression because opposing the aggression equates with opposing the troops as individuals. With deeply inculcated emotional attachments conditioning responses and allegiances, and beliefs about the “realities of war,” opposition to US aggression feels for many people more like opposition to individual soldiers and thus an undermining of their safety. In combination with the oft-repeated mantra, “They are fighting for our freedom,” opposition to the aggression translates as not only opposition to the individual soldiers but also opposition to one’s own interest in “freedom” and “our way of life.” In the same way that the economic system directs identification with fulfillment to the survival of the system of commodity production, the culture of militarism directs identification with fulfilling our “free” existence with the survival, extension and perpetration of the culture of militarism. Working against either translates as working against one’s way of life. In short, without a strong military we would not be “free,” perhaps even dead, therefore it is in our best interest to support, promote and expand a culture of militarism and the militarization of the society.<sup>460</sup>

### **Individuals and Institutions – Part 1**

Among other affects this individual/institutional distinction tends to reinforce is a limiting notion of history, where: (1) history is hidden or forgotten; (2) aggressive historical actions are

normalized and naturalized because options other than violence are absent; (3) history is reduced to individual actions rather than a more substantive notion of history that understands history as largely driven by institutional structures through which and within which individuals and groups develop consciousness, shape policies and carry out actions. These forms of historical reductionism tend to dehumanize and de-moralize audiences, for they fail to take into account how understanding our humanity and our moral nature requires a sensitive and complex exploration of the diverse qualities and rich textures of the social surroundings, institutional structures, and historical sinews out of, through and into which we develop, decide, act and interact. In combination, these characteristics also hinder political alternatives and languages of possibility that are born in working through these complex political, social and historical relationships.

In *Mystic River*, for example, it is partly the refusal to both confront the multiple and interpenetrating histories of violence suffered by the main characters and examine the historical and political reasons for that violence that fuels the continuing cycles of violence, the further dehumanizing of characters, the acceptance of a “law of the jungle” mentality, and the impossibility of creating alternatives. Each character hides an abnormal level of violence beneath a shaky veneer of a normal life and refuses to look past the recurring pain toward reasons for the pain in order to re-enchanted their moral and political selves. Jimmy says to Dave, before killing him, “You do the dying alone,” thus hiding the social impact of killing and dying. Hidden behind the subdued personal histories of violence and left unexplored is the connection between a society that brutalizes young kids, as in the case of Dave’s abduction and torture, and forms of dehumanizing public pedagogy and individual acts of violence that circulate within the local and larger culture that encourage young kids to carry out violence, as in the case of the murderous shooting and beating of Jimmy’s daughter Katie by Ray Jr. and his friend. Sean’s intimation that it was just “kids being kids getting out of control,” plants the notion that this kind of behavior is simply “normal,” so there is no need to look for political, cultural or historical explanations that might open possibilities for ending the cycle.



The refusal to appreciate the possibility of, or to pursue alternatives, leaves as the only alternative more “survival of the most ruthless” dehumanization. This simplifying approach might save time, but not lives.<sup>461</sup> *Mystic River* goes one step further by linking “a big heart” and “love” to “peace” through violence.<sup>462</sup> It suggests, in the penultimate “Imperial scene,” that when we carry out violent acts driven by a heart filled with love we “can never be wrong,” and we can “sleep in peace.” “All that matters” is a “will [to] do anything...even when it is hard [or wrong],” for that reveals that “A King know[s] what to do” in order to protect those under his rule. Here, *Mystic River* collapses the social into the personal, the institutional into the individual, the public into the private. While it is true that individuals may act out of love, it is also true that an individual act of violence driven by love, greed or hate, hides the larger social institutions and political issues that not only condition individual behaviors but also, more importantly, are not driven by moral imperatives. Individuals may carry out violent acts but it is society that provides them with the motivations and the means for carrying out those acts. These connections are rarely portrayed in US cinema. Furthermore, to the extent that the “Imperial” scene is intimating a symbolic link to rulers in larger institutional settings, it falsely suggests that “imperial” decisions are made looking down rather than looking up, i.e. in the interests of protecting people “down below” rather than promoting the interests of the people and institutions “up above.”<sup>463</sup> In the end, *Mystic River* tends dangerously close to arguing that cycles of violence are inevitable rather than contingent, an argument that shuts down the option for working to understand how politics, society and history create conditions in which people act and violence erupts.

In *Rules* a long history of US war crimes and massacres is reduced to the depraved act of one officer who in the end is exonerated of wrong doing thus triply hiding history: (1) institutional imperatives are hidden behind the actions of a seemingly out of control individual, who finally is “in control;” (2) the exoneration of the individual, who symbolically serves as a representative of the larger US military structure, washes clean a long-term history of US war crimes and massacres and

thus legitimates the mass killing of US victims; and, (3) the refusal to introduce other options coupled with the suggestion, “if we didn’t do it to them, they would have done it to us,” normalizes “war of all against all” actions and redirects attention from more difficult questions that might lead to answers that open up historical understandings and political alternatives to US aggression. Missing is any historical or political indication of why Arabs might be angry at the US, an absence that leaves the screaming Yemeni protesters looking crazed and demonic, and therefore, dehumanized. Present is the portrayal of US soldiers as outnumbered victims of a hateful force out to destroy them, and us. It feeds into the simple “eye for an eye” slogan that suggests “we have to kill them before they kill us,” a slogan that again eliminates historical and political understanding, closes down options for alternative positions on how we should engage with other countries, and positions viewers, with no other options, to support a growing culture of militarism and the aggression it employs.

*Black Hawk Down*’s reduction of US aggression to the slogan “In the end, it is only about the man next to you, that’s all it is,” coupled with the painful portrayal of wounded, suffering and dying US soldiers terrorized for “wanting to make a difference,” and a bloated emphasis on US humanitarian commitments, reduces long-term and immediate institutional imperatives linked to US global domination projects and the pursuit of resource control to solidarism, self-protection and courage among individual soldiers. As noted, this positions audiences “in solidarity” with the grunts on the ground, a solidarity that in the end becomes support for the aggressive institutions the soldiers service and represent. Meanwhile, the massive US dehumanization and killing of thousands of Somalis is absent; it is an absence that protects our view of ourselves as noble and altruistic heroes intervening to serve humanitarian concerns. History is reconstituted. In short, the macrocosm gets lost in the microcosm, history collapses into the present, politics is reduced to immediate survival, the UN, not the US (as is historically accurate), becomes the primary block to humanitarian

assistance, non-aggression and peace, and the US is falsely reduced to a historical player who only reacts to horror but never initiates horror.

In *Tears*, aside from the peculiar historical suggestion that the rescue mission that ends by killing hundreds of Nigerians is somehow linked to a purgation-ritual in which we are cleansing ourselves of our sins rooted in slavery, the film focuses on the moral and military struggles, along with the fighting and sacrificing, of a small unit of soldiers, seemingly detached and distanced from larger institutional plans, and bent on defending a small group of Nigerian Christians from the brutalities of Nigerian Muslims. The moral commitment to help the innocent is crucially linked to the carrying out of military violence, thus planting the seeds that morality is linked to military violence, and that the only way to protect the innocent is through the use of military force. Nowhere is it suggested that protecting the innocent might involve creating institutional and social conditions wherein the innocent are not placed in circumstances in which they are victimized, or where massive violence is the only option. Here again, the audience is positioned to identify with and support individual soldiers, fighting heroically, courageously and selflessly against seemingly insurmountable obstacles and odds. This positioning leads to applause when the F-18s scream in to obliterate the “obstacles” and save the day, thus positioning the audience to emotionally and intellectually identify with the use of the primary US advantage in global affairs, bomb power. The simple lesson (historically inaccurate): in the end, violence will make things right.

In films such as *Black Hawk Down*, and *Tears*, the victims of US violence first are humanized in preparation for later dehumanization. In *Black Hawk Down*, in order to legitimate US actions, the Somalis must first be portrayed as fellow humans suffering and dying at the hands of ignoble and brutal killers (who are also Somalis). In *Tears* the justification for US actions is planted by portraying Nigerian Muslim maniacs slaughtering innocent Nigerian Christians. Indications of historical US support for the brutal killers or the US supplying of weapons to brutal regimes in the region remain largely absent. The legitimizing of US intervention is accomplished through a simple

dichotomization of “good Muslims/bad Muslims” in *BHD*, and in *Tears* using a “good Christians/bad Muslims” binary. Why there is conflict between groups is again left largely unexplored politically or historically, leaving one to assume that this type of killing is simply part of some “natural state” of affairs in the region. “Good” reduces to those who are suffering and helpless and who fawningly accept US power as their savior; “Bad” reduces to anyone who is cinematically demonized or who challenges US power’s right to intervene wherever it likes or who may be standing in the way of US interests. The latter point must be inferred. Also lost to history are reasons why the “bad guys” might be harboring outrage against US power, or why they may be offended by the presence of US troops on their soil, or why they might assume that their country is sovereign territory on which the US has no right to intervene and carry out violence. In both films, decisions to protect the innocent made by renegade US individuals position the audience in support of the soldiers and are used to justify the use of large scale US military violence against large numbers of “bad guy” militia or soldiers.

The primary lesson in both *Black Hawk Down* and *Tears* is that the US intervenes to protect civilians against hateful and heinous enemies, when in fact the primary victims of US violence are always civilians as seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Korea, etc. A second lesson is that the US is always outnumbered and therefore threatened and fighting against difficult odds. The latter lesson calls for the use of technological superiority as a way to protect against what is depicted as a US disadvantage. This disadvantage leads to support for what is in reality the US advantage and fetish: techno/bomb power. Because the sacrifices of the US soldiers are so graphically and painfully portrayed in both films, the seeds for supporting more military spending and more “defensive” technology are planted and nourished. Nowhere is the audience given opportunities to explore the growing disconnect between increases in technological destructive capacities and the lack of understanding and political will to constrain the potential, perhaps inevitable, consequences of this gap: “ultimate doom.” In

Hollywood film pedagogy, military aggression and violence always solve problems and save the day. The reality is that military aggression and violence always create problems, increasingly problems of a foreboding nature that may likely end the day.

In a monumental reducing of social abuse and harm to individual pain, *MF* disappears the suffering and trauma of tens of millions of Mexicans living under multiple forms of violence only to focus attention on the kidnapping and suffering, all too real, of one US citizen, the young, very white and very wealthy girl, Lupita, along with Creasy's quest to reinvigorate his allegiance to imposing violence and his commitment to a "kill 'em all" rule of force. Absent from Lupita's drama is the "kidnapping" and suffering of virtually an entire population of people behind economic programs designed to serve the white and wealthy, along with the kidnapping, torturing, raping and murder of thousands of young Mexican women over the last decade. This pattern of concealing and revealing positions audiences to again identify "us" as the victim, rather than "us" as victimizer, a dangerous ploy that promises a continuation of programs of victimization. Mexicans' suffering is the result of a "rule of force" less devastating in the immediate than massive military aggression, but no less destructive in the longer term and no less a producer of outrage and hatred. This individualization and narrow focus confirms the oft-repeated message that US citizens are more "worthy" than the "unworthy" third world "little brown brothers." The audience is positioned to identify with Lupita and Creasy at the expense of the many dozens of Mexicans killed by Creasy, and the many millions who suffer the harsh and impoverished realities of life under capitalism. One US "innocent" is worth dozens if not millions of Mexicans.

*MF* also implants the lesson that if we are going to defend our innocence against screaming hordes of darker and threatening others, we will have to be very well armed, i.e., we will have to invest in a technological advantage, as Creasy does successfully. In fact, Creasy, in response to one kidnapping, literally launches "war." Again, this commitment to technological military superiority is becoming increasingly a commitment to predictable consequences out of our control. Following

the standard war film trope, Creasy is initially outgunned, and always outnumbered, hence his only hope for victory is to accumulate an arsenal against which the Mexican “terrorists” cannot defend themselves. He succeeds, at the cost of his life. In short, we must become more militarized than they are if our future is going to survive – a dangerous lesson given the proven limits of US military and political power to solve problems and the proven strength of US military and political power to create new problems. In *MR*, individual sacrifice, however, of a heroic nature, becomes necessary to sustain that future. There is no intimation that in order to sustain or improve our future, radical institutional transformations and a reduced commitment to aggression and military technology will be required and should be pursued. Again, the institutional is collapsed into the individual at the same time that the individual is used to reinforce institutional imperatives driven by technological superiority, violence and an increase in weapons. Absent from the film are institutional prerogatives that have historically driven much of the Mexican population into poverty and despair, points that would help explain why kidnapping might be used as a tool to create wealth and possibilities for the poor and oppressed, or serve as a form of leveling the playing field after so many years of abuse.

As noted earlier, Creasy, as is common in Hollywood films, is not interested in attacking the social conditions and powerful institutions that create misery and hopelessness, hunger and despair, violence and aggression, he is only interested in killing individuals who are using that system of corruption as a way to escape from the misery and despair. In short, he attacks the victims rather than the victimizers. A final re-historicized lesson, at least on the surface, is that the institutional system is fine, it is just a few corrupt individuals abusing the system that need to be exterminated. This theme is common in virtually all militarized cinema. In addition, it is suggested that Creasy’s real problem as an individual is that he began to question the motives of the institution of violence and aggression he served, i.e. the US military. When he finally reconnects with, accepts and recommits to the violent motives, his spirit is restored, innocence is saved, and he is able to ascend to the heavens in peace leaving the cinematic impression that the “bad guys” have been eliminated

so that now the system will be permitted to ably function as designed in the interest of all, or at least all who matter.<sup>464</sup>

The film presents an extreme suturing of history by suggesting a naïve “happily ever after” ending, at least for the white and wealthy folk who are portrayed as the only ones who matter. Because Creasy/Denzel is a man on a two-fold mission, first to rejuvenate his “lost” and confused self, and second to avenge and then rescue Lupita, the audience is positioned to identify with his torturous and murderous actions, for they are carried out in pursuit of what is portrayed as “justice.” Again, morality, filtered through “justice,” is linked to violence, leaving the audience to assume that justice acquired through violence is a representation of morality rather than criminality. The absence of alternatives leaves the audience with little or no other choice. It is a positioning that lends itself well to US power’s commitment to aggression, lawlessness, militarism and the rule of force.

In contrast to these de-historicized, dehumanizing and de-politicized film pedagogies, a pedagogy that develops knowledge of the links between history, culture and institutional power could lead to levels of political and social understanding that would suggest not only the depth of pedagogical work required to challenge institutional policies and structures, but also a pedagogical understanding of how inclusive, informed, involved and vibrant the political work must be to mobilize the collective intelligence and imagination, courage and commitment, energy and enthusiasm of populations of people in order to transform the conditions and institutions that give rise to so much violence, aggression, destruction and death.

The cinematic focus on individual actions as part of rescue missions as seen in *Tears, MF*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Rules* absences what is at the heart of US military engagement, acts of illegal aggression, i.e., Crimes Against Peace, “the Supreme International Crime” as defined at Nuremberg, “the crime of which other war crimes and horrors are derivative” and that “contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole,” the crime that was the basis of the UN Charter’s primary call and design to end the “scourge of war” for future generations.<sup>465</sup> To the extent that US

audiences are cinematically directed away from an understanding of and engagement with US acts of aggression and criminality and toward an understanding of and engagement with US actions as individualized protective missions of constructive, defensive, humanitarian and heroic rescue, we can expect the audience to continue to assume that the representations in films, coupled with media presentations cycled through Pentagon censors or embedded reporters, because they correspond with representations in official rhetoric about war and other imaging in various media formations, are a representation of engagements and consequences on the ground and in the air outside of cinema. This will tend to work toward further support for US aggression coded as “defense,” and thus seen as self-protective and constructive. The implications of such support, whether tacit or active, are ominous.

### **Individuals and institutions – Part 2**

In militarized cinema, and other media, used to validate US imperial designs and pursuits, individual soldier violence and suffering dominates visible space both as a cover for the immorality, primacy and real and devastating consequences of violence committed by militarized US institutions, and as an audience redirection device that works to shut down political and historical understanding by conditioning audiences to identify with US military violence as: (1) necessary; (2) constructive; (3) defensive; (4) noble; (5) beneficial; and, (6) self-protective.

These six categories (not exclusive) are interpenetrating and part of a “cloak of legitimacy” that hides the real designs of US power and the real consequences of US violence and aggression in the lives of real people both at home and abroad. The categories also suggest a frightening “destroy in order to save” ideology of hardness, and stifles deeper pedagogical understandings of international conflicts and the need for organized opposition to policies and institutions.

In brief, as projected regularly in US militarized cinema, military aggression and violence are necessary because the world is a violent place; constructive because it protects the weak and innocent (us, and those we protect) from the strong and guilty (them, who are out to destroy);



defensive because the world is filled with enemies that hate us and want to destroy us; noble because we are willing to sacrifice to protect those suffering the ravages of tyranny and oppression, and we are driven by humanitarian concerns; beneficial because it makes the world a safer place, builds friendships with rescued victims all over the world, and makes us feel good about ourselves while extending freedom and democracy against tyranny and oppression; self-protective because we are alone in the world in our commitments to justice, peace and what is right and therefore must struggle alone. Each category calls directly or indirectly for military strength, increased weaponry, and a heightened culture of militarism.

As projected through cinematic representations the “need” to self-protect constructs the requirement for defense which stimulates the necessity for “creative destruction” arguments which bleed into “it is good for us” rationalization arguments,<sup>466</sup> and the necessity for defense is more deeply underlined and endorsed by the need to justifiably and nobly protect not only individual soldiers (as in *Rules of Engagement (Rules)* and *Black Hawk Down*), Aryan perfection, purity innocence, and the future (as in *Man on Fire (MF)*), or surrogates (i.e. victims of horrendous violence carried out by “evil others” as in *Tears of the Sun (Tears)*), but also to protect the long-tradition of what is really a pretentious, self-righteous and foreboding US manifest nobility and imperialism as figuratively depicted in *Mystic River*.

*Rules, Tears, MF* and *Black Hawk Down*, are exercises in portraying us as victims, and in reconstructing the sullied national image after Vietnam, i.e. we are the good guys necessarily in need of protection in order to pursue our noble cause of benefiting others. Each film distracts attention away from a larger focus on institutionally driven massive fire power based policy and onto an extremely narrow concentration on individual, often outgunned, combatants, the constructive need to self-protect under conditions of necessary defense that in the end prove noble and beneficial. Developing from long-term Hollywood war film portrayals, in *Tears, Black Hawk Down, Rules* and *MF* the coding evolves out of the direct or indirect presence of US humanitarian intervention where

small groups of brave and heroic US soldiers (or an ex-soldier in the case of *MF*) are engaged in nobly protecting and saving innocent victims from a great number of destructive killers of a most vicious sort. The foreboding and vicious worlds into which the protagonists are placed to carry out the noble rescue mission elicits audience support both for the intervention (protecting the weak – including us - against the strong) and the requirement to violently self-protect in order to complete the mission and rescue those under attack, including the soldiers. Given the set-up the only method available for success is to employ high levels of violence and destruction in order to eradicate the foreboding threat. Each film represents the soldiers not only as rescuers of the weak against the strong, but also as initially weak themselves up against a much stronger enemy. By locating the audience in identification with out-manned and outgunned soldiers who are placed in harms way while carrying out heroic humanitarian rescue missions, the audience is also positioned to identify with and support levels of violence that promise success, and protection, in the mission, with the implied future constructive engagement hanging in the wings.

In each case, because of the absence of political and historical context, the audience is compelled to support high levels of violence because no alternative to the rule of force is offered. The myth of success through violence builds confidence in the power of highly destructive weaponry, but it is the confidence in aggression that is fundamental to so many US failures in the world. Cinematic myths of superiority and success coupled with a deep-seated and reproduced myopia, rooted in US nationalism and military hubris, undermine the development of the necessary political tools, historical knowledge and social skills that promote negotiation and compromise in global affairs. It is a crisis that unless resolved promises eventual catastrophic destruction within the US as the US rains down mass demolition on its enemies. The presence of the myth of US weakness hides the reality of US strength in military affairs. The hidden strength of US military power hides the reality that shocking and awful applications of military might save little if anything other than massive contracts for weapons makers, those who rebuild the damage and those who control the

resources, especially the oil. The presence of the myth of US humanitarian rescue hides the reality of US aggression in international affairs. The presence of the myths of weakness and humanitarianism, however, are crucial to a continuing growth of the US culture of militarism, as is the cinematic myth that wars are short and decisive rather than protracted and destructive.

The two-hour narrative framework of Hollywood war cinema allows for no examination or explication of the long-term horrors and suffering produced by the brutality, trauma and destructiveness of war. A culture of militarism that requires the militarization of the society to carry out its hubristic and aggressive ideological prerogatives also requires a population in identification with the need for greater military expenditures and an absence of the knowledge of what likely lies ahead as a result. Given that the population is generally opposed to unilateral aggression it is much more efficient to identify aggression in the public mind with defense against ominous threats and noble humanitarian intentions to protect the innocent.

Problematically, Hollywood war films are still ensconced in political attitudes rooted in the distant past, notions of militaristic heroism and courage molded by WWII, and a misguided sense of nationalist supremacy rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism. We live, and die, however, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the spread of devastating military technology across the world calls for new political attitudes rooted in meeting peaceful prerequisites, new notions of courage linked to thinking and acting differently, as well as new or revamped notions of internationalism, interdependence and solidarity, lest we destroy ourselves.

Briefly, regarding the six categories of necessity, construction, defense, nobility, benefits and self-protection, in *MF*, Creasy's explosive use of "destroy in order to save" violence and torture is deemed necessary in order to construct a defensive position so as to both survive the onslaught of the "evil doers" and to avenge what he believes is Pita's murder. Because Pita is portrayed as the pure image of virtue, innocence, wealth and whiteness, his actions initially take on the aura of noble vengeance and later noble rescue as Creasy sacrifices himself for Pita's benefit thus planting the idea

that we must be willing to commit to self-sacrifice if we are going to self-protect. In this case “self” is abstracted from self to represent that which is beyond the self, herein a symbol of Aryan innocence, superiority and the future. Audience positioning and identification with a troubled but ultimately “heroic” Creasy and an innocent and loving Pita inside a chaotic, hateful and violent world of kidnapping, corruption, bribery, thievery and murder collapsing on them directs audience allegiance to the necessity of patterns of violence and vengeance that are then accepted as beneficial (they save the innocent) and constructive (they create opportunities for continuation into the future as symbolized by Pita’s youth and thus redeem the past). In that Pita’s white, athletic, wealthy and youthful innocence symbolizes the US as a nation (in contrast to the darker, sordid, poverty-stricken and decrepit Mexicans), Creasy’s vicious actions are internalized as defending us against them, they are noble in their self-sacrificing commitment to saving the hope and future of humanity (here collapsing humanity into the white and worthy wealthy), and protective of our larger self as represented by the “self” of US innocence, glory and hope as symbolized by Pita. It is grotesque and horrifyingly simplified, but the lesson again is mass violence is not only necessary but beneficial, i.e. good and moral. Absent are the long-term destructive consequences this type of thinking entails.

In *Tears*, there is a sub-theme of protecting and restoring Empire in the person of the Christian Nigerian King who wants to “bring freedom to my people,” i.e. “good Christians,” i.e. surrogate Americans. Intimated in the utterance is the claim that he wants to bring oppression to the Nigerians who are not “his people,” i.e. “bad Muslims.” In order for this replacement of evil by good to succeed it is necessary for Lt. Waters and his band of Navy Seals to constructively engage in working to destroy the forces aligned against “goodness,” defend “good” and innocent Christians against the terrorizing and “evil” Muslims, in a noble effort of self-sacrifice that becomes an exercise not only in protecting the innocent but also an exercise in self-protection and solidarism among the soldiers. Though a number of soldiers are killed, they are killed in what they engage as a noble cause of redemption and protection. Those who survive, especially Lt. Waters, achieve the benefit

of doing “a good thing...the right thing,” and thus reconnecting with their humanity, albeit through violence. The lesson, similar to *MF*, is one of reconnecting to our humanity by reconnecting to violence as “a force that gives us meaning,” a force for purgation, noble achievement and self and social benefit. The jungle scenario in which marauding Muslims chase fleeing Christians accompanied by US soldiers establishes the necessity of force as the only saving grace and possible option. In this scenario, typical of Hollywood war cinema, “There will be no negotiations.” Because the soldiers are positioned with the hunted they are seen as engaging in defensive and protective actions. The soldiers, unlike the Christian Nigerians, have the option, at least early on, of leaving. Lt. Waters decides to not abandon the hunted, thus raising the mission to a noble and constructive level of engagement. Placing US soldiers as victims, again outnumbered, positions audience allegiance with “whatever it takes” to survive the jungle onslaught and here what it takes is again a “destroy in order to save” ideology of hardness that calls forth the F-18s to incinerate the Muslim “evil doers.”

Given force as the only option, the audience is again positioned to identify with violence as beneficial, self-protective and in the end necessary. The audience is left with the naïve impression that killing several hundred Muslim soldiers has solved the political and historical conflicts that have led to contention and bloodshed in the first place. This gross simplification of reality undermines commitments toward epistemological curiosity rooted in critical engagements with politics and history.

*Mystic River* spins the pattern by suggesting that in a world gone mad with violence those who are strongest will survive. Therefore, if we want to survive, we must be willing to employ violence, even if we occasionally kill the wrong people in the process. It is a trope that protects “collateral damage” from critically reflective discussion.<sup>467</sup> The sad and growing reality is that the strongest are creating conditions so that nobody survives. While *Mystic River* occasionally falls outside, it also works inside the pattern because the represented violence is deemed necessary and

constructive to protect honor, put Dave out of his misery and to ensure the continuation of “the King’s” neighborhood empire. It is presented as protective because “the King” is now purportedly in a better position to protect his family against further violence and now they can “sleep in peace.” And it is defensive in the same way that US military violence is considered defensive when it is used to maintain “credibility.” In other words, when it is used to demonstrate that brutal and bloody violence will be employed against anyone who we even suspect of wrongdoing. In a post 9/11 world in which the threat of terrorism increases daily, this argument from strength carries with it a degree of plausibility that could lead to greater support for a culture of militarism, until one recognizes that it is large-scale superpower state terror that is precipitating the threat of smaller scale non-state and non-superpower state terror. To its credit, *Mystic River* at least alludes to the inevitability of continuing violence when we accept these notions of violence as necessary, constructive, defensive and noble. It intimates that in the end there are no benefits from violence and its aura of self-protection really plants the harrowing seeds for self-destruction.

*Black Hawk Down* locates US soldiers in the midst of a chaotic, explosive and destructive Mogadishu. After the initial collapse of the mission into confusion, miscommunication, disruption, wreckage and carnage it becomes necessary to employ whatever force can be locally mobilized in order to self-protect and defend against the continuing onslaught of Somali militia. Again, negotiation is not an option, so survival depends on the use of force. The seeds of humanitarian intervention disappear as soldiers are compelled to nobly sacrifice for the cause of protecting fellow soldiers placed in precarious and deadly circumstances. In the end, those who survive are celebrated by cheering Somalis. We are led to believe the cheering is because somehow, against all evidence, the soldiers have constructed conditions in which the Somalis will be free from militia violence and no longer forced into starvation at the hands of warlords. The audience is positioned to feel good about the mission, the courage and heroism of the soldiers, the humanitarian success of US actions, while at the same time feeling bad about what is presented as partially unnecessary sacrifices made

by US soldiers who were victims of bureaucracy, UN malfeasance and well-armed Somali militia. This positioning places audiences in support of US unilateralism, greater use of US force (constrained by the UN in the film), and the pursuit of a different kind of constructive engagement, i.e. one in which US credibility is no longer questioned and that is a constructive engagement that can only be met by an increase in US militarism and force.

The pattern, however, is evidenced most egregiously in *Rules*, and that will be the focus herein. It erupts in the prologue in which Childers “defensively” executes a Vietnamese prisoner of war to protect outmatched and outgunned fellow marines (though ultimately only his permanently wounded friend Hodges is saved)<sup>468</sup>, under attack by unrelenting and murderous Vietnamese soldiers. The nobility of protecting a fellow marine (a common honorific and war film trope, also present in *Black Hawk Down* and *Tears*) supersedes the ignobility of executing a war crime, and in the end this noble ignobility proves beneficial for both Childers and Hodges (and for reconstructing a noble and heroic national militarized image) as together they prove that US war crimes, whether in Vietnam or in the Arab world, are really legitimate, necessary and “good for all of us.” Absent are the harmful consequences of US war crimes in the lives of the victims (and victimizers, at least at the level of ground soldiers, if not the culture as a whole). In this immoral and “Golden Rule is missing” filmic universe the impact on others is largely absent and irrelevant for it would undermine our belief in our Providential “right” to destroy in order to save.

The code plays out again at the scene of the Yemeni massacre outside the US embassy where not only the quivering and quaking Ambassador and his family are threatened by the obdurate and fervent Arab mob but US marines are also under attack, and apparently more important symbolically the bullet-shredded US flag. The slaughter of civilians therefore is portrayed and perceived as a necessary and constructive act of self-protection infused with the noble intention of defending not only the US presence in the Arab world (which is ultimately, in US planning and mythology, “good for us”), a presence symbolized by the weak-kneed and suspiciously swarthy Ambassador (Ben

Kingsley), but also heavily armed US marines threatened by diabolical Arab women and children,<sup>469</sup> and the National Identity as represented by the “heroic” under fire rescue of the “stars and stripes” atop the embassy by “bad-ass Blackman” Colonel Childers. Furthermore, Childers’ order to “waste” civilians is precipitated by the killing of a marine by a rooftop based Arab sniper, lending a modicum of plausibility to the claim “they shot first.” Thus, in well-conditioned minds, the slaughter is “justified,” and the viewer is left to identify with both Childers and the “wasting” order he screamed.

This identification with the war criminal is further instantiated by the director’s ploy of allowing the audience to see what only Childers among those in the film sees in terms of what is “really” happening in the courtyard. Because the audience knows “the truth,” i.e. the “cinematically employed (insidious) truth” that the people in the courtyard, including young children, women and old men, were wielding guns, this pits the audience against all accusations directed at Childers from the beginning of his trial. It positions the audience in solidarity with Childers against the court-martial proceedings, the prosecutor Biggs, and the charges of war crimes, and against the anti-war types who hurl spit, wave signs and scream insults at Childers. Furthermore, it places the audience in support of the America represented by the heroic and “wrongly” vilified Childers, and in opposition to the “official” America represented by the wheedling and obsequious Sokal, the National Security Advisor (NSA), and ultimately and most disturbingly in support of heinous war crimes, continued militarization and the dehumanization of Arabs and other “gooks.”

The constructive need to self-protect under conditions of necessary defense that prove honorific and beneficial and thus promote the culture of militarism is encoded in the form of a simple repeated leitmotif which reduces to “three of the good guys were killed so what does it matter how many of the bad guys we killed?”<sup>470</sup> This is a coded translation of the Pentagon’s Powell Doctrine that suggests that US soldiers must be protected at all costs, including the employment of massive and disproportionate “collateral” damaging force at the expense of anyone who is, or anyone in the vicinity of anyone who is, threatening US forces.<sup>471</sup> Given that the “good guys” in



*Rules* (and *Black Hawk Down*, *MF* and *Tears*) are US military with whom the audience has been conditioned to identify as both “like us” and “for us” where “us” means the nation and all that accompanies notions of nationhood (our values, beliefs, freedoms, way of life, democracy, humanitarianism, nobility, etc.), and the victims are painted as America hating Muslims, i.e. “unlike us” and “against us,” the formula is susceptible to little challenge and in fact, if audience applause at the sight of the bloody massacre is any indication, it is seen as justified and is celebrated. That US massacres of civilians enflame hatred and indignation that portends monstrous blowback is left cinematically unexamined.

After its initial presentation in the Vietnam “war” prologue, the verbal motif begins its sordid journey through the film when the film transmutes back to Washington after the embassy massacre in a scene in which the NSA Sokal engages Marine General Perry and angrily notes, “Childers ordered the slaughter of innocent people.” The General responds with equal anger, “I’ll tell you what we ought to get straight, we lost *three* United States marines!” 83 murdered Yemenis disappear in the shadow of three dead US marines suggesting the standard “US bodies are worth more than those of other states, especially ‘little brown brother’ states.” Soon thereafter, General Perry meets with Childers to inform him that he has been accused of mass murder. After Childers naively and sheepishly responds, “murder sir?” the General asks, “You want to tell me exactly what the hell happened out there?” Childers reacts defensively “I lost marines.” To further inscribe the idea that Childers is sanely dedicated to defending us at any cost he later says, after refusing a “psych evaluation,” “I think [commanding troops] is the greatest honor an American can have.” This honorific is uttered after he has “commanded troops” to “honorably” carry out a brutal massacre of mostly women and children thus insinuating for the audience that the greatest honor an American can have is slaughtering the “other.”<sup>472</sup> He notes the sacrifices (for us) one must endure for the privilege: “You know how many birthdays and Christmases I missed, spent rotting in jungles or in the desert?” Audience sympathy is aroused and entrenched. Here we know he is referring to

Vietnam, Panama and Iraq, as previously revealed. What is left absent for the audience is that the time spent “rotting in jungles or in the desert” was time spent participating in US criminal wars of aggression that killed millions in Vietnam, hundreds of thousands in Iraq, and several thousand in Panama. The absence of this vital historical information into the systematic pursuit of criminal aggression by the US opens an audience to seduction into support for further criminal military actions.

The verbal motif is repeated again during an encounter between Hodges and Childers when Childers notes “I lost marines over there. If I am guilty of this, I am guilty of everything I’ve done in combat for the last 30 years.” The insinuation is that he is innocent of all he has done, when in fact, to the extent that he was participating in illegal acts of international aggression by the United States in Vietnam, Panama and Iraq, there is a case to be made that his combat actions were criminal, but that possibility is left absent as well to an audience that only has individual acts to examine, not institutional policy, international law, or historical realities. Later, during the court-martial, Major Biggs, the by-the-book Stanford trained prosecuting attorney asks if the slaughter could have been motivated “by a desire for retaliation?” Childers disparagingly responds, “I was protecting my men.” The lesson is: protecting US soldiers during the act of carrying out war crimes is enough justification for the war crimes to be perpetrated. When asked if his murderous order was to “Waste the motherfuckers!” Childers contentiously intones, “They were killing my marines, so, yeah, I said it!” Biggs retorts, “There are rules, and marines are sworn to uphold them.” Childers vituperatively retaliates, “I was not going to stand by and see another marine die just to live by those fucking rules.” The “fucking rules” include: warning the enemy before opening fire; asking them to surrender; employing deadly force only as a last resort; and, the Geneva Conventions.

Childers refers here however to another rule: “honor is a code never to be broken,” and the code is to honor the lives of Americans above all else which carries again the concomitant lesson: US lives are more important and of more value than the lives of others. It is a code that

reinforces the social Darwinian codes of “self-interest at the expense of others,” and “survival of the most ruthless.” The same themes play out in *Tears* and *Black Hawk Down* where in the end massive firepower is employed to protect US soldiers under threat by crazed killers. There is not even a nod to the number of people killed by the violent retaliation in any of the films. It again demonstrates the ease with which we culturally disappear our victims. The disappearance of victims is the dehumanization of victims and that, of course, renders violence against them more palatable. Nevertheless, it still remains the greatest crime against the audience when no alternatives to violence are presented to resolve conflicts along with no context for why there is conflict in the first place. The pattern places the audience in the unsavory place of having to support violence because violence is the only way offered to save the lives of those presented as innocent.

As a result of the repeated “Powell Doctrine” motif that says “protect Americans at all costs,” in the end the message, when combined with the rest of *Rules*’ attempts to justify war crimes, is a sense of satisfaction that we (including Childers and, as insiders with the outsider, the “normal” American audience who are positioned against peaceniks, evil Arabs, “unrealistic” book law, “intellectual” Stanford trained desk-bound lawyers, and US “officialdom”) are morally victorious. In each of the films, *Rules*, *Tears*, *MF*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Mystic River*, the absence of larger social, political and historical contexts makes the presence of various forms of violence and aggression not only more acceptable but palatable and more easily endorsed.

### **OTHER PATTERNS: Inside/Outside Identification**

This “insider” audience identification with the cinematic outsider is part of a repetitious trope in what might be called US cinema’s “outlaw” discourse present over the course of US war films since at least WWII. It is that of the hero as courageous and morally conflicted renegade. The renegade is one who willingly questions stultified authority in pursuit of a higher moral cause that the authority apparently cannot understand (but with which the audience can easily identify). The authority figure is often bewildered and befuddled by “the higher cause,” for example rescuing the

Christian Muslims in *Tears*, because of a represented stifling and dishonest character that corrodes and corrupts the bureaucratic mind (perhaps true). The renegade hero Childers in *Rules*, like Lt. Waters in *Tears*, Creasy in *MF*, the grounded soldiers in *Black Hawk Down*, and at a different latitude and magnitude “the King” in *Mystic River*, all live by their own code of morality, truth and justice learned Rambo-like “in the jungle and in the desert,” i.e. “cool” street/in the trenches un-theorized knowledge with which the audience is positioned to identify against the imposed “intellectualized” knowledge that justifies the injustices of authority typically represented by bureaucratic characters. The traditional role of the renegade American hero is to suggest that the normalized laws and figures of authority represent a false, abstract and distanced “official” America that must be transcended and replaced by a real, practical and engaged “in the trenches (as in *Tears*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Rules*) or in the streets (as in *MF* and *Mystic River*)” America. The irony, of course, is that this positioning and identification with “the trenches/the streets” ends up, with its distancing affect, supporting and legitimating the aggressive and violent policies of “official” America, and alienating citizens from the democratic “trenches/streets” that might open up possibilities for the creation of a practical, peaceful, engaged and participatory democratic America. It is here that this “renegade” hero often drifts into the arena of reactionary authoritarian right-wing 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment obsessed politics that believes there are only two kinds of people in the world: those who deserve to be killed, and those who deserve to do the killing. The circle of those who deserve to be killed extends far beyond the Muslim world to include anyone who is on the wrong side of the “new” authority, for example Dave in *Mystic River* and the Mexicans in *MF*, a “new” authority they assume is representative of the “real” set of basic American values.

Persecuted renegade heroes such as Childers, Creasy, Waters, “the King,” *The Punisher*, soldiers in *Black Hawk Down*, *Dirty Harry* and *Rambo* feed into these right wing fantasies. The renegade, it is suggested, performs actions, Rambo-like, that the United States government and its authoritative and too officious representatives are either too corrupt, too

ignorant, too bound by the rule of law, too bureaucratic, too soft, too removed from actuality, or too incompetent to carry out. Therefore, as Richard Dyer specifies, the renegade “repeatedly upholds basic American values against the actuality of America,”<sup>473</sup> as represented by authority.<sup>474</sup> The basic value upheld by the renegade is really an institutional value assumed by US power: the “right” to carry out violence and aggression without being held accountable. By making this value present in the hands of the individual renegade and absent from “official” authority, these cinematic representations in turn build allegiance through the renegade to the absent institutions that the present renegades actually represent, service and serve.

Another consequence of the renegade hero trope is that it distances the audience from an understanding of how both history and institutional structures shape events. If audiences perceive the violent, renegade hero as the solution to political, social and historical dilemmas, the audience is deflected from an appreciation and cognizance of those dilemmas as components of a complex social and political history. The complexities are inscribed as part of a reductionist cinematic characterization thus undermining an understanding of the character and complexity of the collective social work that must be done to address the problems. This deflection therefore undermines attempts to make the political more pedagogical and thus subverts work to make the pedagogical more political. The effect is that the simplifying *presence* of the renegade means the *absence* of a complex understanding of social and institutional structures of power relations and the *absence* of insights into the complicated work of making the political more pedagogical in pursuit of critical collective interventions in reshaping social structures. The combination again serves the interest of those institutional structures of power that largely shape, dominate and benefit from the social, economic, military, political and cultural apparatus as currently designed.

In both *Rules of Engagement* and *Tears of the Sun*, and in less direct ways in *Man on Fire*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Mystic River*, the renegade hero (Samuel L. Jackson and Bruce Willis respectively) operates in what is presented as a moral universe separate from that of his superiors.<sup>475</sup>

In the former, the superiors are represented by the upper echelon of military and political power, as well as laws inscribed in books, in the latter by a distant superior officer following “rules of engagement” imposed from even higher authority in Washington. Creasy, in *Man on Fire*, operates in a moral universe seemingly of his own making, but reflective of his narrow life as a US Special Forces soldier. In short, he understands the “rule of force.” “The King,” in *Mystic River* operates outside of normal social codes by employing a “survival of the most ruthless” street code to protect his imperious standing as “King” of the neighborhood. The *Black Hawk Down* soldiers are dumped into the chaos of Mogadishu, largely unsupported by “officialdom,” and they respond accordingly by using whatever violence is necessary to protect fellow soldiers, survive and escape. The challenge to authority engaged by these renegade protagonists creates a narrative inscription that stimulates audience indulgences and identifications. In all the films, though in modified ways, the audience is directed to conclude that corrupt and inhumane figures of authority and institutions of power are the root cause of ethical violations and callous inhumanities.

In *Rules, Tears, and Black Hawk Down* it is “officialdom” that would have allowed the slaughter of US soldiers in order to protect some abstract set of “rules of engagement” or larger “national interest,” or “international relations,” and an implied anti-American set of international laws, that permitted the sully of the national image, and implicitly encouraged the undermining of the credibility of US power if not for the courage and audacity of renegade decisions. In that scenario it is easy for the audience to identify with the renegade hero/heroines and develop a sense of moral victory over an indifferent and distanced “official” authority— but at what cost? The implied moral victory in the end is a gross moral defeat as it not only seduces the audience to support violence, aggression and war crimes (perversely seen as morally and politically correct and militarily necessary), but it politically, socially and morally distances the audience from what is presented as the “untrustworthy” and “deceitful,” even anti-American, institutional structures that carry out the “real” crimes of war outside of cinema. The audience is educated to believe that the higher echelons

of authority basically wash their hands, Pilate-like, of the decision making process. It is a cruel and dangerous form of depoliticizing, de-moralizing and de-historicizing the audience. In effect, the audience is seduced, through an insidious form of de-politicization and social alienation, to support, tacitly or directly, the larger actions of state that are far more destructive than any one massacre, however horrific. In swearing allegiance to the soldiers the audience learns to swear allegiance to the violent structures of which the soldiers too are victims and thus intensifies its support for the culture of militarism.

In *Tears*, after undergoing a moral transformation, the renegade hero Lt. Waters refuses to comply with orders from his superiors after witnessing the result of a massacre at a Christian mission perpetrated by rapacious Nigerian neo-Nazi “law of the jungle” killers. He quickly comes to realize that the “official” orders will permit the genocidal slaughter to be continued against a group of Nigerian Christians he left behind in the jungle (on official orders). Without renegade Navy SEAL intervention they will be killed. After Waters witnesses, from the helicopter, the blood-drenched scene of the My-Lai like Muslim massacre of Christians, and the agonized and tortured countenance on Monica Belluci’s sweaty brow, he orders the helicopter to return to the site where they “ditched” the Nigerian Christians. The overly emotional rendering positions the audience inside the wracked heart of Waters and in the pocket of this “white man’s burden” scenario in which the helpless Nigerians can only be saved by the Christ-like heroic sacrifice of Waters and his small band of Navy SEALS who will lead the hopeless and helpless Nigerians through the dark hearted Nigerian jungle to safety in neighboring Cameroon. In this case, authority will not provide any support for Waters and his men while they attempt to rescue the several dozen Nigerian Christians from the rampaging and craven Nigerian Muslims who have already massacred many thousands of people, including white-faced priests and nuns as well as many dozens of Nigerians, at the Christian mission and hospital. Because the audience has witnessed the massacre, replete with a beheading of the mission’s priest, and knows that similar atrocities will follow for the people with whom we have

already identified, the shift in moral sensibility for Waters becomes a key tactic in compelling audience identification with the rebellious officer and his heaven sent heroic Christ-like humanitarian mission of rescue, resurrection and redemption. By correcting the immorality and inhumanity of his superiors Waters provides the audience with a military figure of superior morality and human decency with which to identify, and in the mean time works to both redeem recent US failures to intervene in Africa to stop genocidal slaughters in Rwanda and the Congo, and link military actions with humanitarian intervention. The film then provides an ameliorant to a callous policy of tacit support for genocide, and a feel-good lesson about US humanitarianism while failing to note the danger of this rewriting and recreating of history.

Because the only hope for salvation among the hunted Nigerian Christians, and their Christian king who is “resurrected” (thus opening the possibility to recreate his Empire) is the small group of self-sacrificing US Navy SEALs led by Waters, who literally drop from the heavens (aboard a helicopter) in order to bring an absented “God” back to Africa, we identify with and cheer for the success of the heroic saviors.<sup>476</sup> What is absent is a bitter reality of US interventionist forces historically: they do not generally bring salvation, but rather obliteration; they do not bring humanitarian aid but precipitate humanitarian catastrophes; they do not side with the victims but with the victimizers. That reality is absent and replaced by a presence that denotes a different “reality” in which US military might is used as a force for salvation and liberation in the name of “a new freedom,” in the words of the “resurrected” Nigerian “King” during the prolonged and maudlin tearjerker end of the film.<sup>477</sup>

In *Tears*, the US soldiers are courageous “good men” who against the will of Power (here represented as military and government authority) refuse to acquiesce in the face of evil, and do something in opposition to terror. They display a “willingness to sacrifice for liberty” and to prevent the triumph of evil. It is an especially powerful trope in a culture educated to believe that military heroism and militarized struggles for freedom are the pinnacle of human achievement (aside from



maximizing profits). Because the “face” of US intervention is the face of the US soldier, it compels audiences, in the same way it does in *Black Hawk Down*, to identify with the mission and heroic struggle of the soldier, and thus, in the end, support the policies and pursuits of the absent institutional power that remains secreted in the shadowy background.

While it is difficult to argue against any heroic mission that saves innocents from barbaric slaughter, the film cunningly maneuvers the audience identification with Waters into a cathartic celebration of highly destructive US air power.<sup>478</sup> When a wounded Waters, his few remaining crippled men and the remaining traumatized Nigerian Christians are facing sure extermination at the hands of the Muslim killers, US F/A-18 air power is called in at the very last second to incinerate (using illegal fuel-air bombs) hundreds of Nigerian Muslim troops, save the hampered hero, his few bloodied and barely conscious soldiers, and those fawning Nigerians he has worked so courageously and single-mindedly to save.<sup>479</sup> This presentation is, however, quite devious, for it again works to distance the audience from an understanding of the real and horrifying consequences of the use of US air power. It is true that US air power is employed in the film to protect US troops from sure elimination, and in the film’s case one might build an argument that it is justified<sup>480</sup> but what is typically the case is that US bombing kills civilians more than enemy soldiers.<sup>481</sup> In this film, the US rescues civilians from mass slaughter at the hands of the savage enemy, thus displacing responsibility for mass killing in the public mind onto the callous criminality of the evil Nigerians. The presence of such an abominably bloodthirsty enemy and the absence of civilians under US bombs leaves the audience free of any serious moral quandary surrounding US use of, in this case, mass murdering illegal fuel air bombs.<sup>482</sup>

In short, the “real” moral problems represented in the film, as in *MF*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Rules*, are the result of powdery politicians and officious by-the-book officers or police officials who are willing to do nothing in the face of a potentially triumphant dark evil out to kill innocents.<sup>483</sup> Again, there is a triple distancing impact: (1) the audience is de-moralized in that it

is distanced through identification with the “heroic” renegade protagonists from the larger institutions of US military power and the costs and consequences of its regular use; (2) the audience is coded into believing that US military force is employed in the form of salvation, rescue and freedom, i.e. it represents an example of the defeat of evil by good men who are willing to do something; (3) the audience is distanced from and made to be suspicious of one form of authority, “official,” but in the name of the authority of violence and killing.<sup>484</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

A critical examination of militarized and militarizing films in the US will work to reveal the dark underside of the codes that point back to the specialty and reality of US military policy over the years: destruction, and destruction born largely of a banality of evil in which decent people in fulfilling their institutional role, or manifesting socially compelled behaviors, behave like monsters. US military policy is destructive, often massively, not constructive (unless it is constructing military bases in foreign countries); offensive not defensive; self-aggrandizing not self-protecting; ignoble rather than the noble; undermining rather than beneficial (except for the few); and, it is the perpetration of military aggression not for reasons of military or homeland defensive necessity, but for the global pedagogical impact of teaching the world both to quake in its boots (as in the intended demonstration effect of the attack on Iraq),<sup>485</sup> and subjugate itself to US demands...or suffer the consequences. Furthermore, this creating of a global culture of fear and intimidation, mafia don style, is not unlinked from serving and servicing domestic and global US corporate economic interests: domestically to prop up the Pentagon based economic system, and internationally to protect US business investments and interests and provide access to cheap labor, resources and low environmental and worker rights standards. All of this is carried out “in accord with the U.S. elite's longstanding giving of primacy to military means, and the use of force in dealing with target states.”<sup>486</sup>

The filmic representations of necessity, construction, defense, nobility, benefits for us and self-protection operating within and through the individualization of military conflict that absences the historical and institutional projects and policies which plan, initiate and wage aggression, perform the role of creating in the audience another form of the assumption of representation. It is a form of the assumption of representation wherein we assume that what is represented on screen is both an accurate picture of the workings of the world and hence, workings in the world that represent what is best for us. It is accomplished through a long time pattern of the ways in which militarized cinema represents individuals much like ourselves with whom we can identify and “others” we can identify as a threat to our well-being; it represents an interest in self-benefit through national protection and preservation against a terrorizing “other;” and, it represents, through already conditioned codes of what the world “out there” is like, (i.e. a “good” us against a “evil” them), a reinforcement of the “reality” created by the world of visual, aural, linguistic and textual pedagogies in which we culturally and socially circulate. While these false codes assumedly represent the interests of the population, the latter categories of destruction, offense, self-aggrandizement, disreputability and aggression truly represent (in the short-term) the interests of those who influence, shape, largely determine and benefit from policy.

Individualized military violence not only avoids the real source of most US imposed violence and destruction it compels an identification with the perpetrator of the violence as both fellow citizen representing “us,” which in turn reinforces notions of nationalism and patriotism at the expense of international solidarity, and as fellow victim acting in self-defense or in defense of other helpless victims with whom we empathize and willingly support. Because the representations are carried on outside of historical or political understanding, and at the safe distance of cinematic representations that rarely call for, inspire or elicit public political action outside the cinema, the representations both de-moralize the encounter with violence and allow the violence to remain on a superficial level of engagement thus relieving it of forms of public pedagogy that might offer audiences opportunities

for engaging the violence across a more complex range of discourses and human behaviors, as well as political and historical struggles.

Without the context for taking up the violence and aggression morally, politically and historically they are often reduced to another repetition of the ritual of formulaic and celebratory violence that dominates most conflicts in US cinema, therefore reducing violence to a form of intemperate debauchery, moral manipulation, and masturbatory fantasy, and normalizing violence so that the choice of whether to support or resist institutional violence outside the frame of cinema is undermined or left in the darkness of the un-illuminated theatre. In the rare cases in which US air and naval military power and bombing capacity is represented, it is, like much of its representation on televised images of military aggression, spectacularized without any evidence of the human pain, misery, suffering and destruction that results from massive bombing attacks, though it does save “the good guys.” The effect of the absence of pain and suffering is to de-moralize the audience, and to also demoralize the audience. On the one hand the audience is distanced to the point of ignorance and thus is alienated from any capacity to act morally to stop atrocities of which they are unaware. On the other hand, in a world saturated by various forms of electronic media it is virtually impossible not to have some recognition and understanding of the consequences of US military aggression. When this is coupled with a simultaneous recognition and understanding of the vacuous and elite serving nature of the formal mechanisms of democratic expression in the US it is not much of a step to fall into political demoralization, hopelessness, retreatism and cynicism. It should also be noted that representations of real US military power and destructive capacities are often coded to conform with earlier representations of “US power to the rescue” demonstrations, for example, in “cowboy and Indian” movies in which the cavalry ride to the rescue just before a “slaughter of the innocent,” is perpetrated, of course, by the evil and savage “other.”

## **Celebratory and Revelatory Violence**

In the end, one might artificially reduce cinematic militarized aggression and violence into two categories: *celebratory* and *revelatory* violence. Celebratory cinematic violence is often spectacularized, decontextualized or mis-represented violence, lacking in political, ideological or historical explanatory power, and used to indoctrinate an audience to support violence and aggression beyond the screen. For example, it is used to direct audience support toward aggression carried out by and in the interest of US power, and thus is a distorting and distracting form of representational violence that both de-politicizes and de-moralizes audiences by distancing them from an intellectual and moral engagement with the planning, initiating and waging of aggression and crucially the brutal, traumatic and destructive risks, costs and consequences of those aggressive actions. In addition, *celebratory* violence, by celebrating nationalism, jingoism, patriotism and militarism, works to legitimate the “rule of force” over the “rule of law” in global affairs by “justifying” and even spiritualizing, the use of the ferocious and highly destructive military might of the United States (often by hiding it in individualized representations of military aggression and violence), even when it is used to perpetrate monstrous war crimes. It further legitimates US aggression by demonizing and barbarizing the incomprehensible “other,” especially “offensive” Muslims against whom we must defend ourselves through the incorporation of hyper-masculine, superman-like brutal hardness as expressed through the actions of celebrated and lionized individual soldiers.

In contrast, revelatory violence, as witnessed in many of the films directed by John Sayles and Ken Loach, is violence used in an attempt to uncover, examine, critique and illuminate violence and aggression in ways that allow audiences to take up the issue of violence multi-dimensionally so that the knowledge that is produced is able to be employed to move beyond simply an accumulation of celebratory violent images and into a moral, historical and political engagement with the cinematic representations. Engaging films as such aims to produce tools and skills for comparing

and contrasting violence on screen with violence in the world, for understanding and expressing audience capacities for empathy with the multiple dimensions of the victims experience of violence, and for developing plausible explanations as to why violence and aggression occur and how violence and aggression might be prevented. In turn, audiences can make the violence an exercise in developing meaning in order to produce critiques of the violence in order to work to transform their own understanding of cinematic violence as it relates to real material, moral and military matters in the world outside of cinema, and their own political and pedagogical commitments regarding work to stop aggression and violence, which in turn could lead to a development of new sets of facts, values, allegiances, identities and identifications linked to project toward a more peaceful and democratic social sphere.

For examples of “revelatory cinematic violence,” one can examine Sayles’ film *Men with Guns*, and Loach’s *Bread and Roses*. Along with their extensive catalog of other films, these films do not present violence first and foremost as “entertainment” in the traditional sense of amusement or distraction. Rather violence is taken-up reflectively, critically and dialectically so that the films work to involve the audience emotionally, intellectually and politically in a particular direction that challenges our normally situated views on violence, aggression, inequality, militarism and power and their impact on the human mind, body and spirit. In short, *Men with Guns* and *Bread and Roses*, by taking up different forms of violence, primarily military and social in the former and primarily economic and cultural in the latter, work to de-familiarize audiences with the glamorized, jingoized and glorified violence and wealth production, normally represented as everyday commodity and social commonality. Both films challenge our normalized relationship with cinematic and real violence and therefore involve us critically and pedagogically in the politics and morality of symbolic and material violence. In that sense, these films, as is the case in most films by Loach and Sayles, engage us in order to divert or redirect us from our culturally inculcated position of distance and innocence, and distract us from our often homogenizing diversions by involving us in a diverse

range of emotional and psychological complications that resonate in meaningful and unsettling ways to rupture our comfort with “the dominant ideologies that often justify or celebrate violence in [cinema] and real life.”<sup>487</sup>

Such films provide, or attempt to provide, audiences with tools, skills, knowledge and understanding applicable to the exercise of individual and social agency beyond the cinematic experience. *Men with Guns* and *Bread and Roses*, unlike most Hollywood productions, go beyond oppositional filmmaking into alternative filmmaking, by offering up not only critical insights into the complex conditions that give rise to violence, oppression and social alienation, the contradictions people confront in their everyday lives in both interpersonal and international relations, and the long-term horrors that accompany various forms of systemic violence, but also by presenting alternatives to structural violence, including alternatives such as communities of resistance in Guatemala in the former and janitorial service worker unions in Los Angeles in the latter, working in solidarity and support in the interest of social justice, peace and the well-being of the victims. Unlike the generally sutured presentation of violence as a form of social and political problem solving in Hollywood cinema, these independent films demonstrate clearly the undermining capacities of violence and aggression, and point to the difficult work, over the long-haul, necessary to create conditions more in line with human well-being.

These films thus attempt to forge a new and different, more empowering, critical relationship between: (1) film representation and audience reception by rupturing the standard conservative presentation of imposed violence as naturalized and inevitable, as something distanced from pain, suffering and struggle; (2) the revealing and complex array of racial, economic and political tensions at the root of various forms of violence and aggression and solutions to that violence and aggression; (3) cinema culture and moral self-consciousness by building identification not with the perpetrators of violence but with either the victims of the violence and their struggle, or with pained, roiled and critical observers of the aggression who themselves are developing critical consciousness; (4)

presentation and reality by offering up views into the harmful consequences of systematic violence in the lives of the victims and by crucially positioning audiences critically through locating them differently within the cinematic frame, i.e. a de-colonizing looking out from the perspective of the victim rather than a looking down upon the victim from the perspective of the victimizer as is the case in films such as *Rules of Engagement*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Mystic River*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Man on Fire* and the long history of Hollywood “war” films; (5) violence and non-violence and their individual and social consequences by scrutinizing both the structures and costs of violence in league with exploring the moral, political and human agency required to oppose those structures and achieve some degree of self-determination; (6) morality and politics by reflecting critically upon normalized behavior and belief, and patternized conduct and consciousness in the context of presenting opportunities for audiences to link themselves and think themselves with and through the victims and through and within an understanding of the broader social world in which audiences and others circulate; (7) individual atomization and collective organization by offering up opportunities for reflecting upon class, union and solidarity consciousness and the power of collective mobilization to confront injustice; (8) stultifying fate and liberating possibility by presenting violence not as an inexplicable end in itself but part of a larger comprehensible structure of economic, political, historical and social forces, not determined by biology or society, but a result of complex biological and social conditions that can be understood and changed; (9) critical pedagogy and common culture by: (a) offering up new experiences as well as reflections on those experiences as measured against previous cinematic and social knowledge; (b) examining the multiple contradictions that condition the relationships between power, authority, ideology, agency and cinematic representations; (c) moving beyond the simplifying and stultifying presentations of violence and aggression as pain-free for the victim and heightened pleasure for the perpetrator; and, (d) presenting film as something other than a form of alienating voyeuristic escape and stilted spectacle for the viewer; (e) pointing to the deadening impact of violence and aggression in peoples’



lives and how putting an end to those deadening conditions is a moral, political and intellectual duty before those conditions put an end to us.

## **CHAPTER 10: The End of Militarism or the End**

“Wars...remain the principal (but scarcely the only) challenge confronting humanity in the twenty-first century.”  
-- Gabriel Kolko<sup>488</sup>

“The only thing these sand niggers understand is force and I’m about to introduce them to it.”  
-- US 4<sup>th</sup> Division Senior Office in Iraq, 2004<sup>489</sup>

“...unless the United States is able to do some hard thinking about the world, it is not at all certain that the world will be around for that much longer.”  
-- Terry Eagleton<sup>490</sup>

### **Diagnostic and Oppositional Reading Review**

A critical pedagogical study of the long-term US culture of militarism, the films it generates, as well as the audiences both impact, requires that we pursue critical dialogues around militarized cinematic representations and discourses and their political and moral impact on the wider culture. Doing so requires attempts to converge on critiques that contextualize militarized film narratives, images and discourses within larger sets of economic, social, historical and political conditions and lessons, and their relations with popular struggles for information, knowledge, understanding, resistance, peace and democratic participation. The regular, narrowly focused and distorting patterns of present and absent images, facts, histories and discourses, across the history of Hollywood war cinema, call for opening films to critical interrogations rooted in the realities of history, alternative images, and oppositional narratives in order to bring to the surface visions of the harsh and dehumanizing impact of US militarism and aggression.

For example, films such as *Rules of Engagement*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Man on Fire*, *Mystic River* and *Black Hawk Down* screened publicly in mid-2006 cannot be distanced from the realities of the current US attack on and occupation of Iraq, replete with gruesome ground combat as occurred in Fallujah, ala *Black Hawk Down*, vile anti-Arab racism and the monstrous massacre of civilians as occurred in Haditha (and elsewhere), ala *Rules of Engagement*, the propaganda of liberation and humanitarianism, ala *Tears of the Sun*, torture as occurred in Abu Ghraib (and elsewhere) and

uncontrolled killing in the street, and the celebration of “kill counts,”<sup>491</sup> all over Iraq, ala *Man on Fire*, and the killing of the weak by the strong in order to protect “empire,” ala *Mystic River*. The goal of such interrogations is not to return to the screening room to become lost in cinema’s spectacle, or to develop new and more clever modes of deconstructing films, but to use cinema’s spectacle to arouse new cultural perspectives, elucidate and uncover hidden contexts within and beyond cinema, and empower political resistance mobilizations that assist citizens in coming to terms with their power as individual and collective social agents capable of both understanding the world outside of cinema and transforming it.

At the same time that these films, in different and similar ways, are designed to promote militarism and aggression, and a survival of the most ruthless mentality, they all contain an undercurrent of disruption of the main narratives that open up possibilities for engaging in critical readings that reveal an opposition to militarism and violence, and that challenge notions of noble and constructive US actions rooted in necessity, defense, and self-protection that benefit the innocent victims of violence carried out by US enemies. For example, in each of the films, the violence is so horrific and destructive that rather than leave the audience celebrating the glories and nobility of US military violence and aggression, it can leave the audience appalled by the brutal killing and traumatic sacrifice and questioning how any benefits might accrue, thus leading audiences to question the legitimacy of large scale applications of military violence and to consider alternatives. In each film, there is an attempt to guide the audience toward support for US militarism, but the characters themselves are typically misguided, bereft of options other than killing, and narrowly focused by the violent military culture in which they exist. The absence of other options raises questions about what could be present that would ameliorate the conditions that lead to aggression and violence in the first place. Each film contains seeds for resisting the primary ideological inculcations that are rooted in promoting necessary and defensive violence in order to construct noble new world orders in which we not only protect our way of life but bring its glorious benefits to

the globe. One of the goals of a critical film pedagogy is to nourish these seeds of dissent and resistance in public dialogue and discussion in order to open up new understandings of militarism and opposition to militarism.<sup>492</sup> (*See footnote for discussion*)

A critical film pedagogy will recognize that films alone are not the cause of militarism, dehumanizing of US victims, military aggression and the consequent human suffering, a long-term US commitment to the rule of force and increases in destructive weapons technology, but films are a contributing reflective and projective factor that work dialectically within the politics, economics, history and culture of militarism. One goal is to explain those cinematic contributions, rather than censor them, through opening up dialogues and discussions that link film productions to wider cultural productions outside of cinema in political, military and economic spheres. There is a complex interpenetration of causes of violence and military aggression, of which films are but one important cultural component. Critical analysis of film representations of and discourses about militarism and aggression should be encouraged but not at the expense of blaming films for the US culture of militarism.<sup>493</sup> Such a narrow focus avoids historical explanations and political understandings of how US militarism is linked to designs for global domination, control of resources, exploitation of labor, economic subsidies from the population to support corporate industry and profits, arrogant and hubristic assumptions about the US role in the world, wider public pedagogies, technological fetishes, and modes of domination that arise within hierarchical structures, etc.

A critical pedagogical contextualization of films within a wider political, historical, ideological and social critique must, however, guard against an over emphasis on political critique and a privileging of the negative components of militarized cinema at the expense of the possible philosophical and ethical riches to be gleaned by opening up films to “utopian” possibilities often present in contradictory impulses just beneath their corroded and carnage laced surface. The contradictory impulses offer possibilities for counter-readings against the dominant ideological push

of even very reactionary and war-mongering film discourses that are often as much an ideological imposition as they are an ideological response to more progressive tendencies in the culture. Such readings guard against a pedagogy of cynicism and keep open the possibilities for a pedagogy of hope.

For example, a spate of pro-military films could be reflective of moves toward greater militarism by dominant elite culture (i.e. the Pentagon, corporate, executive, congressional nexus); or, a reaction to growing discontent with and opposition to militarism in the general popular culture; or, a production based on cliché themes, characters, plots and narratives that have proven profitable in the past. An absence of militarized films could indicate an attempt by power to keep current military catastrophes out of the public mind; Hollywood's recognition of opposition to militarism in the broader culture; or, the result of low box-office receipts generated by recent military films, etc. One would not want to fall into the trap of offering singular and sutured explanations. Furthermore, present, if just beneath the surface, of virtually all Hollywood "war" films are indicators that open possibilities for learning and teaching contradictions around the categories of necessity, construction, defense, nobility, benefit and self-protection. The absence of real, satisfying and long-term resolutions amidst the typically enormous levels of death and demolition in "war" films suggests that military aggression is in fact highly destructive, potentially unnecessary even if measured only against our daily experience of resolving conflicts without resorting to aggressive actions, employed for offensive reasons given that the violence is always carried out elsewhere, ignoble because of the bloodshed and hubris with which it is imposed, self-destructive because of the damage to and suffering of the participants who are often seen symbolically as representing the nation, and negligibly beneficial because what is purportedly gained is frequently reduced to abstract and cinematically undefined and unexplored notions such as freedom, nobility, honor, glory, etc.

Critical film pedagogy will expose films to multiple readings that challenge and open-up cinematic presences and absences, the dehumanization of victims, the commitment to the rule of

force, notions of US weakness and the requisite calls for greater military technology for self-defense, and the individualization of what is really structural and systemic commitments to militarism and aggression. For example, films such as *Man on Fire*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Rules of Engagement*, along with many of the militarized films produced across Hollywood's long history of "war" film production, can be read on one level as blatant demonizing discourses and racist representations that produce jingoist attitudes because of their varied celebrations of mass murder, dehumanization of victims, and glorifications of the warrior spirit. At another level, *Tears*, *MF*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Rules* can be seen as profit producing machines that were all #1 films at the box office, from which one could conclude there will be others such films produced in the near future. Finally, and important for a pedagogy of hope, each film often elicits commentaries from students that suggest they may also be functioning along the lines of morality tales.

One might observe a tendency in each film to intimate public warnings regarding how much we are out of control as a culture swimming in, glorifying and glamorizing violence, aggression, brutality and torture, along with revelations about the dehumanizing human tragedy of military violence in which innocent people often pay a brutal and painful price. The films can produce valuable, if not vehement, discussions around issues of militarism, racism, masculinity, war crimes, rules of engagement, representation, aesthetics and aggression. While each film's narratives and images suggest, along often reproduced lines, a world of evil, bloodthirsty and predatory others bent on our destruction, a diagnostic critique suggests a violent and aggressive US culture out of control in terms of its willingness to aggressively employ violence against often innocent people, or people struggling to stay alive under extremely harsh and oppressive conditions.

Students will ask about *Rules*, "But why were people protesting outside a US embassy in the Middle-East, isn't it their country? What did we do to make them so angry? Why are we killing them in their country?" Here the absences in the film narrative provoke in students questions that will assist them in placing not only the film in historical context, but US relations in the Middle East

in historical contexts. Regarding *Man on Fire*, someone will offer, “If I was that poor I might be kidnapping people for ransom too!” Or, “Killing all of those people doesn’t change the conditions that are producing the need to kidnap for ransom, does it?”

Again, absences in the film narrative provoke political and moral questions that may undermine the ideological intentions of the film and lead students to not only gain a deeper understanding of how films work as pedagogical vehicles, but to ask about social conditions in the world and their historical underpinnings that open up new forms of knowledge and understanding about relations between nations, cultures, classes, ethnic groups, etc.

In terms of *Tears of the Sun*, students might say, “All the killing is about oil!” or “If the F16s could obliterate the enemy so easily, why did they wait so long to call them in?” To which someone will respond, “What are US jets doing bombing people in Africa?” Or someone else will say, perhaps a former soldier, “Soldiers are just fodder anyway.” Again, the apparent ideological intentions are often undermined by counter-readings that open up larger questions about international relations, the validity or invalidity of military violence, the necessity of aggression, the nobility or ignobility of killing people, the constructive versus the destructive impact of military actions, the relationship between resources and militarism, and the impact of the hierarchical structures of the military where soldiers are seen as expendable, a position that opens up discussions on the morality of sacrificing individuals in order to protect what is called “the national interest.”

Regarding *Black Hawk Down*, a student will ask, “Do we have the right to kidnap people in their own country?” or “Why were we in Somalia; the film doesn’t really make it clear?” Or, “The soldiers were hung out to dry.” Or, “If foreign soldiers landed in the middle of one of our large cities you can bet there would be forces to fight back. These people were just fighting back.” These questions point to reasons why the violence is portrayed as necessary, when in fact it is not, and lead people to question “who really benefits from so much violence?” Again, the pro-military rewriting of history present in the film, leaves open many possibilities for a counter-reading that provokes

questions about the larger political, social and economic issues surrounding US military aggression, about international law, about the abuse of soldiers by the military and government hierarchy, about the right of defense, and about how what is shown as necessary “defense” is really, all too often, unnecessary, “offense,” etc.

These films, and countless others, reveal how few political and moral constraints there are in the dominant culture (as opposed to popular culture responses) on the application of US violence and thus suggest that elite US society at large is failing morally and politically in terms of providing an understanding of the human and environmental costs, risks and consequences of promoting so much militarism and unrestrained violence. These films, and numerous others across the history of US militarized film productions, also reveal that as a culture we spend a lot of time studying and celebrating militarism, but very little time studying alternatives that might celebrate a socially just peace.

Many US “war” films in various genres, including *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, *Taxi Driver*, *Rambo*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Dirty Harry*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Rules of Engagement*, *Mystic River*, *Man on Fire*, etc., also show “heroes” who are lone figures, lost souls, largely lacking in community support, struggling to find an alternative identity outside of their violent selves, lacking in love, decency and companionship, lacking in moral guidance, and seemingly blind to the physical, emotional and psychological consequences of their destructive actions in the lives of others. Again, against the grain of each film, there is an undertone of a morality tale. The films thus suggest a culture lacking in enriching and enlivening cooperative public spaces, including the formal educational arena, in which citizens can find opportunities to develop our multiple individualities within networks of political and moral solidarity, friendship, creative support, and build a sense of agency and empowerment not rooted in domination, destruction and violence. So, one revelation provided by militarized films is that we have created tragic conditions that generate the films in the



first place, conditions that must be challenged in order to overcome the tragedy. In that recognition are the seeds of a pedagogy of hope.

What a critical film pedagogy reveals then is that beyond ideological and political analysis and criticism of cinema, culture, and the stark hegemonic structures out of which films arise, there are opportunities present for differential and diacritical engagements that supply wider explanatory insights into the complex dialectical relationships at work between power and popular culture, entrenchment and transformation, and cinematic and cultural projections and receptions. In other words, against the hegemonic projections of Hollywood cinema bent on inculcating power friendly and policy supportive attitudes and beliefs into material and ideological public space, a critical film pedagogy will engage in political and ideological critiques of power to expose power's dreadful political, social and historical injustices and systemic nature. Additionally, it will engage in counter readings to both explore the combinatorial links between politics, culture, militarism and ideology and reveal alternative and oppositional possibilities that disrupt and undermine hegemonic, foreboding and reactionary positions in order to combat and escape from the destructive and oppressive powers of militarism with the goal of opening new, and expanding old, options for struggling toward a realizable socially just peace and a solidaristic internationalism.

### **“Stark, dreadful, inescapable” - Why study “war” films and the culture of militarism?**

*“...there is something constitutionally aggressive and brutally expansionist about the US domestic and foreign policies, rooted in fact in the economic underpinnings of its political culture.”*

-- Hamid Dabashi<sup>494</sup>

If “theory” simply means using our collective reflecting and reasoning skills to think hard and grasp, intellectually and emotionally, what is happening in the world, along with engaging in “a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions,”<sup>495</sup> and we “theorize” with any degree of engaged accuracy about the current state of the world and “our assumptions” it is difficult to paint pictures of the future that are anything less than gloomy for most, if not all, of humanity. A look at the daily headlines from around the world, rife with war, aggression, terror, militarism and vast

human pain and suffering, is usually enough to give one pause, if not incite one's outrage and indignation. Violence, terror and aggression driven by, in response to or funded by the US culture of militarism, accompanied by the US commitment to developing and using new generations of weapons of mass destruction, and the inflated US willingness to "demolish constraints on the...employment of American power,"<sup>496</sup> by exercising violence and imposing the Powell Doctrine rule of overwhelming force, may be the most ominous and immediate threat we face.<sup>497</sup> It is a threat we should take up pedagogically in as many ways as possible if we hope to limit the vast human pain and suffering that accompanies military aggression and if we wish to survive.

A culture that refuses to pursue historical and political explanations for terrorism, aggression and war, a culture that refuses to question its place in the world and how it projects itself and is received in the world, promises to remain a culture that perpetrates aggression and is victimized by terrorism. Given the preponderance of US power in the world, especially military power (coupled with a collapsing global economy)<sup>498</sup>, the decisions about war, aggression, law and peace made in Washington will largely condition not only the parameters of the violent militarization of the world in the present and near future, with its concomitant misery and suffering, but also the fate of large portions of the world's people. Our cultural refusal, in popular cinema and elsewhere, to "do some hard thinking" about "the principal challenge" of military aggression, bloated Pentagon expenditures, increasing distribution of highly destructive weapons around the world,<sup>499</sup> the US blind commitment to the rule of force in the world, our continued permissiveness in the face of growing militarization, the ease with which we support or simply look the other way in the face of an expanding culture of militarism and its concomitant brutality and destruction, our tendency to disappear militarism as a subject of cultural study, representation or social recognition,<sup>500</sup> our failure to become disillusioned with war and instead to become intoxicated by it through media spectacles, our refusal to hold up the moral mirror to ourselves and admit and condemn what we do to others, the ease with which we allow ourselves to maintain and pursue a global domination project and to

intervene, unilaterally, anytime and anywhere US power and the Pentagon believe it is necessary, all suggest a sickly and arrogant obsession with our own power and a deluded national psyche and patriotic narrative that are still convinced that military might can somehow bring peace, protection and political stability to ourselves and the world. History teaches that it cannot, a vital lesson historical beings should be teaching and learning across cultural pedagogical spaces.

Given the urgency of the situation, the gravity of the issues, the number of lives at stake (all?), the exponential increase in the destructive capacity of weapons along with the ease of access to those weapons (thanks in large part to the US as the main producer and purveyor of weapons), a sober assessment suggests we haven't the time "to wait for US attitudes and its political process [and institutions] to be transformed."<sup>501</sup>

This assessment adds to the gloomy nature of the situation. Given that: the US is at the heart of the problem; its cinematic and other cultural productions continue to reinforce the public attitudes, opinions and beliefs that allow the military machine to continue and proliferate; US militarism and counter-current peace with social justice studies are largely absent from our formal education as subjects of critical reflection; and, it appears that the only force on the planet capable of seriously and non-violently confronting and transforming US policies and structures is the domestic population, we face a serious dilemma and challenge. We should question not only from where the "hard thinking" will come, but also from where the "hard action" will come, and how the hard action and hard thinking, linked to an emancipatory melding of facts and values, can be introduced on a wide scale, sooner rather than later. Because of film's ubiquity, it appears to be a vital tool in taking up the dilemma and challenge. Will it be possible, before it is too late, to create cinematic and other public educational projects around a practical pedagogy that links thought and action, facts (the way things are) and values (the way things ought to be), in forms of emancipatory knowledge that might liberate us from our culture of militarism and save us from coming catastrophes? Surely it is possible, but whether or not it is probable is another issue, and that too is a matter for serious

contemplation. Time is short and the energies necessary for such an enormous project are often redirected elsewhere, often by the very mechanisms that might contribute the most to an emancipatory project, in the one country where such projects are needed most, the US.

There appears to be a correlation between the amount of resources available to engage in aggressive military calamities, the tendency to repeat those tragedies (often with consequences even more grave), the pervasiveness of catapulted propaganda, the failure to “think hard about” those disasters, the refusal to act in opposition to the aggression, and the failure to learn from the cataclysms. The correlation is foreboding and dangerous. Wars and violence, small and large scale, are probably more likely today than at any time in history, especially given the lack of restraint on US power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given that likelihood, there is a greater necessity for oppositional and alternative presentations on militarism and the possibilities for peaceful existence. Furthermore, wars are almost surely more dangerous because of the proliferation of various means of mass destruction,<sup>502</sup> including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, around the globe, exacerbated by both the arrogance and belligerence of the current US administration and, within an increasingly depoliticized, mis-educated, distracted and dehistoricized US population, the apparent failure of sustained resistance and popular mobilizations to confront US power domestically. The complexity of military, economic, political and environmental threats and challenges have never been more profound, and, as always, they remain unpredictable. The unpredictability is both a source of hope and despair: it is hopeful in that the future is there to be created, amidst the unpredictability; and, desperate because the future develops on the materials of the past. But worse, perhaps, solutions continue largely unattended, as the United States remains mired in the hopeless double-trap of power without wisdom and hubris without sapience. Its cultural pedagogical mechanisms are too often reproductive rather than transformative. This trap, particularly as conditioned by the history of militarized cinema, too often allows the US populace to see the slaughterhouse of military violence as: an opportunity rather than a tragedy; a mistake rather than

policy; the spreading of democracy rather than the pursuit of vainglorious self-interest; an opening in the present rather than a closing of the future; a humbling of designated enemies rather than their humiliation that promises reaction because humiliation erases fear;<sup>503</sup> protection against terror rather than a proliferation of terror; legitimate vengeance rather than illegitimate aggression; self-promotion rather than self-delusion; an exercise in control rather than conceit; the innocent killing the guilty rather than the guilty killing more innocents; profitable rather than deplorable; heroic rather than cowardly; and, an exercise in maintaining our credibility rather than an exercise in sustaining and exacerbating their indignation.

A massive public pedagogical campaign is required using whatever tools we have at our disposal, including films, books, lectures, demonstrations, study groups, seminar rooms, classrooms, street theatre, strikes, fasts, civil disobedience, and non-violent resistance in the spirit of revolutionary pacifism that recognizes that “in a world built on violence one must be a revolutionary before one is a pacifist,”<sup>504</sup> etc., that addresses these many delusions, that teaches non-conformity, not only as a virtue, but as a necessity for human preservation, and that reveals the public impression of unanimity as the falsehood it is so that people can cherish the opportunity of collective resistance. All of this will require critical public pedagogies carried forth inside and outside of formal education if we hope to overcome these dilemmas. If we continue to reproduce this kind of present, based in militarism, hubris and aggression, we will continue to exacerbate the possibilities of erasing the future for all, as we have already done, and continue to do, for so many millions of people on a global scale.

Furthermore, the United States refuses to acknowledge the grave limitations of its military power and technology, refuses to dismiss “credibility”<sup>505</sup> as a driving force behind its planning and policies, refuses to recognize, after 60 years of regular interventions, that its military follies, national arrogance, imposed political disasters, its position as the leading producer and purveyor of weaponry, and its dismissals of international laws and covenants, not only have led to intensified

outrage and hatred in the streets around the world, but has generated a plethora of committed enemies who are prepared and willing to mobilize their enmity to wreak vengeful destruction on US shores.<sup>506</sup> These realities are vitally present in the world, but crucially absent from Hollywood cinema.

### **Another Century of War?**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the bloodiest century in human history, with war, aggression and terror killing upwards of 100 million people. Its destructiveness, trauma and brutality unconscionably coincided with a near century of Hollywood “war” film productions that glorified and celebrated war while all too often hiding war’s concomitant human tragedies. Gabriel Kolko’s question, from his 2002 book title, “Another Century of War?” a follow-up to his previous tome “A Century of War,” carries with it a five-fold meaning relevant within the US culture of militarism: one is descriptive, three are alluded to in the question mark, distinguished by emphasis, (Another century of war; Another century of war; Another century of war?), and one is normative. For example: (1) continuing the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s proclivity for “war,” the 21<sup>st</sup> century has begun with military aggression, an increase in state and non-state terrorism, an exacerbated spread of weapons on a global scale, and the threats of mass annihilation that haunted much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of these threats are now more widespread and foreboding than ever; (2) the question mark (with an emphasis on the word “century”) points to the likelihood that we will not survive another century of war, so the question mark asks “if war continues, how far into the century will we survive?;” (3) Also contained in the question mark, with an emphasis on the word “Another,” is the outraged exclamation, “How, knowing what we know about the plagues of terror and horror that accompany war, along with the physically exhausting and politically precarious calamities, can we allow another century to be born into, and continue in, war?; (4) When the question mark emphasizes the word “war,” it merely points to a feeling of exhaustion, malaise and absurdity that has a tendency to produce a fatalism and finishedness that has an inclination to produce cynicism and hopelessness

that virtually ensures the worst; (5) the hopeful version of the question, “Another century of war?” sets up an answer, a rhetorical “yes, it will be another century of war, as long as it lasts” unless all nations, and especially the US, abandon war and aggression as an instrument of foreign engagement, domestic organization, and cultural acceptance and do so not only because it is morally and politically the correct option, but because the deadly and depraved nature of war threatens to destroy our social institutions along with human life itself.

Because of the way we have organized ourselves within a culture of militarism that has militarized the society and much of the world, we now confront a choice that is “stark, dreadful and inescapable: shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?”<sup>507</sup> Needless to say, we have not renounced war, culturally we continue to celebrate war, not least through Hollywood cinema, US power assumes the right to carry out aggression without constraints, to provide weapons to other states engaged in illegal aggression and massive human rights abuses, and we are creating cultural, economic, pedagogical and political conditions that make catastrophic war more likely. The growing US culture of militarism is reflected in the US spending more than the rest of the world combined on its military machine, in US arms sales to the rest of the world accounting for nearly 60% of the total, and, as Reuven Pedatzur notes, in the US being “willing [as the] single, ruthless superpower [intent on shaping] the world according to its own forceful world view, [to employ] nuclear weapons [as an] instrument for waging wars, even against enemies that do not possess nuclear arms,”<sup>508</sup> and in the inability or refusal of dominant public educational institutions (elite media in particular) to honestly address, confront and challenge US militarism by providing the public with accurate analysis and information.

One crucial and pressing reason for working to critique, understand and transform the US culture of militarism, whether through critical discussions generated by film analysis, foreign and domestic policy analysis, or any other means we can imagine, is the major US responsibility “for the persistence—and enhancement—of severe threats to our endangered species,” witnessed again in the

US intention to eliminate the “nuclear brakes” from the [nuclear] Non-Proliferation Treaty leading “to the transformation of the nuclear bomb into a legitimate weapon for waging war.”<sup>509</sup>

The question that remains a specter haunting humanity is one that should drive multiple critiques of and pedagogical engagements against the US culture of militarism in all of its forms, inside and outside of cinema, to paraphrase Bertrand Russell: “Will we abolish militarism and war before militarism and war abolish us?”

### **Educated Hope Beyond Cinema**

While understanding the complex relationships between the culture of militarism, films, audiences, and the deployment of militarized ideologies through cinema requires careful and critical reflection and dialogue on modes of representation, controls over production and distribution, various forms of reception, appropriation and consumption, the facts of history, the construction of identities, agency and beliefs, and the re-enchantment of our humanity, we should not allow an obsession with complexities to stand in the way of two simple points too often absent in militarized films and reporting on military aggression: (1) military aggression brutalizes, traumatizes and destroys human lives with long-term physical, emotional and psychological consequences that in the current period promise forms of blowback against empire that will result in further major human catastrophes; (2) historically, the only “secret” that has been revealed in terms of challenging power is the need to create educated and organized popular resistance movements along with oppositional and alternative public institutions in which the educated and organized populace can develop means for challenging and overcoming the structures and injustices of power. These two points, simple as they may be, call for commitments to the challenging work of understanding the social, historical and political complexities surrounding militarism and aggression in order to ensure that we develop sound and feasible actions capable of abolishing simpler point (1) through the kind of work alluded to in simple point (2). While cinema is a powerful force that produces and distributes social meanings, creates identities and understanding, directs allegiances and aspirations across a wide-



spectrum of culture, film as a form of public pedagogy is limited in its capacity to mobilize resistance movements, partially because of the passive nature of film viewing and partially because film currently operates in a culture in which even if films produce disgust, anger and indignation around militarism, there are few public spaces and political mechanisms for an aroused public to both express that anger and act on it in meaningful and effective political ways. Hence, films must be combined with other work that actively uses film to stimulate dialogue, inspire discussion, encourage agency, motivate actions and empower movements capable of more engaged political and social resistance and transformation. The engagement and resistance should always pursue the goal of creating public spaces and political mechanisms for popular expression, as well as meaningful and effective citizen agency.

The ways in which social meanings are produced, distributed and engaged are crucial to the ways in which social action emerges in practice. Hence, there is the need for a linking of the two, both in terms of understanding meanings and in terms of solidaristic actions. Herein, we have examined various sets of social and political meanings produced and distributed through militarized cinema, narrowly and widely, that circumscribe our understanding of the causes, agents and effects of US militarism and aggression and thus shut-down resistance to US power. In brief, audiences are cinematically directed to support and glorify US militarism and aggression by developing assumptions around what is presented as the noble and constructive intentions of US military engagements. Additionally, the use of US military force is represented as necessary for the defense and protection of both innocent victims of harrowing violence perpetrated by demonic enemies and of our own self-interests often symbolized by US soldiers, outnumbered, under fire. The primary benefit is portrayed as the spread of freedom and the completion of a mission rooted in humanitarian concerns, along with the reinvigoration of national honor, a warrior spirit and superiority. Given those assumptions it is not surprising that “social action” against US militarism is often limited in terms of sustained critiques and mobilizations. What is missing from these constructed and

constricted assumptions is the reality of US aggression in terms of civilian victims and their short and long-term suffering, the political and historical complexities that lead to international conflicts and the leading US role in perpetrating terror across the globe. Also absent are possibilities for negotiated and diplomatic settlements to disputes, the overwhelming US force advantage, and the long-term US commitment to the rule of force in global affairs. Furthermore, any attempt to humanize US victims (a practice that would make it much more difficult to exterminate people) is disappeared. A distribution of social meaning rooted in these realities, rather than lost in myth, could elicit social actions and political practices of a different order and magnitude dedicated to cultural and institutional transformations in the pursuit of overcoming the horrors of militarism.

Stuart Hall suggests that “cultural change is constitutive of political change and moral awareness of human consciousness,” which is true, but cultural change without the institutional structural changes to accompany the cultural change, leaves us with a culture of intellectual content without forms through which to express itself. In short, if democracy is at the root of any struggle against concentrated power, we should observe that democratic ideas without the mechanisms for their public expression in active transformation of structures leaves us disempowered in a way similar to having democratic mechanisms emptied of substantive content in terms of public commitments to and understanding of democratic citizenship. A public that understands democracy but lacks the structures to act on that understanding can easily become frustrated and cynical. Democratic social structures lacking a democratically vibrant, informed, involved, inspired and included public can easily become authoritarian social structures, as witnessed in the present period. In both cases, the public is disempowered.

What is required, of course, is both an informed, involved and included public able to operate vibrantly within substantive democratic social structures, at the political, cultural and economic levels. It is difficult to imagine a demilitarized culture operating within a militarized political and economic order; and, it is difficult to imagine a demilitarized political and economic order, operating

within a militarized culture. The ideologies feed the materialities and the materialities feed the ideologies. This points to the need to understand the work of critical pedagogy, whether rooted in cinema or other forms of public education, as both ideological and material: ideological in the sense of creating ideas and content, material in the sense of creating institutions and forms; material and ideological in the sense of using current institutional structures across culture as social sites for critical pedagogical engagement of ideas; ideological and material in terms of using alternative ideological forms across culture as intellectual sites of critique geared toward the production of alternative institutional bodies. In other words, critical pedagogy must be seen as a force not only inside formal education structures, but also outside, with a fundamental goal of linking ideological transformation with material structural transformation.

The pedagogical work inside formal education structures, at all levels, and across curriculums, should be structured to redesign the ideological and material conditions outside formal education, for example, away from a militarized economic and political order and an ideologically militarized culture; and, the pedagogical work outside formal education structures should be designed to both change the formal education ideologies and material pursuits, while at the same time reflecting on the relationship between ideologies and structures outside of education and inside of education, with the goal of transforming both. To reduce it to a slogan relevant to the current topic, we should, given the gravity of the threats, “Teach Peace, [and] Study War No More,” at pedagogical sites across the culture, whether through cinema, music, theatre, art, science, math, poetry, economics, politics, history, architecture, transportation, communications, ecology, agriculture, religion, television, radio, chemistry, internet, health, etc. In each of these subjects, and in the crossing of subjects, such a project could reveal the necessary and constructive nature of socially just peace, uncover its self-protective and socially beneficial properties, and explode the ignoble myth of “defense spending,” in the US. Such projects could open up the possibility of more

noble pursuits rooted in an understanding of how our moral responsibility is linked to not only what we do but what we don't do that we could do, to both what we commit and what we omit.

A peace pedagogy must be seen “as part of a broader public politics,”<sup>510</sup> and a broader understanding of how learning occurs across cultural sites, institutional structures and emerging technologies. What a critical public pedagogy of the culture of militarism will require are moves beyond simply classroom or journal analysis of militarized cinematic texts that work to understand: (1) how militarized films and a culture of militarism are projected and received; (2) how they produce knowledge and shape culture; and, (3) how the analytical work examining them might be used across subject areas at all levels of education to counter militarism's projections and receptions in order to produce both oppositional and alternative knowledge and culture. Such projects are important for “rethinking the relations of power in schooling,”<sup>511</sup> and the power relations between schooling and popular cultural texts. Another goal, however, is to find ways to explore how to critique and understand the politics and pedagogical operations of the culture of militarism and its popular cultural manifestations, including film, in order to ensure that it becomes a social structure and cultural object of broader pedagogical analysis, critique and transformation both inside and outside of classroom spaces. A pedagogy of critique of the horrors of militarism should not bury a pedagogy of hope rooted in the possibilities for, and human benefits of, a socially just peace.

Because of the pervasive threats a US culture of militarism creates in the world, the increasing misery and despair it produces, the threats to human survival and the inauspicious future it projects, and its ability to infest greater portions of culture, its study and critique should play an increasingly important role among educators and cultural workers in terms of examining carefully the direction of education, the purpose of schooling, and the way dominant social forces impact the structures and ideologies of education as they are related to the growing culture of militarism. Because militarism is a lived experience in the lives of the US public, as well as in the lives of billions of people around the world both ideologically and materially (ideologically with the advent

of global media, and materially with the spread of US military bases, weapons and interventions around the world), and because militarism is a pervasive discourse in the lives of students and teachers, as it is a critical component of US history for at least the last 100 years, a critical pedagogy of militarism would call on education theorists to address ways in which to incorporate the study and critique of militarism across educational sites in US society. If a critical component of critical pedagogy is to link knowledge to political commitments, and learning to radical social change, and one of the primary threats to society is US militarism, it seems that one of the key social changes and pedagogical commitments that teaching and learning should address is the critique, de-glorification and abolition of the US culture of militarism. Critically engaging Hollywood “war” films, because of their cultural pervasiveness and impact, offers a vital tool for opening and sustaining the critique.

As noted, militarized pedagogy takes places across a wide array of cultural sites and social formations, from movie theatres to living rooms, from churches to malls, from sports arenas to concert halls, from the internet to the video game, etc. This provides the possibility for “educated hope,”<sup>512</sup> but also educated despair. In brief, peace is possible, because militarism does not suture our hopes and options, but so is nuclear catastrophe.<sup>513</sup> Hope is partially attributed to our capacity to recognize all of these sites as pedagogical opportunities for public engagement, critique, dialogue and social transformation. Crucial to hope or despair is the ideological and material control of the sites of public education such as cinema and how they produce models of human interaction and understanding. Raymond Williams, among others, has pointed to the problem that the education of the public, in its broader sense, “on the whole [is] being met...by an integration of...the priorities and interests of capitalist [and militarist] society...which necessarily retains as its central principle...the idea of a few governing, communicating with and teaching the many.” A larger critical public pedagogy whether rooted in cinema studies or culture of militarism studies will require educators and citizens, in the interest of a democratized and peaceful public and society, to work cooperatively to understand, critique, challenge and overcome the culture of militarism and the

capitalist priorities and interests it serves and services, that in combination produce a value system inconsistent with democratic participation, social justice and peace, as they permeate more and more corners of public space in the pursuit of protecting private power over public and societal interests.

Hope will be produced when, in opposition to what Williams' describes, we work as educators and citizens, to "on the whole [meet]...by an integration of...the priorities and interests of public well being and happiness...which will necessarily retain as its central principle...the idea of public democratic control of governance, communication and teaching the public." Working toward such a goal will require critical discourses against militarism and capitalism, an exposure of the facts of militarism and capitalism, and a challenge to the values they both inculcate, but also critical interventions that produce alternative public spheres, modes of representation based in social justice and peace, other facts and other values, and affective and aesthetic engagements that move beyond critiques of the present order and into new ideological directions and material formations that refuse and negate the "priorities and interests" of militarism and capitalism.

There is currently an increasing subordination of public goods and resources to feed the US culture of militarism. The negative material consequences in people's lives continue to expand. Thus, there are proliferating options for educators and citizens to create oppositional political formations to stir up greater public participation in challenging the culture of militarism and its limited priorities and narrow interests. One public pedagogical mode of challenge has been a burgeoning critical documentary film industry, largely awakened by Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11," and followed by scores of films that examine and expose the US culture of militarism, including "Why We Fight," "Sir, No Sir," "Weapons of Mass Deception," "Hijacking Catastrophe," "The Fourth World War," "Breaking the Silence," "Occupation 101," "Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land," "Invention Intervention," "Fallujah," "The US vs. John Lennon," with its "War is Over...if you want it" public relations campaign, the re-release of both "Winter Soldier," and "Hearts and Minds," and numerous others. These films are often screened as part of local anti-war

group meetings and are used to generate wider public interest in peace and social justice activities, as well as public dialogues and discussions around US aggression and the culture of militarism in general. Their use should be extended into other public education spaces, including classrooms at all levels, public television, local access television, web broadcasts, church meetings, union halls, in short, anywhere the public gathers. Such films can generate new thinking that leads to new action. The options for new forms of social engagements and responsibility will, in turn, develop new modes of individual and social agency, now crushed by the anti-public militarized and capitalized culture, and new sets of questions for the role the public might play in working against militarism and in the interest of both peace and the public.

A growing public anger over the negative social effects of militarism, from spying, to lying, to emptying public coffers, to loss of employment, to high fuel prices, to torture, mass killing and destruction, to the recognition of increasing disgust directed against the US in the world and the related threats of blowback, to new terrorism threats, often revealed through the circuit of counter-films, all offer opportunities to share alternative facts, produce new values, link new knowledge gained from new experience to new social practices that organize public outrage toward justice, affirm the possibility for alternatives forms of agency, and redistribute public resources to meet the interests and priorities of the public.<sup>514</sup> This suggests that a public education against militarism must be expanded through public intellectual work at all levels of culture, including the critical analysis of militarized Hollywood films that circulate more widely through the culture than documentaries, and the social production of not only films critical of militarism but films that provide tools, skills, knowledge and understanding of what is necessary to overcome militarism and build a more peaceful and socially just society. The work should be geared toward making clear the tensions that roil between public interest and “national interest,” public institutions and private structures, and international solidarity and international military aggression, while carefully and unremittingly

working to increase the possibilities for realizing peace, social justice and public democracy within and against a society and culture dominated by militarism.

Williams points to the hegemonic control of information culture and also suggests that the relationship the public maintains with power is always a pedagogical relationship in which the many are subjected to the interests and priorities of the few. However, the public is also the subject of those interests and priorities and that points to how power is also subject to the power of the public, an insight crucial to the development of a pedagogy of hope working to open up democratic and peaceful public spheres. In short, if power relies upon the consent, labor and support of the people, and uses that consent, labor and support to maintain its economic, military and political power over the people, then the removal of the public's consent, labor and support collapses power. Prior to and in line with the removal of public consent, labor and support, necessary are widespread pedagogical programs of critical thinking directed toward the creation of a radical sense of democracy, notions of participatory citizenship, invigorated forms of individual and collective agency, and alternative social, political and economic structures based in social justice, peace and public well being.

Because of the ominous threats to democracy and the social order militarism poses, a critical pedagogy opposed to militarism will ask what is required to think deeply about, and act with commitment toward, altering political arrangements and engendering popular empowerment rooted in the idea that the public needs “to reclaim the meaning and purpose [of public pedagogy] as an ethical and political response” to the culture of militarism and its attacks on peace and “democratic public life.”<sup>515</sup> It will recognize the political role of pedagogy and the pedagogical role of politics in extending capacities for resources, information, knowledge, understanding, support, skills, solidarity and rights through which individuals and the collective become empowered agents participating meaningfully and effectively in shaping decisions and conditions that inform and shape their lives.

Tethering notions of education and empowerment to challenges to the culture of militarism raises critical questions at the root of any engaged public struggle toward a socially just peace. For



example, in terms of producing alternative understandings of history, society, identity, allegiance, and vision how, in order to work against it, do we get outside of the culture of militarism's powerful pedagogical grasp while living inside it? In other words, how do we come to understand, appreciate and commit to that which is excluded by a culture of militarism, for example, peaceful options to conflict resolution on an international scale, publicly oriented democratic politics on a domestic scale, or a social order based not in domination and hierarchy but in cooperation and solidarity? If our only experience of resolving conflicts is violence, how can we take that experience to produce new knowledge based in critical reflections on that experience? If militarism positions us with particular identities and identifications shaped by narrow understandings of history, politics and possibilities how do we use pedagogy to locate disruptive possibilities that will fracture the narrowness and open it to alternative perspectives on history, politics and possibilities?

How do we use pedagogy to move beyond simply defending ourselves against the immediate threats of a deeply entrenched militarism, into a positive freedom in which militarism has been abolished in the interest of public well-being and survival? How do we move beyond the publicly ensconced notion that militarism is a necessary force in the world? How do we imagine the world as it should be, i.e. free of militarism's horrors, while we are living in a world as it is that is dedicated to limiting any vision of the world as it ought to be? In short, we need pedagogies dedicated to active notions of freedom rooted in open-ended critique and interrogation of what is, individual and collective participation in shaping the decisions and structures that impact our lives, an opening of public spheres to wide-ranging public participation, and a commitment to asking probing moral and political questions directed toward the peaceful democratization of all spheres of public life.

Because militarism is deeply rooted in US culture and politics, its abolition becomes a cultural question, as well as a political question. It is then, in addition to a question about political struggle, a question of cultural imagination, representation, and identity. Culture provides militarism structures for representing its interests, goals, images, and concerns, its notions of the acceptable and

unacceptable, its desires, and its patriotic priorities across a wide public domain, for example, through cinema and television. The use of film, a powerful affective mode of popular discourse, to inculcate militarism's goals and priorities opens up strong pedagogical capacities to direct desires and mold actions in support of militarism. Do film representations of peace have that same affective power to mobilize desires? Militarism, using the power of filmic image and narrative, abstracts knowledge away from peace, as it distances understanding away from justice, while the public is educated to surrender to ritualized and stylized military spectacles, and glamorized celebrations of mass killing, thus eroding our capacity to introduce question of ethics and politics into cinematic analysis, and often, as a consequences, in our lives outside of cinema. The narrow focus of militarized films limits the possibility for public debate, a crucial component in addressing social concerns, of which militarism is primary. This crisis of knowledge and delimiting of debate undermines work toward public political engagement in other domains of culture and thus undermines any hope of overcoming the culture of militarism.

### **Wildest Utopias**

“Also in question,” as Cornelius Castoriadis notes, “is the relation of...knowledge to the society that produces it, nourishes it, is nourished by it, and risks dying of it...[The] monstrous [militarized] tree of knowledge that modern humanity is cultivating more and more feverishly every day...[suggests that we] must go infinitely further than the wildest utopias have ever dared to imagine,” if we are going to overcome these monsters.<sup>516</sup> The crisis, in other words, is crucially linked to the social production of sets of cultural knowledge and representation, of which films are a small but important component, that not only work against the solution to the crisis, but exacerbate the crisis by silencing alternatives, shutting down options for struggle against it, restricting opposition and debate, and reproducing and cultivating new and monstrous forms of knowledge, technology, weaponry and the willingness to employ it. Castoriadis is suggesting that the crisis of

militarism is also a crisis of democratic citizenship, social morality and social responsibility and forms of political agency that operate outside and against the current notions of militarized agency.

We have reached a profound anti-democratic juncture in which solidarity with the future is quickly disappearing, if we are willing to risk “dying of [militarism].” Future generations are in no position to contribute to the decisions that impact their lives. They will inhabit the world we hand down to them. We are ethically responsible for the consequences of our actions or inactions. A true democratic solidarity with the future would work to ensure that the world the future inherits is a world worth living in. Hope for the future must be rooted in ethical solidarity with the future, and a radical questioning of the present. A present that derives its authority from an unnecessary and harmful feature of human production, i.e. militarism, is an authority to be rejected for it not only undermines public autonomy, but, it also creates conditions that destroy the social features required for democracy and peace along with establishing the possibility for the undermining of existence.

Any pedagogical project driven by popular democracy, collective empowerment, peaceful and respectful co-existence and creative public engagement must work to oppose militarism because of its emphasis on domination, violent expansion, hierarchical structures, blind obedience to authority, intimidation, aggression, and destruction, and work toward “a deep, pervasive change in institutions and the very character of social relationships”<sup>517</sup> from the international to the interpersonal. Individuals not only are constructed in part by the international and interpersonal social meanings they internalize through both institutional structures and wider public pedagogies, but those constructions in turn produce sets of social behaviors, attitudes, adaptations and actions (or inactions). A critical public pedagogy is driven less by “transforming minds in order to adapt them to the requirements of [current institutional priorities and interests], (though we must also live in the world as it is),”<sup>518</sup> and more by a project “to change attitudes, customs, lifestyles,” ideas, and commitments to challenge and transform “the requirements of current institutional priorities and interests.”<sup>519</sup>

### **End: Not only “what film teach” but “what we teach from films”**

By situating films both in terms of what they do and what they do not do, and in terms of present and absent images, histories and narratives, we open up possibilities for the always necessary critical discourse and social engagement within and between film texts, audiences and social realities. Negatively, we can ask what militarized films do? They often inculcate, create and mobilize: imperial ideologies; emotional attachments for reactionary political purposes; irrational allegiances; identifications with and glorifications of various forms of power and violence; authoritarian aspirations; the idea that military violence is necessary, noble, constructive, redemptive and the best and only way to solve conflicts; narrow visions of human interaction and communication; false notions of history and policy; silence; misguided support for policies that are portrayed as defensive and beneficial when in fact they are offensive and undermining; and, stifled views of human imagination. Positively, what can militarized films do? They can, when critically engaged or produced, challenge and disrupt our notions of violence as mere spectacle and celebration, and they can disrupt and expand our often normalized notions and translations of filmic representations, myths and discourses, by presenting military violence and aggression in a complex historical and political context of haunting pain, corrosive suffering, monstrous destruction, foreboding threats, and a brutal despair that both soaks the lives of the immediate victims as its effects ripple into and beyond the rest of the community, and now also threatens human survival. In this sense, a critical public pedagogy of film can open up with the public the possibility of using films, including images, generic codes, narratives, ideologies, aesthetics and structures, as a contested political, social and moral terrain, and as a form of popular intervention in “the political struggles of the day.”<sup>520</sup>

This can be accomplished by examining films both relationally and contextually, and diagnostically and oppositionally, for example, by looking at how films relate to or challenge other films in a similar genre, or films with similar ideological proclivities, how they relate to or challenge other forms of popular cultural expression (television, video games, internet, advertisements, sports, etc.), and how films relate to or challenge political, economic and social historical formations and realities expressed inside and outside film. In all of these senses, films can be read both as reactions to social trends and reproductions of social trends. An increase in pro-military films is not only an expression of power's need to reproduce itself, not only a reflection of a militarized culture, but also a response to popular cultural challenges and resistance to power and the militarization of the world. In this way, reading films is not only an exercise in examining hegemonic ideologies and cultural forms of control and how they are reproduced and inculcated, but also an attempt to understand the social struggles, cultural resistance and political dynamics at work in the larger society between power and a population that is often at odds with the policies, pursuits and programs of power. Even the most reactionary films can be a reflection of progressive forces at work in the society. For example, if the culture was supportive of war crimes, there would be little need to regularly produce popular cultural texts that attempt to persuade and convince audiences that they should celebrate and glorify military actions that are, outside of the film world, war crimes.

A critical film pedagogy then is reading both within and against the film, as it is reading within and against the historical and political conditions out of which the film is produced and circulated in the hope of opening up discussion and dialogue in order to both challenge what is reactionary and to expand what is liberatory, and, to see intolerable conditions not as something under which we should surrender and accept but challenge and overcome. One possibility is to find within film texts what Ernst Bloch called "utopian moments," in other words, the "surpluses" and "excesses" that can be employed to inspire critical social reflections and to advance social struggles toward liberation from the oppressive conditions that may appear all pervasive in the film texts

under examination. For example, soldiers in *Black Hawk Down* and *Tears* struggling bravely in solidarity and support under harrowing conditions to survive against enemies portrayed as brutally barbaric can inspire a recognition of the kinds of solidaristic values of courage and sacrifice needed to fight back against power structures rooted in barbarism and brutality. The trauma experienced by soldiers in *MF*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Rules* and *Tears* can be an opening to anti-war stances and critiques of the institutions that willingly work to turn soldiers into “killing machines,” and place them in the line of fire in the first place often for no reason other than the pursuit of power’s interests. In these cases, audiences can find social hope in filmic despair. It is reflective of Frederic Jameson’s notion that “works of mass culture cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well.” His point is that in order for mass cultural productions such as film to draw audiences in they must hold out to audiences not only a stick that pummels power’s interests into public consciousness, but also carrots that feed into audience fantasies and hopes for a better and more meaningful existence.<sup>521</sup> *Mystic River*’s dreary and hopeless conclusion, actually offers a sense of hope, albeit dim, in the idea that even under exceedingly grim conditions in which a person has lost a daughter to murder and mistakenly killed a friend, somehow they find a way to continue and are less alone than they were before. Even xenophobic, pro-violence and reactionary tomes such as *MF*, *Rules*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Tears* can, when opened up to questioning, feed into celebrations of heroic sacrifice and cross-cultural bonding for the good of the larger community, thus providing the audience with both a sense of hope that grotesque acts of abuse can be overcome and the possibility that we can be rescued from heinous monsters out to destroy us.

Another task of a critical pedagogy would be to direct our awareness toward what is destroying us and who are the real monsters with a goal of sobering us to the destructive capacities of war, not only in ways that make us reluctant to support military aggression but also in ways that compel us to overcome the culture and structures of militarism. This will require continued critical

examinations of the links between the economics and politics of aggression, the systemic nature of US aggression and the culture of militarism. These critiques must be coupled with examinations of the impact of militarized cinematic portrayals that work to redirect audience attention from the grim horrors, primary victims, and long term suffering caused by military aggression. The audience is redirected through the glorifying of military violence, heroizing of soldiers, sanitizing of the impact of mass carnage by linking it to celebratory spectacles, and in the suggestion that military violence solves political and social problems. The narrow concentration of audience attention on our pain and suffering, often through the lives of soldiers on the ground, is a focus that can, in the end, lead to further endorsement of US aggression and militarism. Each of the primary films under examination, by exploring the conflicts and destroyed lives of soldiers, as in *Tears*, *Rules*, *MF*, and *Black Hawk Down* or in the case of *Mystic River*, by looking at the blood-dimmed life of a local “hood,” offer up possibilities for asking critical questions about institutional structures responsible for creating the conflicted, destructive and blood-dimmed conditions.

While Hollywood films generally speak in a more or less ideologically monolithic voice, reflective of the power structures in the larger political and economic culture, that requires exposure and critique, individual films can, and should, be read as expressing a multiple set of perspectives. In short, a critical approach will both denounce the repressive narratives and proclaim possibilities within those narratives; a critical approach will ask not only “what do films teach,” but “what can we teach from films?”

In order to teach from films, we can ask the following questions: What do militarized films often not do? They do not provide instruction, vision, history, critique, ethics, alternatives, oppositional narratives and imagination that might provide tools and skills for developing a deeper and more critically reflective understanding of what was, is and could be in the world outside of film and a culture of militarism, which could in turn, develop a new world inside of film and a less militarized culture. In short, militarized films are too often lacking in a vital emancipatory link

between facts and values. By exploring these categories we put ourselves in a position to examine and understand not only how films as “pedagogical devices” interface with ideological, political, military and economic forces in the culture, and how they narrow options and imaginings, but also how films might be used to provoke and provide meaning beyond the film in ways that could lead to deeper understandings of who we are as a culture, who and what we might become as political agents, what is necessary to defend ourselves against and protect ourselves from the growing culture of militarism, and thus, nobly instill new hopes and possibilities for social transformations.

In a time of “grand imperial strategies,” war, terrorism, vengeance, increasing militarization, miscommunication and deceit, the privatization of pain and increasing violence from and in many quarters of human lives, and threats of nuclear annihilation, films such as those examined herein can be read critically in ways that hold up a mirror to the horrors of what is, challenge “those intent on establishing beyond doubt and beyond challenge the supremacy of American arms [and the] expansive...open-ended war[s] that will produce,”<sup>522</sup> and expand the pedagogical limits of the too often pervasive, narrow and regressive “war of all against all” ideologies, explore notions of the violence of authority and the authority of violence, and situate private and social pain within the social conditions, historical realities and powerful institutions that promote, tolerate, impose and legitimate pain. In addition, when read critically beyond the narrow bounds of the filmic text, militarized films can become not only a mirror that reflects, and a window that sees into, but also a hammer that reshapes us and transforms society, thus allowing us to see that military violence and aggression are rarely necessary or constructive, hardly noble and protective, largely offensive and mostly beneficial to the weapons makers.

In the end, with new sets of facts and values in hand, we can hope that rather than courage, strength, power and justice evoking identifications with domination, militarism, aggression and force that portend “apocalypse soon,” we might critically examine and engage militarized films and the culture of militarism in ways that open the possibility to link courage with compassion, strength with



understanding, power with love, criticism with affection, the future with hope, knowledge with action, and justice with peace and well-being in the pursuit of the goal of abolishing what Kolko calls “the principal challenge confronting humanity in the twenty-first century.”

## APPENDIX

### Militarization and Militarism

*“A generation of children raised on violent [images and representations] could therefore be excellent future soldiers.”<sup>523</sup>*

-- Terminator Magazine

*“Mainstream politicians today take as a given that American military supremacy is an unqualified good.”*

-- Andrew Bacevich<sup>524</sup>

*“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, ... a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children... Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”*

-- President Dwight D. Eisenhower

**Militarization** and **militarism** are at times used synonymously, other times distinctly. Writing just after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Michael Sherry, from *In the Shadow of War*, notes that over the years from the late 1930's forward an unrelenting commitment to militarization “reshaped every realm of American life—politics and foreign policy, economics and technology, culture and social relations—making America a profoundly different nation...[in which] national security [i.e. a willingness to use force to protect “elite interests”] became the axis around which the American [economic, political and cultural] enterprise turned.” Sherry falsely assumed a diminution in the US commitment to expanding militarism, engagement in aggressive war, increasing authoritarian autonomy and continuing disavowal of international laws and conventions, on the grounds that US militarism was driven by “anxiety and vulnerability,” rather than by a profit producing and power seeking “global domination project”<sup>525</sup> that became freer to act in the absence of an oppositional and deterrent national bloc, the USSR. Predictably, after the Cold War, and the disappearance of the Soviet deterrent, the US has become ever more deeply entwined in militarism's ambitions, including its invitation to and pursuance of endless war, and the “valuing of military power for its own sake,”<sup>526</sup> while becoming ensnarled in the potentially catastrophic and dooming consequences of its fatuous and deadly embrace.

The victory of US militarism and neoliberal ideology<sup>527</sup> in the Cold War extended and revitalized commitments to the use of military power to radiate “American values” to every corner of the globe, and allowed popular culture and mass media to tap into the “violence sells” prospects of the new militarism to ensnare new profit possibilities and pedagogy opportunities. In short, in Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, it opened the floodgates for the pursuit of “the universal and permanent triumph of the US version of capitalist society,”<sup>528</sup> and continued a “reality untaught in American schools and textbooks [that] war – whether on a large or small scale...[has] been pervasive in American life and culture from this country’s earliest days.”<sup>529</sup>

The United States is a nation made by war, militarism and large-scale violence, and “built on two monumental crimes: the genocide of the Native American and the enslavement of the African American.”<sup>530</sup> This “dark, violent and ruthless side [of] American...history of racial conflict and tension...contained absolutely savage atrocities...[that have] bred an extremely ruthless attitude to other nations and peoples...[and is] very much part of the [US] tradition of ruthless warfare against [those considered] savage aliens...”<sup>531</sup> Writing in 1942, Quincy Wright observed “The United States...has had only twenty years during its entire history when its army or navy has not been in active operation some days, somewhere.”<sup>532</sup> Harry Magdoff, writing in 1970, concludes that “the United States...starting from the Revolutionary War...was engaged in warlike activity during three-fourths of its history...”<sup>533</sup> Updating it to the present we conclude that the US has been engaged in “warlike activity” 80% of the time, or 2,212 of 2770 months, with a current commitment to a war of terrorism that, in Vice-President Dick Cheney’s words “may last generations.”<sup>534</sup>

Patrick Regan clarifies a distinction between *militarization* and *militarism*. He suggests that *militarization* represents the material preparations for war (soldiers, equipment, weapons, technology, communications, planning, etc.), while *militarism* includes the appearance of military values, virtues, attitudes and ideals,<sup>535</sup> for example, heroism, jingoism, xenophobia, a warrior ethic, conservative politics, patriotism, allegiance, hierarchy, hyper-masculinity, obedience, discipline, sacrifice, etc. It is

important to note the careful and crucial links, interpenetrating and conditioning factors between the “material preparations [and costs and consequences] for war,” of which the culture of militarism is a crucial component, and, the ideological creation of values, of which the material preparations are an essential element.

Catherine Lutz, similar to Regan, distinguishes the two by suggesting that *militarism* identifies “a society’s emphasis on martial values [cults of action, courage, sacrifice, hard-body discipline and physical fitness]...while *militarization* draws attention to the simultaneously material and discursive nature of military dominance,”<sup>536</sup> i.e. the collective mobilization of the personnel, ideologies, and resources, the regulation of bodies, minds and structures, necessary for war preparation, initiation, waging, occupation and reconstruction. The risks, costs and consequences resulting from, the material and ideological mobilizations in support of, and the purposes for, militarism and militarization, are internal and external, moral and political, emotional and psychological, domestic and international.

The term “military,” arises from the Latin “*miles*,” meaning “soldier.” Thus the process of “militarism,” in some fundamental sense, is linked to the *soldierization* of the citizens within a society as created by those sites of political, ideological and cultural pedagogy that create, situate and produce the *soldier/citizen* subjects and mobilize “soldierly” desires, as noted above. For example, militarism involves those discourses, experiences and representations out of which military values and identities rhetorically, desirously and materially emerge so that populations of people will “soldier on” in the face of unpleasant conditions and trying circumstances for themselves that more often than not serve and service the interests of ruling elites,<sup>537</sup> in pursuit of, in the case of the United States, global hegemony. Andrew Bacevich notes how “various groups in American society – soldiers, politicians on the make, intellectuals, strategists, Christian evangelicals, even purveyors of pop culture” have developed a penchant for seeing “the revival of military power and celebration of military values as the antidote to [or distraction from] all the ills besetting the country.” Among dominant culture’s public intellectuals “paying homage to those in uniform [as well as the militarism they represent] has become obligatory and

the one unforgivable sin is to be found guilty of failing to ‘support the troops.’” Cynthia Enloe adds, “Publicly criticizing militarization has been widely viewed as an act of disloyalty.”<sup>538</sup> The ideological maneuver is part of treating US nationhood as an absolute value verging on a form of religious fundamentalism in which people are invested emotionally and psychologically. Criticism of this religion of state then becomes not only a form of national disloyalty but because individual identity is invested so deeply in protecting the national identity a form of disloyalty to self. One might add another sin: questioning the assumed “right” of the US to use military force whenever, wherever and against whomever it deems appropriate, an assumed “right” that reveals how the US “has invested its national sovereignty with passion and authority proper to God.”<sup>539</sup>

Chalmers Johnson draws a distinction between *militarism* and *the military*. By *military* he means “all the activities, qualities, and institutions required by a nation to fight [wars].” A culture of *militarism* develops when military institutions begin to displace other social institutions, and there is an assumption of tasks on the part of the military that are normally left to non-military social formations. In the domain of film production, there has been an expanding relationship between the White House, the Pentagon, and Hollywood in the post 9/11 world, “opening a new phase in the evolution of the Hollywood War Machine.”<sup>540</sup> Johnson, like Bacevich, and numerous other contemporary commentators on US militarism seem primarily driven to make somewhat visible US militarism by the threat of what Johnson calls “blowback,” i.e. it is bad for us, so we should address it. The position rates low on the moral scale when we fail to note that it is much worse for “them.”

Herein, the terms will be used interchangeably. For example, “militarized” films, refers to films that are both militarized and militarizing, that both reflect the culture of militarism and work to reinforce and reproduce the culture of militarism. “Culture of militarism” refers to the ideological and material public pedagogical mechanisms that produce beliefs, ideas, actions and technologies that make military aggression possible.<sup>541</sup> (*see footnote for discussion*)

## Why Worry

There are numerous reasons, growing out of Eisenhower's admonition, for exploring this *pedagogy of militarism*: the terror attacks of 9/11,<sup>542</sup> the massive increases in military spending (announced budget is \$420.7 billion; estimated real budget is over \$780 billion in 2006),<sup>543</sup> the extension of US military bases overseas (more than 725 bases in over 130 countries)<sup>544</sup>, US wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq (both condemned by the global population and deemed "illegal" by international law experts around the world)<sup>545</sup>, presidential announcements for unending wars<sup>546</sup>, the *Fahrenheit 9/11* cultural phenomenon,<sup>547</sup> the \$4 billion Pentagon recruiting budget that includes violent video game productions such as *America's Army*,<sup>548</sup> new recruitment techniques that blur the boundaries between entertainment and war, fiction and reality, Hollywood and the Pentagon,<sup>549</sup> an estimated 655,000 (or more)<sup>550</sup> civilians killed in the US attack on Iraq (as of October 2006) primarily by US air strikes that have increased exponentially since July 2004,<sup>551</sup> an "incapacity for ethically inspired acts,"<sup>552</sup> the spread of WMD<sup>553</sup>, subversions and violations of international law,<sup>554</sup> conflicts between public attitudes regarding foreign policy and Administration plans and actions,<sup>555</sup> the merging of Hollywood and the Pentagon to sell militarism,<sup>556</sup> and the "appreciable risk of ultimate doom,"<sup>557</sup> all lend special gravity to any study of the links between audiences, militarized films, the culture of militarism, aggressive US foreign policy, and attempts to inspire and mobilize forms of critical mass political agency capable of resisting, reversing and overcoming these trends.

Militarism is assumed to be an incomprehensible "ideology," a vile pursuit, a murderous rage, a pernicious predisposition, that infects other countries, but not the US. The more omnipresent militarism has become in US culture, the more it inserts itself into every corner of life, including films, talk-radio, professional sports, children's cereal,<sup>558</sup> presidential campaigns,<sup>559</sup> fashion design,<sup>560</sup> SUV production,<sup>561</sup> television programming, advertising, video games, ROTC programs,<sup>562</sup> schools, combative interpersonal relations, "the more it[s] corrosive affect] seems to be ignored or deflected, suppressed or forgotten, kept

safely outside the established public sphere.”<sup>563</sup> (*see final chapter footnotes for discussion of this disappearance from textbooks*)

Omnipresent US militarism is, however, quite visible in both the ever-present cinema of militarism and the bloated US commitment to maintaining military force far superior to any would-be threat or adversary. For example, the US maintains thirteen power projecting aircraft carrier battle groups (sometimes more accurately called “carrier strike groups”) scattered across the oceans of the world. Each carrier is accompanied by two guided missile cruisers equipped with tomahawk cruise-missiles; a guided missile destroyer; an anti-submarine warfare destroyer; a frigate for anti-submarine warfare; two nuclear armed attack submarines armed with 24 multiple independently targetable re-entry warheads (up to twelve per missile providing a capacity for hitting, with nuclear bombs, over 280 targets per-submarine, or a combined capacity in all the carrier groups of hitting well-over 3,000 targets) for the purpose of “overt, rapid and decisive striking power.”<sup>564</sup> No other country has warships circling the world. Johnson adds that the 725 overseas US military bases, and the stationing of US troops in over 130 countries across the globe, are less about military preparedness and more about a growing offense-driven *culture of militarism*, as is the depth with which the military is embedded in other social institutions from universities to films, from petroleum producers to investment banks, from arms and munitions manufacturers to television, from talk radio to the automobile and aeronautics industries, from multi-national corporate pursuits of neoliberal globalization to toys, clothes, and video games, etc.<sup>565</sup>

Militarism’s omnipresence, coupled with its strange incomprehensibility and disappearance down “the [critical] memory hole,” is a result of it coming into conflict with several prevailing cultural and political myths of US history: (1) US foreign policy pursuits are carried out with noble and benevolent intentions; (2) the US never initiates aggression, it only responds to the provocations of others; (3) US society is constructed upon institutions that are free, open and democratic; (4) the US is dedicated to the rule of law in global affairs; (5) the US mission is one of God-prescribed “Manifest Destiny;” (6) “the ideals we espouse represent universal truth, valid for all times.”<sup>566</sup>

The reality is, of course, much more bleak: (1) foreign policy is driven by self-interest, is ignoble, and typically in violation of international and US law, frequently the Nuremberg Principles, and is brutal and deadly; (2) rare is the case in which the US attacks because of provocation or threats from the victim; (3) the dominant institutional form in the US is the corporation, hardly free, open and democratic in structure or influence; furthermore, US political democracy is largely of the formal rather than the substantive sort; (4) the rule of force has been the order of the day;<sup>567</sup> (5) “Manifest Destiny” is an earlier form of the TINA theory, i.e. “there is no alternative [to global capitalism].” TINA really means “there is no alternative to global capitalism that US power will permit to exist,” as evidenced in regular US attacks, direct or indirect, against countries or movements that attempt an independent course, a practice often attributed to Cold War conflicts, but which both preceded and follows the Cold War.<sup>568</sup> In addition to the conflict with prevailing myths that “disappear” militarism, there is both the cultural habit of treating attempts at the historical contextualization of military related engagements as treasonous and un-patriotic,<sup>569</sup> and the bureaucratic and increasingly secretive apparatus and arrogance of power that “hides its knowledge and action from criticism.”<sup>570</sup> Regardless of the myths and pretexts, the vilifications and calumniations, the US pursuance of “doctrinally logical justification[s] for employing its massive military power” remains unsubstantial, and US leaders, in both major parties, continue in their failed apprehension of “the negative long-term political, economic, and ideological consequences of its policies in much of the world.”<sup>571</sup>

In linking *militarism* to a proclivity to connect offensive military power with national character, measures of national preeminence, and the effectiveness and productiveness of force, Bacevich notes “Today as never before...Americans are enthralled with military power. The global military supremacy that the United States presently enjoys...has become central to our national identity.” He adds “...many Americans have come to believe...the United States ha[s]...become masters of all things military.” This “national identity,” growing out of an increasing arsenal of sophisticated and destructive weaponry, a widening expectation that US “values” will ineluctably vanquish all “evil” foes through military



superiority and ingenuity, a romanticization of war, warrior values and soldierly pursuits, and the corporate and military soldiers employed to use the sophisticated weaponry has “come to signify who we are [i.e., a militarized but peace-seeking culture as projected internally; a militarized aggressive culture as understood externally]...what we stand for [i.e., peace in internal affairs, viewed domestically; aggression in international affairs, viewed externally],” as well as the unilateral<sup>572</sup> US pursuit of “reshap[ing] the world in accordance with [elite] American interests and [elite] American values.”<sup>573</sup> As evidenced by the US attack on Iraq, the ease with which the initial conquering proceeded, and the wholesale devastation wrought, “[t]he extent of American military superiority has become almost impossible to overstate.” In the global arena, other country’s military forces and capabilities are “so far behind they have no chance of catching up.” The US military “is the strongest the world has ever known.”<sup>574</sup> “Military metaphysics” is how C. Wright Mills, in the 1950s, described the US belief in a preordained mission to destroy “evil” in order to accomplish a “New World Order.” Mills’ point was to suggest that an immersion in a *culture of militarism* creates an unwavering commitment in the US to “solving” international conflicts through the use of military force thus undermining the possibility of finding other, more diplomatic, less aggressive and destructive solutions, in other words, solutions in accord with the UN Charter and International Law.<sup>575</sup>

The militaristic predisposition is deeply entrenched in US culture and history. Its recent manifestations, ideologically and materially, in the post-9/11 world are arguably unprecedented in that militarism is not only linked to “military preparedness, military action, and the fostering of...military ideals,” values, and identities, but is also identified with, “the nation’s strength and well-being,”<sup>576</sup> that is being applied on a global, and potentially catastrophic, scale.

While the United States is not historically alone in developing a *culture of militarism*, it is, in terms of its military spending, global military bases, enormous stores of weapons, record of interventions, national arrogance and hubris, the growing Pentagon behemoth, and cultural forms (with a global pedagogical impact), particularly films, television and video games, that promote militarism and

violence, “the largest wellspring of this global process”<sup>577</sup> of militarism and militarization. The proliferation of the Pentagon apparatus beyond foreign policy planning and execution and into US domestic society and culture, with one recent manifestation being the appointment of a National Intelligence Czar (John Negroponte<sup>578</sup>) and the concomitant NSA surveillance operations, opens up the danger and possibility of “the triumph in all areas of life of...military metaphysics, and hence the subordination to it of all other ways of life.”<sup>579</sup> A culture of militarism undermines and erases “any real image [or pedagogy] of peace,” or democratic citizenship. The stifling of the imagination and inhibiting of morality is a particularly dangerous pursuit given the continuing proliferation of WMD. When a *pedagogy of militarism* permeates a culture “the only seriously accepted plan for ‘peace,’” in C. Wright Mills’ view, “is the fully loaded pistol. In short, war [i.e. aggression] or a high state of war preparedness is felt to be the normal and seemingly permanent [and profitable] condition of the U.S.”<sup>580</sup> The ideologically hidden, but materially felt, costs, risks and consequences of this “permanent condition” are enormous.

This Orwellian “loaded [and firing] pistol” = “peace” positioning, accompanied by a normalization of the violence of war as a “permanent condition” that appears as not only self-evident, but inevitable and unchallengeable, become representational pedagogies in the culture that produce and inscribe allegiances to force and aggression and create a population of people largely incapable of imagining resolutions to international conflicts outside of the option of military violence, a population who assume, because of the routinization of war and violence, that acts of international aggression are acceptable and necessary modes of interaction, and because of the pervasiveness of US war and violence in international affairs, an emotionally desensitized population with diminished probabilities and reduced abilities for engaging in ethically inspired acts on behalf of the victims.

A US culture of militarism shapes, and is shaped by, national histories of expansionism, exceptionalism, and imperialism, as well as various doctrines such as *Manifest Destiny*,<sup>581</sup> “the Monroe Doctrine,” “civilizing missions,” Lincoln’s “last great hope of mankind,”<sup>582</sup> “the Truman Doctrine,”<sup>583</sup>

“latter day chosen people,” “New Jerusalem,” and “City on the Hill” mythologies of noble intentions and benevolent actions that often celebrate, glorify and legitimate aggression and violence. “The idea that the United States had a special and unique mission, assigned by a higher authority, to remake the world... had existed throughout the nation’s history, from George Winthrop’s ‘City on a Hill’ proclamation to the Founders’ conception of the nation as a new Israel leading the world from darkness to light.”<sup>584</sup>

Films produced within this culture of militarism do not only reflect and organize reality, they play an active role in creating reality. In a militarized culture there is a reciprocal pedagogical relationship between what is done militarily by the society and what is done militaristically in the society. An aggressive, expansionist and violent foreign policy is not dislinked from militaristic cultural discourses and representations that galvanize patriotic feelings, nationalist sentiments, and jingoist commitments while both reducing the horror and inhumanity of war to a series of aestheticized and sanitized spectacles that safely distance the spectator, while transforming war into another product to be commodified in the marketplace.<sup>585</sup> Furthermore, the extensive naturalization and aestheticization of film violence and military aggression renders them routine and less susceptible to questioning, critique, challenge, and transformation.

Citizens immersed in a culture of militarism and violence “are prepared along the way to see violence as something that is not only inevitable but necessary.” It is inevitable because we are unaware of other options, and it is necessary because we are mis-educated to believe that chaos will be brought back to a state of happy equilibrium only through large-scale violence. The hegemonic ideology and “perpetual pedagogy” of militarism articulate discourses and practices that raise aggression to the level of a “uniform cultural language” and produce a commitment to, and subduing of, the other, in ways that can only be envisioned through the prism of domination, violence and aggression.<sup>586</sup>

A militarized society, as opposed to a society governed by popular democratic participation, suggests a social order under some degree of hegemonic military influence, tyrannical hierarchical

structures and control, both ideologically and materially. In other words, a militarized society is a society governed both by mechanisms that transmit military values, life-styles, allegiances, and cultural orientations that condition popular consciousness through a common sense internalization of those values, attitudes, allegiances, etc., (i.e. a political ethos of militarism becomes a “traditional popular conception of the world”<sup>587</sup>), and, the rule of force exercised through surveillance, repression, images of power, intimidation, fear, displays of weaponry, and, when necessary, physical force and violence, along with the symbols of statehood Marx called “names, battle slogans, and costumes.”

The militarized ideological apparatus functions beyond the capacity of sheer force: it mystifies power relations, history, and social concerns; it creates moods of passivity and spectatorship, as well as attitudes of retreatism and disengagement from, and fatalism regarding, political action; it ensures that only a finite range of views are considered inside and outside of policy making circles; simultaneous with establishing a psychology of acquiescence and willingness to look the other way, it promotes and enshrines illusions about violence so that the ideas of aggression and war become plausible and palatable; it encodes jingoist forms and notions of national superiority; it imbricates rationalizations for economic and strategic impulses; it manufactures a myopic blindness surrounding the true risks, costs and consequences of militarism and war, e.g. war’s immense carnage and short-term and long-term physical, emotional and psychological suffering; it employs a romanticization and glamorization of violence, combat and war and its sacrifices as an ennobling and sacred endeavor;<sup>588</sup> it promotes an idealized notion of warrior masculinity; it imbues a spirit of resignation to and sacrifice for “the sanctity of the cause,” i.e. the militarization of the society through war related social formations and war readiness, preparation and engagement becomes “a force that gives us meaning.”<sup>589</sup> It is all part of the “effort to render politics aesthetic [that always] culminate[s] in one thing: war.”<sup>590</sup>

Military aggression itself functions as a type of opiate for the society and is promulgated by virtually every social formation, whether economic, religious, political, or educational. “It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it.”<sup>591</sup> The discourse of war,

when linked to militarism, its counterpart, patriotism, and a deeply embedded ethos of conquest, expansion and domination, provides a large palette of psychological and emotional thrusts that imbue a desire for adventure, sense of purpose, attitude of superiority, belief in nobility, commitment to loyalty, willingness to sacrifice for a “higher cause,” and identifications with heroism and Empire.

In combination, the ideological and material forms of militarism are forms of repressive discipline that regulate both the public mind and public body in time and space. There is both a colonization of the space of the body in terms of the removal of public space for the exercise of the public will through public assemblies that might threaten the power structure, and the colonization of the mind through reductions in privacy, insight and understanding accomplished by surveillance, suppression of free speech and limitations on free thought. Along with that there is a direction and redirection of thoughts and attitudes by the cultural pedagogical apparatus of state that create cultural landscapes and educational terrains that reproduce, support and legitimate authoritarian structures rooted in various fundamentalisms (political, economic, military, religious). These in turn may be linked to legislation and practices that suppress civil rights, undermine human rights, repress dissidents, and incarcerate superfluous people, and a militarized police state apparatus that demolishes social and mental spaces in which democratic values, practices and politics might be nourished, exercised and expanded.

The *culture of militarism* interfaces with the militarization of society. They work concurrently as both material and discursive practices. As a discursive practice that manifests its power in cultural formations including film, television, advertisements, public relations, news, video games, journals of opinion, the academy, etc., militarism performs a legitimating role in constructing values, attitudes and beliefs that make violence and war acceptable, tolerable, effective, sellable, and, perhaps most important in a corporate dominated social order, profitable! In turn the material practices of militarism support the military apparatus necessary to prepare for, engage in, and remain committed to aggression and war.

Michael Geyer has suggested that militarism represents, and is represented by, “the contradictory and tense social [and cultural] process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence,”<sup>592</sup> and in turn the process by which the organizations of violence produce society. Another sorrowful consequence of this link is the obfuscation of reality in the lives of the wielders of the club, the political surrendering to the “masters of war,” and the closing down of our moral imagination to the point where it is possible to see but not to notice, and virtually impossible to “envision the people on whom the bombs are falling,”<sup>593</sup> to hear the screams of children whose legs and arms and faces have been blown off by cluster bombs or burnt off by fuel air bombs, or the tear-stained, agonized faces of mothers and fathers mourning over the mutilated bodies of their children. That alone calls for a more careful pursuit of a moral and political critical pedagogy that examines the relationship between audiences, the public pedagogies of film violence, the culture of militarism and aggressive US foreign policy in the hope of developing our capacities for critically understanding this relationship, awakening our abilities to act empathically in the interest of the victims (including ourselves), and intervening to transform the social and cultural structures of militarism. It calls for cultural and pedagogical pursuits that venture into that sometimes “unknown territory” of an ethics of solidarity that becomes, in the words of Will Smith, “a declaration of interdependence”<sup>594</sup> that recognizes we are all in this together. Furthermore, it provides us with tools and skills, as well as knowledge and understanding, for both opening our eyes in order to develop a clearer picture of reality, and for actively intervening to overcome militarism’s harmful, traumatic, brutalizing, costly, often deadly, and potentially dooming, consequences.

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# ENDNOTES

## CHAPTER 1 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire*, (New York: Verso, 2003), p. 266

<sup>2</sup> Robert McNamara, *Foreign Policy*, May-June 2005, online at:

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=2829](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2829)

<sup>3</sup> This combination of military power and diminishing capacities for internal defense led McNamara and others to conclude “a greater than 50 percent probability of a nuclear strike on US targets within a decade.” Graham Allison, in *Nuclear Terror*. (New York: Times Books, 2004) suggests that nuclear terror inside the US is “inevitable.”

<sup>4</sup> Richard Byrne, “Film, Study of,” *The Encyclopedia of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1971), Vol. 4, p. 1. The comment may be slightly dated. One would have to now include other obsessions, in terms of the reflecting and producing a culture of militarism, such as video games, computer games, the Internet, etc.

<sup>5</sup> John Steinbruner and Nancy Gallagher, “Constructive Transformation: an alternative vision of global security,” *Daedalus*, Summer 2004. Steinbruner and Gallagher argue that because of the risk, we have a “vital obligation,” in the “U.S. political system [of which popular culture is a crucial component] “[to] recognize the risk and confront the implications” of the US culture of militarism. The exploration of alternatives, they suggest “might usefully begin with a broader notion of transformation.” This broader notion of transformation could include the way we approach public pedagogy in the US, including the way we use film production and reception, as public pedagogy, to evolve a practical pedagogy that links material and ideological, social and intellectual transformations. In this way we may be able to transform that which we are seeking to understanding through a deeper comprehension of that which we are trying to transform which includes ourselves.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Vandello and D. Cohen, “When believing is seeing: sustaining norms of violence in cultures of honor.” In M. Schaller and C. Crandall (Eds.), *Psychological Foundations of Culture*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004)

<sup>7</sup> See Sarah Boseley, “655,000 Iraqis killed since invasion,” *The Guardian*, October 11, 2006. Online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,,1892888,00.html>. For the full study see, G. Burnham, R. Lafta, S. Doocy, L. Roberts, “Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey,” *The Lancet*, Vol. 368, Issue 9545, October 21, 2006, pp. 1421-1428

<sup>8</sup> Robin Wood, *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 2

<sup>9</sup> The irony is that a culture that relies on mass violence in order to survive is producing the material and ideological conditions for its own destruction. The US Space Command in *Vision 20/20* argues the US must have “full-spectrum dominance,” i.e. military control of air, sea, land and space, in order to protect US interests (“the haves”) from the “widening economic divide” and “deepening economic stagnation, political instability, and cultural alienation,” all of which might produce, they suggest, violence among the “have-nots.” The US thus reserves the right to employ “unilateral military power” to guarantee “uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies, and strategic resources.” In short, the US reserves the right to continue to create and exacerbate the shameful conditions that generate the conditions that in there argument require increased US militarization and domination. It is this illogical logic that leads to comments such as “an increased risk of ultimate doom.” It is a very potent reason for engaging in projects that critique and challenge this dooming logic. At some level one assumes much of the population is aware of this contradiction (more so after 9/11) and this contributes to the disillusionment, cynicism, fatalism, indifference, detachment, frustration, etc. Robin Wood points out “What else are they supposed to be, given that they believe they are going to die soon in a variety of horrible ways [WMD calamity, disease, ecological catastrophe, terror attacks, natural disaster, etc.]” and we are regularly dispossessed of that which might provide us a real sense of hope for the future, i.e. that one of the features of our creatureliness is that we are capable of imagining and creating a culture and society radically different than the present. In short, contra-Margaret Thatcher, **there are alternatives**; and, that is a lesson fundamental to any CPPFM.

<sup>10</sup> In most cases, “war” is a misleading term that hides the fact of US aggression. “War” suggests some form of mutual antagonism and a bit of a “fair fight.” Generally, the US only attacks under conditions where the enemy is in a very weakened position to fight back. In short, there is a difference between

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engaging in war and “attacking.” One would not say “The Nazis were at war with Poland,” but “The Nazis attacked Poland.”

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Kellner, “Film, Politics and Ideology: Reflections on Hollywood Film in the Age of Reagan,” online at: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner)

<sup>12</sup> Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, p.21

<sup>13</sup> Herein the term militarism will be distinguished from militarization in that the latter will refer to the dynamic processes in the political, economic and social institutions that feed and shape a culture of militarism and the former will refer to the values, beliefs and attitudes that are often the intellectual, emotional and psychological engine that drives militarization. In the film world, Hollywood/Pentagon films are part of the dynamic process of militarization that shapes the culture of militarism and also a crucial component of the culture of militarism that feeds the engine that drives militarization. Perhaps one could say militarism is the engine and militarization is the vehicle; or militarism is the brain and militarization is the body. The distinction remains unclear because of the dynamic relationship (engines don’t drive without vehicles and vehicles don’t drive without engine; brains do not think without bodies; and bodies do not think without brains). Militarization is the set of social practices and processes that create the plans and policies for the production and promotion of aggression and violence, i.e. they create the culture of militarism, a culture that is consumed by war and aggression to an extent that they condition the metaphors, memories and visions that shape national consciousness and behavior.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Soldier’s Faith*, Memorial Day Address, Harvard University, May 30, 1895, online at: <http://harvardregiment.org/holmesfa2.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Michael Bolston and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, (New York: Penguin)

<sup>16</sup> Jim Garamone, “Joint Vision 2020 Emphasizes Full-spectrum Dominance,” *American Forces Press Service*, June 2, 2000

<sup>17</sup> Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 7

<sup>18</sup> Walter Millis, *Arms and Men: A study of American Military History*, (New York: Mentor, 1958), p. 166

<sup>19</sup> Richard Barnet, *Roots of War*, (New York: Penguin, 1972), p. 3

<sup>20</sup> For example, one of the more famous WWII US propaganda films is, *War Comes to America*, Part VII in Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series. This segment attempts to explain the reasons why the US became embroiled in the war. The implication in the title is that the US was attacked and thus forced to enter the war, when in fact the US homeland exited the war unscathed while all of its powerful rivals in the world were left devastated. This is one reason why the US ended the war the most powerful country in the world with about 50% of the world’s wealth and with unmatched military might. In short, the substance and horror of war spared the US, while its shadow (moral, cultural, economic and political) darkened the landscape. In theatrical films (or even documentary films about WWII) the “shadows” of bombs (i.e. the clouds left after explosion) were visible, but the “shadow” always hid the human and material destruction raging beneath.

<sup>21</sup> SIPRI reported global military spending of \$1,120,000,000,000 (surely an underestimate) with the US leading the pack with roughly 50% of global spending. Recent US actions have led to rapid increases in military spending in Russia, China, Japan, India, Pakistan, Brazil and elsewhere, almost surely the result of US unilateral proclamations, threats and actions around the world.

<sup>22</sup> Though the threats were largely invented the threat of nuclear Armageddon was real (mostly because of US actions – including \$5 trillion spent on nuclear weapons - and contingency plans) and itself placed a shadow of gloom and potential doom over the culture.

<sup>23</sup> Joanne Brown, Johns Hopkins, notes “Metaphor is too important to be understood only in narrative terms. It is too fundamental to how language works, to how politics works.” In other words, metaphors of militarism are part of a political, cultural and pedagogical apparatus that reflect the nature of the society and also tools that shape the society and the ways people define themselves and their actions. Brown quoted in Dale Keiger, “Why Metaphor Matters,” *Johns Hopkins Magazine*, February 1998, online at: <http://www.jhu.edu/~jhumag/0298web/metaphor.html>

<sup>24</sup> Here reflective of the “Cold War.” William Levitt, pioneer of US suburban development said “No man who owns his own house and lot can be a communist,” which carried with it the implication that “ownership of one’s own house and lot” demonstrated not only our superiority over other forms of social organization, but also our victory.

<sup>25</sup> For a revealing critique of the ways in which the Pentagon is used to rob public resources in the interests of corporate power see Jeffrey St. Clair, *Grand Theft Pentagon*, (Maine: Common Courage Press, 2005)

<sup>26</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 222. One implication here is that those distanced from the material carnage and suffering of military violence, i.e. civilian

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“idealists,” abstracted from the realities, can much more easily endorse the use of military might. Those who engage in military aggression, those who kill, see others killed, those who are wounded, or see others wounded, are more likely to take a realist position expressed in Sherman’s infamous phrase “war is hell.”

<sup>27</sup> Related and supportive of the “warfare state” is the Hollywood tendency to naturalize “war,” as though “war” is part of nature, and a warrior spirit is a natural way to be. This is absurd on the surface given that placing people in conditions of war is highly abnormal in the course of overall history and as compared to our general daily interactions. The best we can learn from this is that people will behave in unusual ways when placed in unusual circumstances. Nevertheless, the position is also somewhat comforting because it tends to lessen responsibility for both the violence of military aggression and the responsibility of locating the political, economic and cultural institutional sources of militarism.

<sup>28</sup> See *Program on International Policy Attitudes* studies on US opinions and attitudes on “foreign policy,” “defense spending,” “Iraq,” etc. online at: [pipa.org](http://pipa.org), and *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations*, “Global Views 2004” online at: <http://www.cfr.org/globalviews2004/index.htm>. A majority of US citizens believe that the US should accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court regarding war crimes, permit the UN to lead the way in international crises (in accord with International Law), and rely on diplomacy more than military measures. Majorities also support the idea that the US should resort to military force only if there is “strong evidence that the country is in imminent danger of being attacks,” a position that is both in accord with the UN Charter and International Law and opposed to the US government’s bipartisan consensus on “preemptive war,” which is an international crime. This public position suggests the need for elites to constantly invoke threats to compel the population to continue to support the militarization of the US and the continuing use of US force in global affairs.

<sup>29</sup> For a careful study of this effect see “Ratings of US Foreign Policy Rise Sharply in Nearly Every Area: Apparently Due to ‘Rally Effect,’” a PIPA study that demonstrates how in March of 2003, consequent upon the US preparation for and attack on Iraq, “the public’s ratings of US foreign policy rose sharply in nearly every area...part of the ‘rally’ effect that often accompanies new military action, in which the public tends to suppress its criticism of US leaders and policies.” This same effect typically leads to a sharp rise in the President’s approval rating. One suspects that the “rally effect” may be inflated in the US after years of Hollywood films about Vietnam in which the brutal suffering and horrors experienced by US soldiers on screen is linked to a lack of support back home, thus creating a sense of not only guilt, but support for the troops, which translates as rallying around the President and further support for force and militarization.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. xii

<sup>31</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 122. One wonders what the impact would be if there was a vast decentralization of film production so that instead of making five films for \$200 million dollars each, we made 1,000 films for \$1 million dollars with the production and exposition under more local control. It would be a small step in the democratization of cinema.

<sup>32</sup> For example, knowing that someone is dead is not the same as knowing that they are dead because they were tortured and murdered by US armed, trained and supported death squads, and that is not the same as also knowing that they were murdered because they were organizing a union in order to overcome exploitive working conditions in a US run sweat shop, etc., etc. US cinema generally leaves out contexts which might help to explain why those we so often kill in films are angry in the first place. *Rules of Engagement* is a classic case of simply showing crazed Arabs attacking a US embassy in Yemen, with no context to explain why they might be angry, or why the US reserves the right to carry out violence against them.

<sup>33</sup> **Public spaces** refer to the material and ideological realities through which the public and public/private institutions interact in ways that influence one another. Public space is physical and mental space. Crucial to the relationship is control of that physical and mental space. There can be physical space where the public gathers that is not under the control of the public, and that raises the question of whether or not it is public space. Private control of space that the public occupies typically tilts influence from the public to the private. Film theatres are generally private space open to a paying public. The public occupies the private space of the film theatre, and in some respects, the private space of the film occupies the mental space of the public. The theatre is a private space over which the public has little control and influence. Decisions over how the space is used are generally made outside the sphere of local or even national public influence. One could say that social space is potentially public space but not that public space is necessarily social space. Social space is public space when it is under the control of the public; public space is not necessarily social space because it can be under private control even though the public still occupies the space. The social space that is public space exists for the advancement of the social good; public space that is privately controlled exists for the advancement of the private good, with only incidental benefits for the

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public. Public space, like the individuals who occupy it, does not exist outside of society. The kinds of social space in society, along with the roles and uses of that space, for example, to organize a democratic union (social), or to sell a product (private), is the result of a complex interaction between history, politics, economics, governance, culture, geography, etc. Cinema is public space for it represents a material and ideological location where the public gathers to interact with a cultural production made possible by society. Nevertheless, it is not generally social space, though the impact of the public occupying ideological and material private space, impacts society. For the most part, the film/public relationship is organized to advance the private good (this is not to say that the public does not derive some benefit from the experience, for example, pleasure, laughter, relief, distraction, etc. - *Here one might add a "stick-in-the-mud" point slightly more nuanced: can we legitimize our film entertainment given that it is often built (in militarized cinema) on the massive suffering and death of fellow humans? In short, there is massive abuse, exploitation and violence that lie at the root of these productions. This does not invalidate them as films, but it does raise questions about the way they often glorify war and the background is something of which we should at least be mindful. In a phrase, films, especially of the militarized sort, are never merely entertainment*). That there is an interpenetrating material and ideological influence between the public and public/private institutions, we know. What exactly the influence is, how much and in what ways in either direction the influence conditions and shapes, we do not know, and can only speculate at a general level. At a general level one suspects that Marx was correct in the *German Ideology* when he suggested that the ruling ideas in society are those of the ruling class, and that the class that is the dominant material force in society is also the dominant intellectual force. In short, the means of material and mental production are linked and those who lack control over the means of material and intellectual production in society are generally subject to those who have control. What is intimated is that ideas have a material origin in social structures but they also carry on a political function. One political function is to promote, protect, expand, ratify, and hide the unjust truth of the unjust arrangements. Additionally, there is the question "who do we mean by 'the public' in "public pedagogy," and "public space," for clearly pedagogy impacts people in different ways according to an array of complex, interactive and largely immeasurable social, physical, political, economic, historical, habitual, psychological, emotional, intellectual, ideological, gender, age, class, race, and sexual preference factors and spaces they occupy. Rather than concentrate on the differences that define the multiple publics, we will operate on a general notion of the public as those who share a common US culture of militarism. A critical public pedagogy will ask, "In whose interest, in what direction, with what goals, and with what consequences is public space organized?" In terms of the culture of militarism, cinema space is organized in the interest of US military power, to support US military aggression, to promote and protect the interests of a Pentagon driven economy, with the consequence of great human harm. *This is not to suggest that the Pentagon system has not produced enormous technological benefits in aeronautics, computers, medicine, etc. The questions would have to be "at what cost?" and "can those benefits be legitimated on the pain and suffering of so many people?"*

I am not herein suggesting that films have hegemonic ideological control over audiences, or that everyone leaves theatres completely mystified by the cinematic production, or that there is a monolithic ruling class and sutured ruling ideological production apparatus that without contradictions, fissures or confusions expresses its interest to a completely receptive, gullible and determined public. One doubts there is anyone, outside of straw-men producers, who actually believe such reductionist absurdities. Surely, there is a give and take relationship between films and audiences. Nevertheless, control is clearly tilted. Furthermore, one would not to suggest that there are not vested power interests and perspectives expressed in cinema, or that the ruling ideas are not generally the ideas of those who control the material means of production. For example, one would search far and wide before locating a Hollywood film that provides a moral position against US military aggression. Given the thousands of films we might consider "military" films, and the thousands of others, influenced by "military" films, it is suggestive of a very serious absence of certain forms of moral, political and historical knowledge across the culture. The only other explanation would be a monolithic ruling class that censors all productions, and that is hardly plausible. The cinematic ideological expressions, however, are not only the articulations of the perspectives of power but often an indication of how power responds to popular resistance and cultural shifts, sometimes to redirect the resistance and shifts, sometimes to profit from them by co-opting them. As the public develops mechanisms of resistance power often responds with new and more sophisticated means of defending against that resistance. At a first level of approximation, Hollywood films are not produced and distributed by poor people, but by rich people. The institutions that drive investment and production are not institutions dedicated to serving the interests of the poor, but rich institutions, often large banks and corporations, interested in making money and maintaining power. Given the dominant place of the

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Pentagon-system in the US economy, as well as deeply entrenched notions of US patriotism and nationalism, it is not surprising that films with military themes will generally express pro-military views and values.

<sup>34</sup> The distinction remains unclear because of the dynamic relationship in which engines don't drive without vehicles and vehicles don't drive without engines; and, brains do not think without bodies, and bodies do not think without brains.

<sup>35</sup> In terms of *culture*, it is one of the manifestations of what we are as creatures, i.e. humans create cultures through society. Without humans and society there is no culture. It is a particular feature of the beings we are and a consequence of the ways we organize ourselves in the social sphere. The interacting historical forces of nature, politics, economics, geography, temperature, society, biology, etc., that produce the complexity and struggles of human cultures is truly beyond the scope of understanding at anything more than a general level. Nevertheless, culture should be seen as linked dynamically to social power, political interests and political economy. Understanding culture requires attempts to understand political, economic and social power and also resistance to that power. Culture is a social arena of conflict and struggle in which some features are shared by most, but many of those features operate to bring advantages to some while disadvantaging others. Furthermore, various components of culture, for example, the dominant media, education, sports, military institutions, popular music, commodities, and religion should be seen as not necessarily separate. It is true that in each there are subcultures, but still there is often an overarching set of dominant elite values they share. Those who attend a baseball game bring various subcultures to the stadium, but during the celebration of militarism evinced by the playing of the *National Anthem* and *God Bless America*, they are quickly reminded of a larger culture of militarism they share (whether or not they support it), not to mention the shared rapacious corporate culture that dominates professional sports (and weapons production). We should add that culture is contradictory. The long term US culture of militarism has brought wealth and power to some, provided resources, finances, infrastructure, etc., to create much of the privilege many people in the US enjoy, but often at the expense of great suffering among the victims of that culture of militarism. Santa Fe, NM and Yosemite Park wouldn't exist without the military conquest of Mexico and Native Americans, but is Santa Fe and Yosemite Park worth the human suffering that resulted from those military conquests? Computers and commercial jet travel come largely out of the US culture of militarism and the militarization of the society, but are they worth Korea and Vietnam, and the 8 million or so people killed?

From a more traditional perspective film is more easily recognized as "culture" than militarism. But if by culture we mean "the entire panorama of conventional beliefs and practices within...society" (**Michael Parenti, *The Culture Struggle*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006, p. 12**), it is clear, because of the powerful impact it has in shaping beliefs and practices, directing investment and production, and entrenching and extending power, that militarism is a vital part of culture. Because militarization generally is driven by and feeds the interests of elites, power finds it necessary to develop a self-justifying *culture of militarism*. That culture produces its own myths, values, institutions and beliefs in order to promote, legitimate and ratify the project of militarization, as well as suggest that militarism is a natural way of organizing society. These sets of values, beliefs, structures and myths are frequently described as "culture" to hide the political impact they exert across society. In terms of film, this blindness sometimes manifests itself in comments such as "it is only entertainment." Antonio Gramsci referred to all of this as "cultural hegemony," arguing that behind the "outer trench" of the state "there exists a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" that work to shape public perceptions and direct public attitudes and opinions (not always successfully) in order to protect the power of entrenched interests. (**Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 238**) In the present, Hollywood film is a vital part of the fortress, so one would expect it to produce narratives in the overall interest of dominant institutions. Though there is a common culture of militarism in the US, it doesn't follow that the cultural values held by different people and different groups are in agreement. Generals and peace activists share the culture of militarism, and both might want peace, but the former wants it through domination and violence, while the latter wants it through social justice and non-violence. Warmongers and revolutionary pacifists share the culture of militarism in the US, but respond to it by working to expand it in the case of the former, and abolish it in the latter case. In short, culture evolves, and there are various forces at work in shaping that evolution. Hegemonic institutions are in a position to have a greater influence on that evolution and to make adjustments to respond to upsurges of resistance to dominant culture. The flood of right-wing hyper-masculine Hollywood celebrations of US militarism in the 1980s are both an offensive reflection and projection of the cultural power of a conservative administration and changes in the global corporate economy that required an expansion of US military



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might around the world, but also a reflective and defensive response to the upsurge in a culture of resistance to militarism that manifested itself following the US attack on Vietnam and that continued to grow through the 80s (blocking a US attack on Nicaragua) and beyond.

<sup>36</sup> This is not to suggest that ideology is omnipotent and omniscient, or that there are not contradictions in hegemonic ideologies, or that counter-ideologies are not always working in various ways to critique and challenge power. If the latter wasn't the case, power would need none of the steps herein outlined to promote and protect itself. While power uses ideology to suggest its own inevitability the very existence of ideology demonstrates its vulnerability.

<sup>37</sup> For example, the videogame "Hitman," promotes killing with the slogan "You are the killer." One is reminded of the chant often heard in Marine bootcamp: "What do we do for a living? Kill, Kill, Kill!"

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5

<sup>39</sup> Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. x

<sup>40</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956)

<sup>41</sup> The following four-part definition of *militarism* is provided by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 6, p. 438: "The spirit and tendencies of the professional soldier; the prevalence of military sentiments or ideals among a people; the political condition characterized by the predominance of the military class in government or administration; the tendency to regard military efficiency as the paramount interest of the state." *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, p. 1173, offers the following: "the belief or desire of a government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests." US militarism is generally used to "defend" US national interests outside of US territory, for example in Iraq. The "military class" in the US extends beyond the military and includes politicians, journalists, cultural workers, civil servants, and portions of a well-indoctrinated (with "military sentiments and ideals") public.

<sup>42</sup> For example, in conversations with high school students after a public screening of the misanthropic, misogynistic blood and violence fest *Sin City*, a number of young women said, "The treatment of women in the film was empowering." They explained this to mean, "Many of the women in the film were well-armed and not afraid to kill people." Hence, in the culture of "the new American militarism," a willingness to not only wield weapons but to use them in acts of violence and mass killing (as occurs in *Sin City*, and, we should add, Iraq), is now seen by some as "empowering."

<sup>43</sup> Timothy Lenoir, "Fashioning the Military-Entertainment Complex,"

<sup>44</sup> Caleb Carr, *Lessons of Terror*, (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 229

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, p. 7

<sup>46</sup> In Elisabeth Bumiller, "Bush May Weight the Use of Incentives to Dissuade Iran," *New York Times*, February 24, 2005

<sup>47</sup> Conn Hallinan suggests that the "real" Pentagon budget, including nuclear spending, spending for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, interest on previous budgets, etc. exceeded \$700 billion in 2004. There are other hidden costs that are not included.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriel Kolko, "On the Avoidance of Reality," in *Crimes of War*, Falk, Kolko, Lifton, (eds.), p. 12

<sup>49</sup> See Linda Bilmes and Joseph E. Stiglitz, "Iraq War Will Cost More Than \$2 Trillion," *The Milken Institute Review*, November 3, 2006, online at: [http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_2006/110506A.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/110506A.shtml). To put the figure in some perspective, suppose we imagine "SMALL MODEL SCHOOLS" we can build and supply for \$10,000,000 (ten million) each. If the cost of the US aggression on Iraqis is \$2 trillion (\$2,000,000,000,000), how many schools could we build? Answer: 200,000. If each school served 250 students that would be schools for 50 million students; in other words, new schools for every K-12 student in the United States (as of the latest census there were 49.5 million K-12 students in the US!), and we would not have to kill hundreds of thousands of people!

<sup>50</sup> Tom Englehardt, "Icarus (Armed with Vipers) Over Iraq," *TomDispatch.com*, 2004, online at: <http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=2047>. Englehardt suggests "Given where we've ended up [after the mass air war horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which continue in Iraq], it would be perfectly reasonable to consider this moment [in 1911 when the first bombs were dropped from an Italian airplane on 'recalcitrant Arabs' near Tripoli] the beginning of modern history, even of modernism itself.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Turley, "Foreword," in David Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 14

<sup>52</sup> Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, p. 25. Much of the material in this section is drawn from Robb.

<sup>53</sup> Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, p.26

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<sup>54</sup> Bill O'Driscoll, "Behind Enemy Lines: Life During Wartime," *Pittsburgh City Paper*, 2001, online at: [http://www.pittsburghcitypaper.ws/prev/archives/moviearch/b/mv\\_behindenemylines.html](http://www.pittsburghcitypaper.ws/prev/archives/moviearch/b/mv_behindenemylines.html)

<sup>55</sup> Phil Strub, personal phone call, May 2005

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Language and Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). The reflections and deflections are crucial to shaping public memory for "they seem to us to express what is central to our collective identity."

<sup>57</sup> W.D. Romanowski, "Oliver Stone's JFK: Commercial filmmaking, cultural history, and conflict," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 27(2), pp. 63-71. Romanowski discusses how cinema and debates around cinema shape not only our retrieval of the past, but the past to which we have access through the collective memories that film in its public pedagogical role configures, appropriates, reconfigures and re-appropriates. Pentagon propagandists are surely aware of Orwell's dictum: "those who control the past, control the future and those who control the present control the past."

<sup>58</sup> Scott Ritter, "Blame for Haditha Lies at Bush's Feet," *Alternet*, June 8, 2006, online at: [http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_2006/060806C.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/060806C.shtml)

<sup>59</sup> David Robb notes "Congress...has never once looked into whether the placement of propaganda by the world's most powerful military [U.S.] into the world's most powerful medium [film] is in the public's interest." Congress, as part of the "military-industrial-congressional" complex would seemingly have little interest in such an investigation. Furthermore, as intimated below, and suggested by a solid analysis on the sources of US foreign (military) policy by Lawrence Jacob and Benjamin Page in the *American Political Science Review*, February 2005, the major influence on, and the primary interests served by, US military policies, is "internationally oriented business corporations," with a secondary grouping of "experts (who, however, may themselves be influenced by business)." The opinion of the public, not surprisingly, rates very low and has "little or no significant effect on government officials [and policy]." With this in mind one might conclude that the "propaganda" impact of films corresponds more with a distraction effect rather than an ideological effect.

<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that different audiences do not take up particular texts with different interpretations, just that they do so within a set of representations that narrow interpretive possibilities. This is also not to suggest that audiences cannot engage in counter-reading of texts, for example, reading the mass violence often shown in Hollywood films not as something to be celebrated, but, seeing, in a film's attempt to celebrate violence and glorify militarism, a perversion in the culture because it glamorizes violence and aggression. A critical pedagogical approach would work to recognize these contradictions, and not end them at the level of passive interpretation, but use those counter-readings as seeds for developing individual and social agency and political organization designed to counter the culture of militarism.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Joseph Watson, "Hollywood, Iraq and 9/11: Reinforcing the Party Line," *Prisonplanet.com*, November 28, 2005, online at: <http://www.prisonplanet.com/articles/november2005/281105partyline.htm>. Stone, not alone, overstates the case in suggesting, implicitly, that there are Hollywood films that "tell the truth about war." Stone himself in his "truthful" films about Vietnam generally focuses on the negative impact on US soldiers and US society, and addresses existential conflicts between "good" and "evil," rather than revealing the far more devastating impact of the US aggression on Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian people and society, or looking at the structures of systemic militarism in US society. In *Heaven and Earth* Stone goes as far as saying "the war was bad for both countries," reflective of Jimmy Carter's callous comment "we owe nothing to the Vietnamese because the destruction was mutual." Perhaps the more important question is why so many filmmakers "prostitute" themselves to serve and service the culture of militarism without Pentagon coercion, cooptation or enticement by failing to "tell the truth [about war]." One explanation could be filmmaker Sam Fuller's (*The Big Red One* (1980)) claim that "you cannot make a real war movie," anymore than "a man [can perform] an autopsy on his own body," because audiences can never "taste the pain of gunshot wounds," or "still smell the blood [of victims]." Regarding Stone's and Carter's comments, one wonders how we might respond culturally to a German filmmaker, 15 years after a hypothetical German victory in WWII stating in a film about Poland "it was bad for both of us," reflecting a comment of a German president who said "we owe nothing to Poland for the destruction was mutual." That there are so few comments in the US when a US filmmaker and president utter such un-truths provides some evidence of how deeply embedded the notion of our righteousness in military endeavors really is among the intellectual set (those in positions to publicly comment in newspapers, journals, etc.). One suspects, based on poll results, that the general public, less subject to elite indoctrination, is not so easily fooled. In short, it is sometimes the case that the general public does not have enough education not to see the obvious. Fuller quoted in David O. Whitten, "Cinematistics: The Cosmetic Face of War," in *The Long Term View: A Journal of Informed Opinion*, Volume 6, Number 2,

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Spring 2004, p. 138. On “still smell[ing] the blood [of victims]” see, US marine corporal Ryan Briones on the after-effects of the Haditha massacre, online at: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=2017565>

<sup>62</sup> Tom Englehardt, “Collateral Damage: the Incident at Haditha,” *Mother Jones*, June 7, 2006, online at: [http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2006/06/haditha\\_massacre.html](http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2006/06/haditha_massacre.html)

<sup>63</sup> The massacre in Haditha is really a footnote in the massive air violence in Iraq, but it leaked out into public space. The victims have been quickly disappeared in talk of how bad Haditha for us (Bush is “anguished,” but there is little talk of the anguish of the Iraqis) and with a focus on how “something broke down [in Haditha],” in the words of General Jack Keane, but he is referring not to the bloodshed and massacre of Iraqi civilians but “that no investigation was conducted immediately.” In short, it is a paperwork problem for us rather than a slaughter of them that is important.

<sup>64</sup> In short, the “truth about war” is stultifying ugliness, stinking bloodshed, harrowing mutilation, moral emptiness and mass death (not just on the US side). One solution for planners is to manufacture a different “reality” for the public as in the case of the Pentagon “infomercials” witnessed in the hiring of *Cops* producer Bertram Van Munster to create a Pentagon friendly version of post-invasion Iraq and the *Saving Private Lynch* fabrication in which, counter to reality, the Pentagon manufactured, in *Wag the Dog* fashion, a Rambo-like Jessica Lynch heroically fighting to near death down to her last bullet before being wounded, captured, stabbed, tortured and raped and finally “rescued” by Special Forces troops risking their lives to free the heroine from the deplorable Iraqi monsters. (See, Jonathan Turley, “Hollywood Isn’t Holding Its Lines Against the Pentagon,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 2003, online at:

<http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0819-05.htm>) Iraqi Dr. Anmar Uday, who treated Lynch’s injuries, said, regarding the reporting of the “rescue,” “we were surprised. . .it was like a Hollywood film. . .they made [it] a show. . .[like] action movies [starring] Sylvester Stallone.” (Dr. Uday quoted in Robert Scheer, “Saving Private Lynch Take 2,” *AlterNet*, May 20, 2003, online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/15958/>. Scheer notes “the rescue was *pure Hollywood*.”) Lynch angrily objected to the falsifications stating “[the Pentagon] used me as a way to symbolize all this stuff. . .[I]t hurt. . .that people would make up stories that they had no truth about.” Making up stories, however, is what Hollywood does best. Part of this invention performed the standard role of portraying “us” as the primary victims of a beastly enemy thus disappearing, again, the tens of thousands of civilian Iraqi victims. Once Lynch failed to “play along” with the illusion she too was quickly disappeared. When war policies and actions come under public scrutiny and criticism, as was occurring with the Iraq imbroglio, the standard response is to find a more convincing way to market the programs (create a different/better reality) rather than change the policies. This is not surprising given that the policies are designed and supported by, and enacted to serve, interests other than the public, generally international corporate concerns. The Hollywood War Machine, which includes military “minders” embedded in Hollywood (see the credits at the end of virtually any film that employs Pentagon resources), plays a crucial role in creating more convincing ways to market and create the culture of militarism. The distorted presentation of US military aggression means “millions of Americans can support a war effort with no more consequences to them or their families [only if one looks narrowly at the costs, risks and consequences of the culture of militarism] than the energy it takes to change the channel on their television receiver.” (See Whitten, “Cinematistics. . .” p. 140. The statement is true only if one avoids looking at the larger costs, risks and consequences of the culture of militarism.

<sup>65</sup> In short, they engage in propaganda.

<sup>66</sup> Some of Strub’s comments contained are taken from a phone call in May 2005. Because Strub is interacting with elite sectors in Hollywood, i.e. generally those in the “blockbuster” wing and thus “money folk,” his argument here is not surprising given the Jacobs and Page study referred to herein. In short, it is not surprising that elite sectors in Hollywood and elite sectors in the Pentagon share similar views on US military policies. Furthermore, there is the assumption of representation effect. Strub appears to believe, along with many others, the Hollywood representations to be true accounts of US military actions.

<sup>67</sup> For example, the Pentagon insisted on changing history to a more acceptable and promotional version in Roger Donaldson’s Cold War Cuban Missile Crisis docudrama *Thirteen Days* (2000). The Pentagon was offended by the portrayal of superhawk General Curtis LeMay as “unintelligent and bellicose,” and asked for a more sober and supportive portrayal. (Two of LeMay’s more infamous quotes are: “there are no innocent civilians,” and “bomb them back to the stone age,” referring to the Vietnamese in the latter quote. LeMay did possess the honesty to admit that had the US been on the losing side in WWII he would have been tried as a war criminal for the fire bombing of Japanese cities.) Furthermore, the film accurately portrays the US Joint Chiefs calling for an assault on Cuba, a “bellicose” position that if carried out would almost surely have led to a nuclear confrontation between the US and Russia and perhaps the end of the

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species. The Pentagon insisted the film be rewritten to depict the Joint Chiefs in a less jingoistic light. Additionally, the Pentagon demanded the deletion of a scene in which a US U2 spy plane was shot down over Cuba on the grounds that it never occurred. Public records presented to the Pentagon during filming, however, clearly demonstrated that the incident happened on October 27, 1962, and the pilot was killed. Still the Pentagon refused to acknowledge the event and Phil Strub penalized the producers for filming and including the scene by forcing them to reconstruct the events in the Philippines at a much higher production cost.

<sup>68</sup> See Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, for extensive insights into Pentagon interference with and shaping of multiple Hollywood productions.

<sup>69</sup> For corroborating evidence see, for example, Kull, Ramsay, Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly*, Winter 2003-2004.; also, PIPA, "Americans on America's Role in the World After the Iraq War," April 29, 2003, online at: [http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/PostWarIraq/report\\_april29.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/PostWarIraq/report_april29.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in A.S. Hamrah, "Allied Forces," *Boston Globe*, July 4, 2004, online at: [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/07/04/allied\\_forces?mode=PF](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/07/04/allied_forces?mode=PF). In other words, no accurate portrayals of war will be permitted; if carnage and the killing of civilians is portrayed it must be depicted so as to suggest it is justified in that it is part of a higher cause, or "accidental," leading to the concept of "collateral damage," or retaliatory in which case blame can be placed on the victims rather than the perpetrators (see *Uncommon Valor*, *Rules of Engagement* and *Black Hawk Down* for classic and disturbing examples).

<sup>71</sup> Tom Englehardt, "Collateral Damage." The concept of "collateral damage" is a peculiar euphemism for killing civilians. If person X disembowels and chops off the head of person Y one would not typically say "person X has damaged person Y," but "person X has murdered person Y." No sane person would claim that those killed in the 9/11 attacks were simply "damaged," and if they did we would note the depravity of the concept. That we are able to so easily employ the term to our victims suggests a profound level of demoralization and dehumanization at work in our culture of militarism. "Damage" is something typically done to buildings or structures, for example, "rain damage," or "wind damage." "Damage" in the instance of "collateral damage" also suggests that it is "bad for us," bad for our "structure of militarism," for example, it is "bad" if people learn that we are massacring civilians, hence the need for "damage control." "Collateral" suggests something of a secondary nature, hence of secondary importance, lower in the hierarchy of importance, outside the primary cause and effect. But we know that in modern war since WWII, and increasing since, the primary victims of US military violence are civilians and most are killed by US air strikes. So, civilians are not the secondary effect of US bombing they are the primary effect. "Collateral" doesn't easily translate to "criminal," but it should. The real "collateral" effect of US military aggression is US soldiers killed. "Collateral Damage" does serve a pedagogical effect, captured by a high-ranking anonymous Pentagon official speaking to the *New York Times* who said, regarding the large number of civilians killed in the US attack on Fallujah, "the locals...have to make a decision," in effect, support the US effort, stop supporting the resistance, or "suffer the consequences that come with [not supporting the US]." So, killing civilians is part of a pedagogical package to compel people to support the US attack or "suffer the consequences." Since resistance to illegal military occupation is legal, killing people for supporting that resistance further raises serious questions about the legality of US operations, to say the least. In the standard literature, the use of force or the threat of the use of force to intimidate or coerce a civilian population is called "terrorism." "State terrorism," is the inevitable result of an occupying army fighting a resistance supported by the population. Mark Mazzetti reports in the *NYT*, June 4, 2006, the effect: "... American troops have come to see the population itself as the enemy." The killing and terrorizing of civilians for the purpose of undermining resistance is captured clearly by Colombian peasant farmers: "they empty the pond [the population] to catch the fish ['insurgents']." Films such as *Rules of Engagement* and *Black Hawk Down*, among many others, work to legitimate this form of state terrorism in the public mind.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Turley, "Foreword," *Operation Hollywood*, p. 21. That the Pentagon will produce propaganda is, of course, not new. The Reagan Administration's "Office of Public Diplomacy," under the command of Otto Reich, in collaboration with CIA propagandists and Army psy-ops specialists, engaged in the production of propaganda [in "enemy territory," i.e. in public space], often hoaxes, in support of the US attack on Nicaragua in the 1980s. The "White Propaganda" included the placement of false information in newspapers as well as op-ed pieces in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*, as well as pieces for television news programs. The goals were to intimidate and silence journalists and news outlets, including *NPR*, who offered dissenting views or insufficiently positive views of administration



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Central America policies, scare the public into believing the Sandinistas were about the attack the US, influence Congress to support funding for the murderous Contras, and paint the Contras as “freedom fighters,” rather than the mass killers they were. The US Comptroller General reported that Reich’s office “engaged in prohibited, covert propaganda activities.”<sup>72</sup> In the current attack on and occupation of Iraq the “Arab street,” is outraged. Rather than change the policies that are stimulating the growing anti-American sentiment, the Bush Administration launched a new position “The Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy,” i.e. a new propaganda wing serving Pentagon interests, under the direction of Madison Avenue advertising executive Charlotte Beers, once called “the most powerful woman in advertising,” and famous for marketing “Uncle Ben’s Rice.” This project, and other “public diplomacy” projects such as “Hi” magazine, failed for an obvious reason: even the best propaganda cannot deny the reality people are living. For extensive documentation see the National Security Archive, a DC-based nonprofit (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB40/>). Also see, Jeff Cohen, “The Return of Otto Reich: Will Government Propagandist Join Bush Administration?” *FAIR*, June 8, 2001, online at: <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2446>

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in the UN press release, “Address by Carla Del Ponte, Prosecutor of the ICTY, at the International Conference, Sarajevo, May 5, 2006,” online at: <http://www.un.org/icty/pressreal/2006/speech/cdp-060505e.htm>

<sup>74</sup> Richard Falk, “Resisting the global Domination Project: An Interview with Richard Falk,”

<sup>75</sup> Gerard Huiskamp, “*Minority Report* on the Bush Doctrine,”

<sup>76</sup> Project for a New American Century, online at:

[www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf](http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism*, (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004), p. 44

<sup>78</sup> John Steinbrunner and Nancy Gallagher, “An Alternative Vision of Global Security,” *Daedalus*, Summer, 2004, p. 99

<sup>79</sup> The phrase, as noted, “influence machine” is from a phone conversation with Phil Strub, Pentagon liaison with Hollywood, in which he was responding to a question about the power of films to shape the public mind.

<sup>80</sup> The general overview of the history of militarized films demonstrates a consistency in many of the patterns found in these five particular films.

<sup>81</sup> Vivian Sobchack cited in David McKinney, “Violence: The Strong and the Weak.” *Film Quarterly* 46.4 (Summer 1993), 16-22

<sup>82</sup> Susan Jeffords, quoted in Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, (New York: Random House, 1994), p. 346

## **CHAPTER 2 NOTES**

<sup>83</sup> Here paraphrasing *Partners in Health* “The Drug War In Perspective,” in *Dying for Growth*, (Monroe, MN: Common Courage Press, 2000).

<sup>84</sup> Michael Ratner, “Building post 9/11 Security,” *HumanRightsNow.org*, online at:

<http://www.humanrightsnow.org/permanentwar.htm>. Ratner points out that the US culture of militarism, deeply embedded in policy and planning, after 9/11, compelled the US to respond with war, a bypassing of international institutions thus violating international law in essentially unilateral attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and to “refuse to examine the root causes of war and terror, and its own role in those causes.”

<sup>85</sup> Henry Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 92

<sup>86</sup> Because of the rapid expansion in and presence of media information and formations, cyberspace and information technologies, as well as the continuing concentrations of power in these arenas, it appears increasingly important to not only understand public pedagogy but to work to unravel the intensifying control of the public mind as a result of the growing concentration of media power.

<sup>87</sup> Raymond Williams, *Communications*, p. 14

<sup>88</sup> Roger Simon, “*Teaching Against the Grain*,” (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1992), p. 57

<sup>89</sup> Gabriel Kolko, “The Age of War: the US Confront the World,” (London: Lynn Reinner, 2006), p. 1

<sup>90</sup> Douglas Kellner, “Film, Politics, and Ideology,” online at: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner)

<sup>91</sup> Here one would not wish to be too cavalier. Imagining a future different from the present can have the negative consequences of distancing us from action in the present that might bring about that which is imagined. In that sense, imagination can provide “what is?” a form of protection against what “should be.” Ideas have the potential to rob energies and time from actions necessary to realize the ideas. In addition, they are typically much safer for one is much less likely to have one’s blood spilled in the seminar room than in the streets. The satisfaction of fantasy can work to undermine the frequently unsatisfactory daily

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struggles against power. Imagination can quell passion as much as stimulate it. Most important, fantasy can produce a masturbatory quality that undermines the mutually fulfilling social interactions and actions necessary for challenging, in the present case, the powerful culture of militarism. Perhaps a surer way to stir the passions, at least those of discontent, is to take a dispassionate look at the state of things.

<sup>92</sup> Equally difficult is to imagine what the world we imagine in our minds (a future world) would really be like. This points to a number of contradictions in what is often referred to as Utopian thinking.

<sup>93</sup> This pattern continues to play itself out in Iraq in 2006. A UN report on civilian casualties in Iraq over the first six months of 2006 notes “Civilians are reported to be severely affected by heavy MNF [i.e. US] bombing.” See Marjorie Cohn, “As Yesterday’s War Still Rages...Bush’s Enemy *du jour*,” July 31, 2006, online at: [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)

<sup>94</sup> A CPPFM, it might be argued, should operate on the assumption “there are no bad people, only bad ideas and bad institutions.” One does not want to be a reductionist on such views, but from a first level of approximation the statement seems true, or at least true enough, to provide one with a continuing sense of hope and possibility because we know we can alter ideas and change institutions.

<sup>95</sup> Perhaps an analogy will help to clarify the point of linking facts and values and how they might drive a different set of ideas and actions. A CEO reporting to a stockholder’s meeting will present certain facts that are in accord with the sets of values most people bring to the room. The facts will be around profits, stock options, losses and growth, new developments in the company that will improve market shares, profit projections, investment opportunities, etc. The values, in general, will include greed, selfishness, domination, aggressiveness, rivalry, exploitation, avarice, etc. Absent from the facts will be how much the company polluted rivers, soil and air, how much cancer may have developed because of company pursuits, how many workers lived in poverty, how many workers were killed by death squads mobilized to destroy unions, how corrupt the bookkeeping was, how poor working conditions were in the sweat shops, etc. Herein, institutional prerogatives drive the values and facts present in the room and are not easily overcome because the structure puts constraints on developing new values and exploring (or, if explored, reporting) new facts. Here, the interests of the corporation (an abstraction), supersedes the interest of humanity (material). Suppose the CEO undergoes an ideological transformation of sort, or develops a new curiosity about the human facts surrounding the pursuit of corporate profits. For example, suppose the CEO suddenly takes seriously a call to bring into public spaces a set of values reflecting a generosity of spirit, respect for others, openness to the possibility of peace, fairness and social justice, a willingness to change, tolerance (but not the sort that allows us to tolerate the intolerable), humility that recognizes that every human life matters, persistence in a struggle for social justice, refusal to accept fatalistic or fundamentalist ideas, openness to change, a spirit of hope, and a disposition of joy. Alone this might merely stimulate a more joyful presentation of the enormous profits earned and lead to a gala celebration among stockholders who appreciate the generous handouts, continue to see unions as intolerable, see willingness to change linked only to changes that increase market share, and see fatalism linked to anyone who suggests that even greater profits are not possible next year and the next year, etc. Context shapes values, but, so also do facts. Suppose the CEO linked the transformed set of values to a new set of facts about exploitation, repression, environmental destruction, murder, disease, misery, suffering, despair, etc. Even within the institutional constraints it is possible that the facts will transform the interpretation of the values, and the new sense of values will in turn motivate a new desire for understanding. In short, facts can motivate values and values can motivate facts. Of course, transformatory impact will depend on what kinds of facts and values are presented, how they are presented, to whom they are presented, and the histories, politics and institutions within which they are presented. New facts without new values can easily lead to a simple “blame it on the victims” response. New values with new facts can lead to a simple “feel good” attitude. It is not that we shouldn’t feel good but we should also learn to feel bad about what we do which in the end can help us feel even better if the feeling bad (a value) is linked to knowledge and understanding of facts, analysis of conditions, and strategies and actions to overcome the conditions that make us feel bad in the first place.

<sup>96</sup> Stuart Hall, “Race, Culture and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies.” *Rethinking Marxism* 5: 10-18

<sup>97</sup> Henry Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture*

<sup>98</sup> Henry Giroux, “Take Back Higher Education,” p. 90

<sup>99</sup> Henry Giroux and Roger Simon, *Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday Life*. (New York: Westport, 1995)

<sup>100</sup> Stuart Hall, op-cit

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, “Bringin’ it all Back Home: Pedagogy and Cultural Studies,” in *Between Borders*, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (eds.), (New York: Routledge, 1994), Introduction

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- <sup>102</sup> Henry Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education*, p. 99
- <sup>103</sup> Douglas Kellner, "Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle,"
- <sup>104</sup> Henry Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education*, p. 110-118
- <sup>105</sup> Roger Simon, "Broadening the Vision of University-Based Study of Education: The Contribution of Cultural Studies," in *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 12: 1 (1995), p. 9
- <sup>106</sup> David Trend, "Nationalities, Pedagogies, and Media," p. 238
- <sup>107</sup> Truth does not always reside in what we see, or in what we believe, in fact, there is always more outside the frame, as evidenced by the representation of the tearing down of the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad. Different interpretations will accrue depending on how much one sees inside and outside the frame, what legal, political and historical knowledge one brings to the presentation, what one wants to believe in the presentation, whether or not one accepts the "reality" of the images, whether or not one asks questions about who is tearing down the statue, how one feels about authority and power and who or who does not wield it, whether or not one has access to alternative views and narrations of the event, whether or not one accepts or denounces the US invasion and occupation, whether one is an Iraqi resistance fighter or an Iraqi servant of the US, etc. In short, film literacy requires a commitment to understanding the complexities, extending the frame of reference, and that carries with it "an implicit...argument for developing new approaches to teaching and learning." See, David Buckingham, "Teaching About the Media," in *The Media Studies Book*, David Lusted, (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 33
- <sup>108</sup> Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism*, p. 44
- <sup>109</sup> Stephen Prince, *Visions of Empire*, (New York: Praeger, 1992), pp. 1, 3, 191
- <sup>110</sup> Robin Wood, *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 1-9
- <sup>111</sup> Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica*, (Bloomington: Indiana, 1988)
- <sup>112</sup> Carl Boggs, *Imperial Delusions: American Militarism and Endless War*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).
- <sup>113</sup> Tom Pollard, "The Hollywood War Machine," in Carl Boggs, editor, *Masters of War*, (New York: Routledge, 2003). Pollard was writing in 2004. What is and is not politically correct in Hollywood may shift slightly given the debacle of Iraq and growing public opposition. To protect against current imbroglios, Pollard argues, Hollywood may rely on "frantically invoking past military glories and victories in order to legitimate the present one."
- <sup>114</sup> James Snead, *White Screens/Black Images* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 131, 142
- <sup>115</sup> See Frida Berrigan, "Seeing [Pentagon] Stars," August 1, 2006, online at: <http://www.tomdispatch.com/>. The United States exported close to \$10.5 billion in film and television in 2004. Film and television are two of the largest US exports. If it is true that a country "is what it exports," this tells us much about US culture. More importantly, in 2005 the US exported more than \$18.5 billion in attack helicopters, tanks, jet fighters, missiles, and other weaponry. 2006 is already adding up to surpass 2005, a foreboding tendency given the increasing violence and warfare in the world, a tendency that is not unlinked from the increasing violence and warfare. In short, the more war the more weapons; the more weapons the more war. US weapons exports account for more than half of the reported world total, \$35 billion. Berrigan wonders what US culture would be like if the CEOs of our major weapons manufacturers and the high ranking Pentagon officials who open up weapon sales doors around the world, were given the same kind of publicity as celebrities in Hollywood? We know much about Brad and Jennifer but little about Jeffrey Kohler and Robert Joseph. Kurdish children in southern Turkey are malnourished and often illiterate but they know two words quite well: "Cobra" and "Blackhawk," i.e. US attack helicopters sold to Turkey and used to bomb and strafe Kurds. Selling weapons produces strange arrangements and rip-offs of the public. Poland purchased \$3.5 billion in US weapons, but only after a promise of \$6.3 billion in US taxpayer money to build in Poland, among other things, a Lockheed-Martin weapons plant. The US sold 36 F-16's to Pakistan. India was upset, so the US offered 126 jet fighters to India. Now, Pakistan is upset...and so it goes. There is always a "crisis in the Middle-East," and the current one is threatening to spiral out of control in a region already rich in US weapons. The US response? Speed new weapons to Israel, and sell \$6 billion in weapons to Saudi Arabia. Everyone is happy, except those starving for lack of food and those dying from lack of peace. Jeffrey Kohler is the Director of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency at the Pentagon. In other words, he works to sell offensive weapons around the world. Robert Joseph is Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security. In other words, he works to promote offensive weapons and military technology that undermine global security. In a culture of celebrity and militarism is it surprising that these "weapons celebrities" are largely unknown?

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<sup>116</sup> Henry Giroux, "Private Satisfactions and Public Disorders: *Fight Club*, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence," *Henry Giroux Online Articles*, online at: [http://www.henrygiroux.com/online\\_articles/fight\\_club.htm](http://www.henrygiroux.com/online_articles/fight_club.htm)

<sup>117</sup> Brian Goldfarb, *Visual Pedagogy*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p.7

<sup>118</sup> For example, if someone interpreted *Man on Fire* to be a film about Eskimos building canoes we would note it was inappropriate to the conditions.

<sup>119</sup> One general feature of language and interpretation is that though we are generally free to express different ideas we operate within the domain of the appropriate to the situation; it seems to be a feature of articulated structures. Few people would talk about "Gone with the Wind" as a film about space travel; or "Rambo" as a film about Eskimo's building igloos, even if the viewer of the first film was an astronaut and the second film and Eskimo who lived in an igloo.

<sup>120</sup> Goldfarb, *Visual Pedagogy*, p. 7

<sup>121</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People*, (New York: New Press, 1998), p. 295. While Hobsbawm is writing about the ways in which both "the old world and the new" were transformed in the process of colonization, his notion of mutual transformation is important for understanding the relationship between films and audiences, and what they each bring to and take from one another.

<sup>122</sup> Even a cursory examination of the coverage of the Israeli aggression against Lebanon reveals to what lengths US and Israeli propaganda will go to plant in the public mind the idea that aggression is really only "self-defense." See especially *The New York Times*.

<sup>123</sup> Josh Tyrangiel, "So, You Ever Kill Anybody?" *TIME*, November 21, 2005, p. 135

<sup>124</sup> Stone says "it's not the filmmaker's fault that society is where it is. The filmmaker does his best to reflect society the way he sees it. And our society is in a very violent and bankrupt mode." Quoted in Jane Caputi, "Small Ceremonies," in *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media*, ed. Christopher Sharrett, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 1999. When asked by Matthew Sweet in *The London Independent* if he intended to make the audience feel outraged by *Rules of Engagement*, Friedkin testily suggested that audience response is not his burden but a burden the audience must bear without any intention or responsibility from the director. "I can't **determine** what an audience's reaction will be. And believe me, it varies." Sweet then suggested that Friedkin must, when directing a film, make attempts at maneuvering the audience in a particular moral or political direction. "Not at all. I don't make a judgment about the characters, in this film or any film that I've made. In fact, I work very hard to achieve a lack of judgment. Matthew Sweet, "Movie Targets." Stone, however, seems to miss a number of crucial points in his comments. Those points are highly relevant to the critical analysis of films and to an understanding of the pedagogical power of films to shape culture and society, and potentially aid in transforming it.

**First**, films, regardless of the director's intent, never only reflect culture and society, they project back into culture and society in ways that may re-inscribe or reinvent the culture and society. (*This dialectical relationship between the culture of violence, films of violence, producers of films of violence, and audiences for violent films is extremely complex for there are no homogeneous categories or groupings either between or within categories as evidenced by the multiplicity of forms of violence in the culture (economic, social, personal, physical, emotional, gender, racial, health, police, etc.) to the vast array of films - including films that are violent for what they present, and films that are violent for what they do not present but should present - to the complicated process of production that includes investors, writers, directors, actors, distributors, advertisers, critics, marketers, reviewers, etc., to audiences who can be seen as individuals or groups, both of which vary in a multitude of different ways*). One might imagine viewing and reflecting upon the "imperial" scene in *Mystic River*, or the massacre scene in *Rules of Engagement*, or the torture scenes in *Man on Fire*, in a country that is threatened by US violence, and consider how the cultural formations of both US society and the potential victim's society impact the reading of the film. Film's are, regardless of the intent or opinion of the director, political, and what Henry Giroux calls "teaching machines," that condition identities, allegiances, aspirations, values, goals, beliefs, attitudes, consumption patterns, etc. (*Gramsci's notion comes to mind that "everything is political, for everything is based on human activities within the context of society. Nothing human can happen apart from politics, not even art."*). In a "winner take all" culture, we might ask what impact identifications with King Jimmy in *Mystic River*, or Childers in *Rules of Engagement*, or Creasy in *Man on Fire*, have on viewers who consider themselves societal "winners" as opposed to "societal losers," "victims" rather than "victimizers," or how the setting of each film might be impacted by the class identification of the audience. In addition, we might ask how, in a "winner take all" society, *Mystic River's* "imperial" finale, *Man on Fire's* torture and murder extravaganza, *Rules of Engagement's* massacre scene, *Tears of the Sun's* fire bombing of Nigerians, or *Black Hawk Down's* strafing of Somalis, work to produce allegiances to a national consciousness of



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domination in the midst of US pursuits of “grand imperial strategies.” Films, viewed in theatres by millions of people as part of a national mass spectacle (and millions more on video and DVD), are extremely powerful “pedagogical devices” for projecting and inculcating cultural common sense and shaping, or manipulating, mass consciousness. Measuring the effects of these projections, the multiplicity of ways in which influences flow one into the other (society into film/film into society; identification into experience/experience into identification; representation into culture/culture into representation; politics into film pedagogy/film pedagogy into politics), and what is learned from the “teaching machines” is difficult, to say the least. But it is clear that film and film audiences both shape and are shaped by the culture in complex and interpenetrating ways that mutually influence one another; and, it is clear that the shaping and conditioning is done within the limitations and possibilities of a hegemonic domination over the socializing institutions of society by powerful corporate, political and military formations. And surely those who invest in, write, direct, act in, distribute, advertise, criticize, review, market, and view films are reflecting and projecting multiple and powerfully hegemonic social formations and inculcations including economic, political, ideological, cultural, militaristic, and historical categories, etc.

**Second**, implicit in Stone’s comments is the notion that responsibility for the filmmaker ends with reflecting what is, i.e., holding up the mirror to society, with no further responsibility to critique, instruct, inform, politicize, awaken, challenge, ethicize and transform. In this mistaken sense, the filmmaker is merely a spectator on reality, and thus, the film viewer is merely a spectator of the spectator doubly detached from reality. But we already know that films, as teaching machines, instruct, inform, imbue, politicize, shape, etc., and they do so within sets of social, cultural and economic circumstances and political understandings that condition the conditioning. What vengeful films such as *Mystic River*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Man on Fire* “teach” to a culture that has been victimized by 9-11 violence and has responded to that violence by lashing out into the world with violence, especially when the films explore to some degree our pain and suffering, but then settle on a notion of the inevitability of violence in response? The crucial questions become, in whose interest is the instruction, the politicization, the pedagogy carried out, and in what ways do, or can, film, or critical film analysis, open up possibilities for new discourses that would assist in rethinking culture, militarism and politics? If the filmmaker’s intention is to reflect only what is, i.e. a descriptive role rather than a normative role, and the filmmaker is convinced that society is “violent and bankrupt,” the filmmaker is projecting violence and bankruptcy back into a culture of violence and bankruptcy and providing the audience no tools or options for rethinking or imagining beyond what is into what could be. This is an inherently conservative approach to filmmaking in that it is always in the interest of the rulers to ensure that various cultural pedagogical devices: (1) reproduce and re-inscribe what is; (2) prevent the ruled from understanding how what is got to be the way it is, an understanding that could provide a foundation for understanding that things are the way they are because they got that way not because they have to be that way; and (3) prevent the ruled from imagining what could be as an alternative to what is that could provide a foundation for transforming what is into what could be.

It is along these lines that we would argue that the films under review, are conservative, even reactionary, films, despite possible radical cracks and fissures in their representations. Any film, any cultural apparatus, that shuts down hope for alternatives lays the groundwork for despair; any shutting down of possibility beyond what is lays the groundwork for surrender to what is thus canceling the potential for transforming what is into what could be and guaranteeing a reproducing of what is. Brecht offered an expanded role and responsibility for the artist in suggesting that the role of the artist is not only to reflect, but to reshape, and, unstated by Brecht, but implied, to transform in ways that increase human well being and ameliorate human pain and suffering. (*The source of the Brecht quote “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a tool with which to reshape it.” is disputed. Trotsky, in “Literature and Revolution” introduces a similar theme: “Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes. But at present even the handling of a hammer is taught with the help of a mirror...”*). In order to carry out this responsibility it is important to move beyond the personal visions of the filmmaker (a vision that is never only personal but already conditioned by history, politics, economics, culture, etc.), or the personal reflections of the viewer (reflections that are never only personal but already conditioned by history, politics, economics, culture, etc.) into broader cultural and political questions of a general and particular nature.

<sup>125</sup> Henry Giroux, *Abandoned Generation*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001), p. 78

<sup>126</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004), p. 17

<sup>127</sup> Freidkin may disagree, but indifference is a political position. If I claim indifference to your suffering, it is not a non-position; it is my position regarding what I will do about it: i.e. nothing, and that means I support the conditions of your suffering.

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<sup>128</sup> See Ann Scott Tyson, "Ability to Wage 'Long War' Is Key To Pentagon Plan," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2006, p. A1. The 'long war' is part of a 20 year US "defense" strategy that involves US military deployments to dozens of countries across the globe.

<sup>129</sup> See virtually any speech given by George W. Bush since 9/11 at: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

<sup>130</sup> This "insight" is based on a conversation with a number of high school students after a public screening of *Sin City*, a deeply cynical, misogynistic and misanthropic gore fest, in which several young women found the film to be "empowering for women." When asked "why," they replied, "because most of the women carried guns, and they were not afraid to use them." Ouch.

<sup>131</sup> Paul Gilroy has argued that militarization is the core of fascist values and aesthetics and that fascism's designs are most persuasively expressed and inculcated in the interpenetrating spaces of politics and entertainment. In short, fascism's public pedagogies are seen most often in the mutually nourishing forces of politics and entertainment.

### **CHAPTER 3 NOTES**

<sup>132</sup> Ardant du Picq, *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern*, Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing, 1947, p. 110.

<sup>133</sup> Danny Schechter, "Pattern recognition in the Bush Media Era," *Mediachannel.org*, June 16, 2006. Nazi propagandist Heinrich Himmler noted that the Big Lie was more impacting on the public mind than the small lie, and most important of all was the constant repetition of "the lie" to engineer the public mind. Danny Schechter explains it by noting, "repetition of key phrases and message points [and images] is essential to influencing public opinion," and shaping public memory. Bush clarifies this in his statement. The two key components are: (1) the creating of illusions/inventing of reality/"BIG" lying; and, (2) repetition in order to inculcate the proper values, attitudes, perceptions, allegiances, behaviors, myths, identities, identifications, etc. to ensure that the public remains either subservient and obedient to power, thus serving and servicing power's interests, or simply distracted, unobtrusive and perhaps confused. Still, as a caveat, one should note that films produced within the US culture of militarism, though expressive, and frequently embodiments or reflections, of the social, political and economic frameworks and currents in which they are produced, are not necessarily reducible to, or perfectly correlated with, those frameworks because of the refractive complexity of the collective cultural landscape in which films circulate. We should note that when discussing films from a critical pedagogy perspective it is not only about what the films, as "teaching machines" teach and what audiences learn from the film, it is also crucially about what we can teach and learn from the films by locating the films in a larger set of discourses around other films, culture, economics, politics, history, etc. For example, a film like "*Rules of Engagement*" which is a flat out Hollywood endorsement of US war crimes, may be attempting to legitimate US military aggression and criminality, but one would not want to take the film up in any way that endorses that theme. So, one could use it as an opening to talk about the history of US war crimes, international law, hyper-masculinity in films and culture, anti-Arab racism not only in the film but in US culture, why so many US films seem to endorse US military aggression, the concept of universality (how would we look at a film in which foreign soldiers were massacring our friends, family members and neighbors?), etc. So, films are not hegemonic in their projections, but cultural sites for dialogue, discussion, disruption, critique, and historical understanding. If the goal is to develop a transformational pedagogy, a question would be "how can we use popular culture's productions to advance the cause of social, political, economic and cultural justice?" Douglas Kellner's notion of "diagnostic critique" intimates such an approach.

<sup>134</sup> State Department Planner George Kennan, in PPS 23, 1948 (declassified 1975), quoted in Richard Manning, "The Oil We Eat," *Harper's Magazine*, February 2004, online at: <http://www.harpers.org/TheOilWeEat.html>

<sup>135</sup> For example, Dwight Eisenhower noted "The true mission of American sports is to prepare young men for war." Recent comments by American soccer star Eddie Johnson prior to the World Cup further solidify the link. Johnson said "We're here for war...it's like you do or die, it's survival of the fittest over ninety minutes-plus... We're going to go out there and do whatever we've got to do...do the [illegal] things when the referee is not looking." Team USA's most visible fan club calls itself "Sam's Army," (i.e. Uncle Sam). A visit to its website will reveal just how militarized sports can become, especially it is internationalized. The site is filled with war images, martial music and jingoist anthems. If one did not look carefully one might assume it is a military site.

<sup>136</sup> Tom Pollard, "The Hollywood War Machine," in Carl Boggs, ed., *Master of War*, (New York: Routledge, 2003). P. 311

<sup>137</sup> Pollard, "The Hollywood War Machine," p.329

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<sup>138</sup> For example, in Sam Peckinpah's gritty, male-bonding, special-forces style, blood-drenched, hyper-violent *The Wild Bunch*, "the strong group ties that develop in combat," "loyalty to one's buddies," "unit cohesion," the slaughter of hundreds of mostly faceless victims, and the ideologies of "liberation, freedom and democracy," (See Leonard Wong, Thomas Kolditz, Raymond Millen, Terrence Potter, "Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War," *Small Wars Journal, US Army War College*, July 2003, online at: [www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/wong.pdf](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/wong.pdf)) that frequently serve as motivating factors for military action in combat films and Pentagon catapaulted propaganda, are coded within the guise of a Western in which a small group of six courageous men led by an aging and wounded "veteran" played by William Holden risk their lives against seemingly insurmountable odds and engage in mass slaughter in order to hijack munitions for Pancho Villa's revolutionary cause in Mexico. The stoic heroism, the fighting for each other, the unflinching courage under fire from numerous and depraved enemies, and the sacrificing for higher moral concepts, i.e. "freedom," so often evidenced in combat films, are narrative elements that drive the film forward. In the scenes of mass death "nobody really dies" because in the mind of the audience, as Roger Ebert points out, the scenes are not really death scenes "for [in US cinema] death comes to individuals, not crowds." In US cinematic representations of military violence it is we who are individuals and they who are faceless crowds, hence we who die and we who suffer. The victims are relegated to the category of non-being and their elimination is a peculiar form of US cultural paranoia intent on erasing that which might infiltrate our purity and remind us that those we exterminate are as close to us in many respects as we are to ourselves and our desires. The absence of being-ness in the depiction of US victims in US cinema prevents the victim's humanness from spawning and thus reminding us of the unspeakable inhumanity of our own humanity. In short, Ebert intimates, these are scenes of nihilistic power, domination and determination, and what is determined is the God-like power to decide who lives and who dies, who is a worthy and unworthy victim. In the Manichean world of militarized films and culture, it is "we," the subjects, who live, and "they," the objects, who die, and thus it is we who are the "powerful," protected and godlike who all too easily and willingly carry out wholesale slaughter, and they who are the powerless, demonic, slaughtered...and forgotten. In short, we are present and they are absent as fully human. Therein is revealed one of the dangers of the film pedagogy of militarized mass killing. It not only glorifies violent power and political domination and robs us of our full humanity by hiding our inhumanity to others, but it also morally distances the audience from the horror, pain and suffering of mass killing. As a consequence it dehumanizes both the audience and the victims of real mass violence that too often remain faceless in the course of US mass bombing and obliteration, invisible in dominant media reporting, and therefore don't really die (i.e. not really "killed") in the consciousness of the "audience." In other words, their absence gives them a presence that hides their real absence, and the representation allows the audience to assume the "best" about what "we" do. There is a triple death of the victims, real, fictional and historical, because the fictional is never entirely removed from the real and neither is entirely removed from the historical. The ultimate pedagogical task we face, however, is not to produce films that depict the pain, suffering, death and inhumanity of military aggression and violence (otherwise we may simply learn to sentimentally gloat over our limited awareness of the suffering of others, as though merely knowing – always partially an abstraction - is enough to stop it), but to abolish the conditions, systems and institutions that promote, purvey and perpetrate the horrific violence that causes the pain, suffering, mutilation, inhumanity and death.

<sup>139</sup> James Castonquay, "The Spanish-American War in United States Media Culture," *Hypertext Scholarship in American Studies*, online at: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/aq/>>. This anti-bureaucratic, anti-government stance produces a potentially complicated reaction in the audience: on the one hand it rightly teaches people to question authority and to some extent the institutional structures involved in warmongering, but, on the other hand it creates a heightened sense of support for those who are carrying out the orders of the institutions. In short, it attacks the injustice of bureaucrats, but not the injustice of military aggression. Because of the tendency to want to support "the Home Team," the portrayed lack of support coming from the bureaucracy can actually work to increase support for US military aggression and violence because the public typically only sees the US military as represented by "the troops," rather than the monstrous Pentagon/Corporate/Congressional complex that uses the military as the "iron fist" to protect power, wealth and privilege.

<sup>140</sup> See Andrew Kelly, "The Greatness and Continuing Significance of *All Quiet on the Western Front*," Robert Eberwein, editor, *The War Film*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 23-29.

<sup>141</sup> H. Barnes in *Herald Tribune*, quoted in "War Without Glamour on the Film," *Literary Digest*, 105, May 17, 1930, p. 20. It should be noted that within the films the audience is still left with the impression that war, as ugly as it is, is still inevitable. The horrors of war are not matched by lessons in struggles for peace.

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The bitterness these films represent demonstrate a defeatist and hopes less attitude driven by cynicism. Anger and outrage over violence expresses itself as bitterness when there are a lack of mechanisms for the public to channel the outrage and anger in forms that promote creative democratic public participation with the possibility of social transformations. New facts often generate new values, just as new values often generate new facts, but the pedagogical work must be done to ensure that the new facts and values gain expression through oppositional and alternative social structures the provide the public with a voice and mechanisms for individual and social agency.

<sup>142</sup> Whale's film, based on the sequel to Remarque's novel "All Quiet on the Western Front," contains a scene in which the few remaining soldiers from a devastated company line up and are joined by the ghosts of their fallen comrades. In *All Quiet* the film ends with most of the soldiers dead while their specters march off into the distance but not before looking directly into the eyes of the audience and accusing the audience of sending them to their awful and slaughterous fate. Whale's 1937 film was controversial because it contained attacks against the Nazi regime, portraying them as warmongers and doctrinaire, while showing the world through the pessimistic eyes of the main character who is disgusted to discover that the societies that carried out the carnage of WWI had changed little and were again preparing for slaughter. The book upon which the film is based was banned under Nazi rule in Germany. The Nazi government threatened "Universal Pictures" with a boycott of all of their films unless the anti-Nazi sentiment was filtered. Much to the chagrin of Whale the studio succumbed to Nazi pressure (at a time when it was clear that the Nazis were already carrying out mass killing and imprisonment of dissidents, Jews, leftists, union organizers, etc.), allowing profits to trump integrity, and heavily edited the film before its release. In *J'accuse* (1919) the dead rise and plead for any justification for their harrowing deaths. As is often the case, little justification can be offered. *Homecoming* (2005) is a zombie film in which US soldiers killed in Iraq rise up to challenge the current administration. Missing from the entire film are Iraqis. The film sadly falls into the "war is bad for us" category, and thus lowers the moral power it might have had.

<sup>143</sup> Andrew Kelly, "The Greatness and Continuing Significance of *All Quiet on the Western Front*," in Robert Ederwein, editor, *The War Film*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>144</sup> Phil Strub in the video *The Military in the Movies*, (Washington: Center for Defense Information, 1997)

<sup>145</sup> For example, if Iraq annexed New York in 2002 and claimed it as Iraqi territory would we bomb, torture and kill the residents simply because they were now Iraqis; would we hate them and consider them terrorists? Or, if the entire populations of Pennsylvania and Illinois, approximately the same total as Iraq's 2003 population, were moved to Iraq in early March of 2003 and the entire population of Iraq was placed in Pennsylvania and Illinois at the same time, would we bomb and kill those now inhabiting Iraq or would we bomb and kill those now inhabiting PA and IL, or would we not bomb at all? Are the people moved to Iraq from PA and IL any more or less human because they have been moved? Are the Iraqis any more or less human because they have been moved? Should the human rights of all of these people be any more or less valued because they have been moved? The film points to a conflict present in the two founding documents of modern international law: The UN Charter, which protects the rights of states (abstractions), and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which protects the rights of flesh and blood individuals. It is revealing that the United States essentially dismisses both documents, except as the rights apply to particular sets of US interests. The classic US film *Joe* points to this notion within a family structure.

<sup>146</sup> A number of 1930s gangster films contained anti-war elements, especially that of the abandoned, war-damaged and forgotten veteran, including: *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1933); *They Gave Him a Gun* (1937); and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939).

<sup>147</sup> This group-heroes/rugged individualist formula consisting of an often diverse group of men engaged in a dangerous life-and-death mission driven by both rigorous teamwork and individual heroism continues to repeat itself (albeit with slight variations) in more recent films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Three Kings* (2003), *Pearl Harbor* (2002), *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), *U-571* (2000), *Tears of the Sun* (2003), *Black Hawk Down* (2002), etc.

<sup>148</sup> Strub, *The Military in the Movies*,

<sup>149</sup> Walter Chaw, DVD Review of *Guadalcanal Diary*, online at: <http://www.filmfreakcentral.net/dvdreviews/guadalcanalwing.htm>. Films such as *Behind Enemy Lines* (2002) and *The Sum of All Fears* (2002) function as fairly straightforward contemporary Pentagon recruitment posters and hi-tech weaponry advertisements.

<sup>150</sup> See Eugene Garecki's 2006 film *Why We Fight*

<sup>151</sup> See Bruce Cumings and Jon Halliday, *Korea: the Unknown War*, (New York: Pantheon, 1988); Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, (New York: Basic Books), chapter 7

<sup>152</sup> Here using the term as suggested by the Latin *propaganda fide*, i.e. "spread the faith."

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<sup>153</sup> Mark Selden, "Before the Bomb: The 'Good War,' Air Power and the Logic of Mass Destruction," *Contention*, 5,1, Fall 1995, 113-132; online at: <http://www.etext.org/Politics/Progressive.Sociologists/authors/Selden.Mark/Before-the-bomb-the-good-war-air-power-and-the-logic-of-mass-destruction.95feb>. The US Air Force Strategic Bombing Survey plausibly concluded that "probably more persons lost their lives by fire at Tokyo in a 6-hour period than at any time in the history of man." The impact of the fire bombings is captured by Japanese Doctor Kubota Shigenori: "In the black Sumida River countless bodies were floating, clothed bodies, naked bodies, all as black as charcoal. It was unreal. These were dead people, but you couldn't tell whether they were men or women. You couldn't even tell if the objects floating by were arms and legs or pieces of burnt wood." The disappearance of such horrors from war films again distances US audiences from the horrifying impact of the primary source of US violence in war, i.e. bombing attacks. Aside from its ideological impact it may reflect something of a change in the technology of war as well. The systematic targeting of civilian populations in WWII reflected both a new level of moral depravity in war and the new technological means of mass destruction. The technology not only made it possible to obliterate entire populations in a single day of bombing, but it made the killing more efficient and more sanitized. The use of air power distances the killers from the victims thus literally desensitizing the experience of mass killing (no screams are heard; no burning flesh sears the nostrils; no mutilated bodies are seen, etc.). From 30,000 feet, or in the age of cruise missiles from hundreds of miles away, the executioner does not look into the eyes of the victim, hear the pleading or weeping, and it lacks the visceral aspect of sticking a bayonet into the stomach of a fellow human, or shooting people with a gun. Furthermore, bombing from a distance makes it easier to claim that all targets are "military targets," (rather than innocent civilians as is typically the case), thus legitimating the claims that the bombings are "justified," and "for a good cause," therefore adding to the sanitizing effect. Militarized films arguably produce a similar sanitizing effect by removing from the narrative most evidence of the primary source of US violence, airpower, and the annihilated civilian populations that quiver, suffer and die in its wake.

<sup>154</sup> R.J. Rummel, "Was World War II American Urban Bombing Democide?" online at: <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/COMM.10.5.03.HTM>

<sup>155</sup> Walter Davis, in *Deaths Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche Since 9-11*, (London: Pluto, 2006), chapter 4, claims Hiroshima incinerated "600, 000 people in a second and condemned another 300, 000 to the condition of *hibakusha*, the walking dead." He discusses how killing at a distance, as is done both in techno-war and in the spectacle of the war produced by our image machines delivers us from the horror. Tibbets, who piloted the *Enola Gay* over Hiroshima said "It was all impersonal." Davis suggests that "killing at a distance is the greater evil precisely because it abrogates the image and the human connection between slayer and slain." If morality circles around human connections based in the emotionality and psychology of fear, solidarity, hate, love, anguish, support, remorse, etc., killing face to face requires that we feel or think "hate, fear, anguish, remorse," vengeful, etc., but killing at a distance, or experiencing the killing through the remove of the spectacle of cinema for example, "renders the whole thing impersonal," and thus it is arguably a de-moralized and de-moralizing event.

<sup>156</sup> When Alfred Hitchcock grayed the discourse by depicting a Nazi sub-commander in *Lifeboat* (1944) as something other than a crazed and diabolical mass murderer, i.e. a sub-commander in possession of navigation skills, command knowledge and seagoing strength, able to take command of a lifeboat filled with survivors of a torpedoed American passenger ship, he became the victim of vitriolic attacks for selling out democracy and sympathizing with Nazis. Additionally, John Huston tried to release an anti-war documentary *Let There Be Light* (1945) as part of the Pentagon supported *Why We Fight* series, in which he revealed the brutal emotional and debilitating psychological trauma suffered by soldiers as a result of their participation in war, but an angry and fearful US military censored the film by shelving it for several decades. Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), p. 283; and, James Agee, *Agee on Film*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1958), p. 236

<sup>157</sup> Reginald Thompson, British journalist, discussing the "deluge of destruction [and] absolute devastation," added "Dive bombers, tanks, and artillery blasted strong points, large or small, in town and hamlet, while troops waited at the roadside as spectators until the way was cleared for them. Few people can have suffered so terrible a liberation [as the] civilians [who] died in the rubble and ashes of their homes. See Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, chapter 9 and Eric Prokosch, *The Technology of Killing: A Military and Political History of Antipersonnel Weapons*, (London: Zed Books, 1995) chapter 2. For example, in Korea, Strategic Air Command crews served six month tours of duty in which they rained down death and destruction on people they would never see. "It took three months to destroy the Korean cities." Then the US bombed the villages. "After another month, there was nothing left worth the bomb it



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would take to blow it up.” (See Conrad Crane, *Bombs, Cities and Civilians*, (University of Kansas, 1993), Chapter 10). The bombing, often unhindered, continued for another two and 1/2 years. In one case a North Korean city, Wonsan, was under siege from the air and sea for 861 days straight. U.S Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said “I had not seen devastation until I had seen Korea. Cities...towns and villages...are completely obliterated.” (See F.J.P. Veale, *Advance to Barbarism: How the Reverse to Barbarism in Warfare and War-Trials Menaces Our Future*, (Madison: C.C. Nelson, 1953), foreword.

<sup>158</sup> Rene Cutforth, a BBC correspondent described the impact on the ground (never seen on film): “In front of us a curious figure was standing a little crouched, leg straddled, arms held out from his sides. He had no eyes, and the whole of his body, nearly all of which visible through the tatters of burned rags, was covered with a hard black crust speckled by yellow pus...He had to stand because he was no longer covered with a skin, but with a crust-like crackling which broke easily...I thought of the hundreds of villages reduced to ash that I personally had seen and realized the sort of casualty list that must be mounting up along the Korean front.” Rene Cutforth, *Manchester Guardian*, March 1, 1952, quoted in Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, (New York: The New Press, 2001), p. 130

<sup>159</sup> 20,000 US soldiers died in Korea, but the war cost the lives of up to 5 million Koreans, mostly civilians and mostly civilians killed by unrelenting, and criminal, US air and sea bombing attacks. Given the extremes of horror one assumes it took some real effort to disappear the carnage from Hollywood productions.

<sup>160</sup> In the repeated attempts to normalize behavior in war the films fail to demonstrate that the depicted behaviors are aberrations driven by aberrant conditions and should therefore not be held up to represent anything normal about human behavior other than abnormality in the face of the absurd and extreme.

<sup>161</sup> Krauthammer quoted in Eliot Cohen, “What Combat Does to Man,” *The National Interest*, December 22, 1998, online at: <http://www.highbeam.com/library/docFree.asp?DOCID=1G1:53972633>

<sup>162</sup> Vincent Canby, “Saving a Nation’s Pride of Being: The Horror and Honor of a Good War,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1998, pp. E-1. Canby fails to note that “war is [not] good again [and never is for the victims – on either side]. Convincing the public that “war is good [or necessary]” became a crucial cultural pedagogical task after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The calls for a “peace dividend” in which the Pentagon budget would be cut substantially, a seemingly common sense position, given that the major “threat” (largely invented) to the United States had disappeared, had to be countered. Films such as *Private Ryan* and the cultural apparatus that grew around it, including journal articles, books, TV commentaries and documentaries, a Special *Newsweek* supplement, the *Band of Brothers* series, promotional materials, sporting events celebrating the “Good War,” (including the “Super Bowl”), Internet groups, the *Greatest Generation* craze, etc. performed the pedagogical task of reaffirming the idea (perverse as it may be) of “good war.” Implicit in Canby’s announcement is George Bush’s proclamation after the 1991 US attack on Iraq, “we have finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome.” In other words, the public’s reluctance to support US intervention and mass killing has been buried so we can again celebrate the slaughter of war. It is important for the public to understand that such statements do not generally reflect public opinion and attitude but are employed to shape public attitude and opinion. As suggested elsewhere in the study, the public, on most issues related to “war” and aggression, is far more progressive than policy makers, hence the importance, from power’s perspective, of either shaping public opinion in the interests of power, or, less cumbersome, largely ignoring it.

<sup>163</sup> The implication in Canby’s comment is “we have overcome the Vietnam Syndrome” in which people had questions about “war.” The point should be, perhaps, that people typically have very serious questions about the legitimacy of military aggression, hence the importance of the concept of “the assumption of representation.”

<sup>164</sup> *Final Countdown*, is a literal time-warp film in which a modern US super-carrier travels through a time warping storm only to emerge one day prior to the Japanese assault on the US Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. The commander (Kirk Douglas) is confronted with the choice of whether or not to intervene to prevent the attack and in turn re-shape history. In brief, the linked lessons from the film, appropriate for the re-emergence of militarism in the post-Vietnam era, include: (1) the United States is militarily unprepared to defend itself so we better spend more through the Pentagon; (2) in order to protect ourselves and our self-esteem (damaged in Vietnam) from ominous external threats and evil enemies, we must possess an even stronger, self-protecting and more dominant military. It should also be noted that this film, and a number of others mentioned below, was released at a crucial period of challenges to US hegemony and national esteem, 1979, in which the Iranian Revolution occurred to overthrow the US backed brutal regime of the Shah; the Sandinista Revolution was carried out in Nicaragua to overthrow the murderous US backed

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Somoza dictatorship; and, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Reagan Administration, and many films, played on this to suggest that the world is a threatening place and there are many “evil doers” out to get us, therefore we need a larger military. Films over the next several years played a crucial role in linking a restoration of self-esteem with a revitalization of military prowess within a growing world of ominous threats. Because people identify with, and create identities through internalizations of national characteristics such as military power and domination, when that power and supremacy is in any way undermined (or threats are fabricated), an evisceration of individual self-esteem is not an unusual effect (something also experienced are feelings of anger or calls for restitution and atonement). (See Douglas Kellner, “Film, Politics, and Ideology,” online at: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner)).

<sup>165</sup> Robert Wilonsky, “Bora! Bora! Bora! *Pearl Harbor’s* sound and fury signify nothing,” *Houstonpress.com*, May 24, 2001, online at: <http://www.houstonpress.com/Issues/2001-05-24/film/film.html>

<sup>166</sup> In short, many of these films intimate that the ultimate good and moral life is one sacrificed to the cause of the US national interest, an interest always portrayed in abstract terms of freedom, liberation, justice, duty, honor and democracy, rather than the more material national interest based in the “economic structure existing in the United States, its requirements, and the regions of the world crucial to the satisfaction of these needs. [In brief, the] capitalist system with private ownership of the productive property of the society,” as noted early on by the *Council on Foreign Relations*. See Laurence Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust*, (New York: Monthly Review, 1977), p. 173

<sup>167</sup> The glorification of WWII continued in Autumn 2006 with Clint Eastwood’s *Flags of our Fathers*, where we are again taught that “war is hell,” hierarchies are often corrupt, and soldiers are sometimes pawns in power’s games, but in the end one is left with the general impression that the US mission is a moral one and “The Greatest Generation,” is still the greatest. A.J. Muste, revolutionary pacifist, asked a crucial question about war, and I paraphrase, i.e. “Who will teach the victors the lesson that war and violence do not pay?” Hollywood war films have yet to teach the victors that “war and violence do not pay,” in fact they have taught just the opposite, and the \$2 trillion price tag on the US aggression against Iraq demonstrates that war does pay well for those who reap the benefits uncoupled by the Grim Reaper.

<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Mostow, director of the celebratory, and history falsifying WWII submarine epic, *U-571*. *U-571*, “a morality tale for the new century” (Carl Boggs), portrays the real heroic exploits of a WWII British submarine crew’s successful detecting of Nazi secret codes as carried out by a US submarine crew. Apparently this rewriting of history was intended to suggest (falsely) to US audiences that the victory in the “good war” was primarily the result of a leading US role in defeating the Nazis. Justices at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal might beg to differ with Mostow. For example Justice Roling of the Netherlands wrote “From the Second World War above all two things are remembered: the German gas chambers and the American atomic bombings.” Justice Pal of India wrote “if any indiscriminate destruction of civilian life and property is still illegitimate in warfare, then, in the Pacific war, this decision to use the atom bomb is the only near approach to the directives...of the Nazi leaders. US Admiral Leahy suggested that the atomic bombings represented an “ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.” Quotes from Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: the Conquest Continues*, (Boston: South End Press, 1993), p. 239

<sup>169</sup> Historian Marilyn Young notes “Vietnam [became] an acid bath in which received myths [that the US stands for self-determination, freedom, and democracy] dissolved, and so presented a serious threat to the nation’s very sense of self.” In short, the integrity of the long-held national narrative was threatened. See Marilyn Young, “Dangerous History: Vietnam and the “good war.” In *History Wars*, E Linenthal and T. Engelhardt, editors, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), pp. 199-209

<sup>170</sup> This represented about 15% of the population of 38 million people. An equivalent number, using relative to population figures in the current US, would be roughly 45 million people killed, mostly by bombings. We might ask ourselves how we would look at a foreign film industry and culture that made films about such a devastating attack on us and largely disappeared the victims (us), and the main source of the slaughter, while concentrating on the pain and suffering of the aggressor (them), thus inverting victim and victimizer in the public mind. One suspects that “depraved” would be too kind. The cinematic disappearance of the victims in the US aggression against Vietnam is surely partially responsible for poll results in which US citizens estimate Vietnamese deaths at 100,000, rather than 5 million. If a similar poll was taken in Germany about the Holocaust and the median answer as to the number of Jews killed was 125,000 rather than 6 million, we might have some concerns about the public pedagogies at work in German culture, both inside and outside of classrooms.

<sup>171</sup> While experience is crucial to knowledge it does not necessarily create the kinds of knowledge one would endorse, hence the importance of critical reflection on experience, whether one’s own, or that of others. One would guess that US citizens would see the absurdity of Rambo’s position if they saw a

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German film in which a soldier, referring to his time working in an extermination camp said “who are they to protest me unless they had been there?” Of course, one does not want to moralize for there is some truth to the statement in both cases. Soldiers too are often the victims of the military machine that produces them and orders them to carry out atrocities. While the moral position for soldiers is to disobey illegal orders, not everyone is a hero, for any number of reasons, including self-protection.

<sup>172</sup> These latter lessons have been learned by every imperial power, except one, the United States, as evidenced in Hollywood’s war stories and most recently in the highly destructive catastrophe in Iraq.

<sup>173</sup> One serious but failed attempt was made during the years of the US attack to rekindle the jingoist spirit with a flat-out propaganda film designed to influence public opinion, *The Green Berets* (1968), co-directed by real-life jingoist John Wayne. A rugged and super-patriotic defender of the US aggression Colonel Kirby (Wayne) proclaims (in order to justify war crimes), “Out here due process is a bullet!” In one phrase, he captures the long-term US insistence on the rule of force above the rule of law in international engagements. The film follows the standard “good war” combat-film/Western narrative stereotypes (the Vietnamese perform the sub-human, savage, cannon-fodder role often suffered by Native Americans in Westerns while the Army Outpost is named “Dodge City” to remind the audience of the connection), filled with heroic encounters, comradely sacrifice, courage under fire, etc. The NLF is portrayed as an outside force of brutal killers who terrorize the local population rather than a group that worked with, was part of and found much support in the population. Not surprisingly the US, the aggressor, is portrayed as working with and supporting the population against the abominable NLF. The ceaseless rabidity of the NLF tends to justify the US presence, and the Vietnamese long for nothing more than to be an American. But, the public didn’t buy it. Perhaps it was because the film was too distanced from the reality the public was beginning to understand, carpet-bombing, strategic-hamlet concentration camps, free-fire zones, and thus saw through the blatant propaganda attempt. The film’s failure at the box-office closed the door on directly pro-attack Vietnam films for a number of years. The unremitting US violence in Vietnam did filter back into other US films of the late 60s, including Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* (1969), both of which might be read as allegories for the US aggression and bloodshed. The technology of mass violence in Vietnam seemed to be reflected in the way these films used new film technologies that allowed for the presentation of violence at levels more explicit than in the past. A number of directors took critical looks at Vietnam by producing films about other wars, for example: Robert Altman’s *M\*A\*S\*H*, Mike Nichol’s *Catch 22* (both 1970), and Dalton Trumbo’s *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971) use the lens of Korea, WWII and WWI to address, in a mocking, satirical, darkly absurd and sarcastic way in the former two, and a starkly grim way in the latter, Vietnam, war in general, and to irreverently undermine the stereotypical heroic war film narrative. The “catch” in *Catch-22*\* suggests that any celebration and sanctification of the barbarities of war is utterly insane and illegitimate thus challenging the propaganda function of hundreds of previous Hollywood war films as well as years of military aggression and propaganda. *Johnny* bluntly and directly suggests that war robs us completely of our humanity. \**The “catch” is that combat soldiers can appeal for a medical discharge on the grounds of insanity, but combat soldiers who recognize the insanity of combat are responding sanely therefore cannot be discharged, whereas the truly insane are those who do not recognize the insanity of combat, i.e. those who think war is sane are insane, and those who think war is insane are sane, and neither will be relieved of combat duty*

<sup>174</sup> Cimino resorts to “Yellow Peril” race stereotypes “popularized” in WWII, to portray the “enemy.” See J.W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon). The Russian Roulette scene is a total fabrication. There is no evidence that the Vietnamese ever subjected US soldiers to such treatment. The film even implies that this was a policy endorsed from the leadership. During these brutal scenes Ho Chi-Minh’s photo is prominently displayed in the background, as though Ho is overlooking, with approval, these scenes of torture.

<sup>175</sup> M. Johnson, “Jones makes impact in *Heaven*,” *Hartford Courant*, January 7, 1994, p. B.1. Johnson is here referring to Oliver Stone’s Vietnam film *Heaven and Earth*, but the statement is generally reflective of most Hollywood films on the subject of US “war.”

<sup>176</sup> Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politic*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988,) p. 203

<sup>177</sup> Unlike Conrad, who makes clear that the real heart of darkness is in Europe, then the center of Western imperialism and atrocities, and its colonial and sepulchral institutions, Coppola locates the darkness more in the human heart and psyche.

<sup>178</sup> see M.J. Bates, *The Wars We Took to Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996)



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<sup>179</sup> Oddly, the film's individualist sanctification also suggests that one reliable way to overcome ruthlessness and power-crazed authoritarian madness (Kurtz) is to become more ruthless, authoritarian, murderous and crazed (Willard) than one's intended victim (or one's enemies), a "madness" reflected in the soon to be Reagan Administration's belief in a "winnable nuclear war."

<sup>180</sup> Since one universal feature of humans is conscience the film repeats the standard practice of dehumanizing the victims. We might question whether killing in self-defense against an invading army seemingly intent on obliterating you carries with it more or less "conscience" than killing and carpet-bombing mostly innocent people in a criminal attack on a foreign land? We might consider why *Apocalypse Now* and no other US Hollywood Vietnam film ventures into the moral and political territory of this "conscience" question. That would require the unthinkable in elite Hollywood culture and US intellectual culture in general, i.e. holding up the mirror internally to see the victimizers (us) and holding up the mirror externally to see the victims (them).

<sup>181</sup> Stephen Prince, *Visions of Empire*, (New York: Praeger, 1992), p. 127

<sup>182</sup> In a world of unjust power relationships, in which most people feel somewhat victimized by power, the underdog role can play a powerful role in building audience identification and support. *Cinderella Man* (2005) demonstrates this quite clearly, in the context of a boxing film. The absurdity of presenting the US as a military underdog, given US dominance in the domain of force and violence, should, but often does not, speak for itself.

<sup>183</sup> The film remains somewhat unclear as to why Rambo is so driven to destroy: is he a psychopath; is it because of his experiences in Vietnam at the hands of the Vietnamese; is it because the US military trained him to be an effective killing machine; is it because war transmogrifies its participants; is it because of his mistreatment by the local police; or is it simply a reactionary filmic device of vengeance against what Stallone and Kotchoff believe was a non-supportive pacifist counter-culture and bureaucratic government that abused and mistreated vets when they returned from Vietnam, and undermined the support they needed while in Vietnam; some combination of all of these? An answer to these questions gets lost in the film's confusions – perhaps form is mimicking content?

<sup>184</sup> The anti-government theme played contradictory roles in this cycle of films and in Reagan Administration propaganda. On the one hand the goal was to sever confidence in and support for government programs designed to help the people, but on the other hand the goal was to generate support for a massive growth in government spending on the military. By distancing militarism from the very system of which it is a crucial part, such films attempt to use subversion of the system to promote conformity to the most violent and authoritarian part of the system.

<sup>185</sup> This functions as a sort of mantra for the Reagan years, i.e. if we are going to be committed to killing people, which we are, we must be the best at it. Therefore, we better expand the military budget.

<sup>186</sup> Lost in the celebration, and crucial for a critical pedagogy that not only asks "what do films teach" but "what can we teach and learn from films,) are questions we would obviously ask of any other country, such as, "What right does the US have to attack other countries in the first place; why should the public support mass slaughter; how wide, especially in a country that purports to be democratic, is the circle of responsibility when it comes to war crimes, etc.?"

<sup>187</sup> Of course, the unstated answer (unstated in the film) is "yes, 'again,' but this time under mythical conditions." Again missing is a crucial question for a critical examination of the film, "What right did the US have to 'win' anything from the Vietnamese?"

<sup>188</sup> The assumption that "communists" are evil and driven by some desire for world domination that will dead-level all individuality, hides a truth uttered by armed Salvadoran peasants when asked in their remote mountain village/camp in the 1980s "are you communists?" After a good deal of laughter, the response was "Are we communists? We are hungry. Our children are dying from malnutrition. Our land is being stolen. Our villages are being destroyed. We are being killed. Our future is being erased. Are we communists?" Such film portrayals of US victims, and US cultural portrayals of victims in general serve to place these questions of why people do what they do at the level of abstraction and thus hide the real conditions and circumstances that shape the ideological and material choices and decisions people make in their lives. One is reminded of Dom Helder Camara's comment "when I feed the poor they call me a saint; when I ask 'why are the poor hungry' they call me a communist." Poverty and hunger can be addressed by saintly actions of charity, thus maintaining the "heaven/earth" hierarchy, but this still maintains hunger and poverty as abstractions. To materialize the hunger and poverty is to ask for a shifting from the vertical relationship of hierarchy and abstraction to the horizontal relationship of solidarity and materiality. It is the latter that is liberatory for both victims and victimizers. Similar questions can be posed regarding militarism and aggression.

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<sup>189</sup> Cinematically we can celebrate our historical roots as “revolutionaries” in order to reinforce our counter-revolutionary contemporary policies sold to the public as support for “freedom fighters.”

<sup>190</sup> This was important especially at a time when the Reaganites were carrying out aggression to destroy the Sandinista revolution and supporting mass killers in El Salvador to undermine the FMLN.

<sup>191</sup> A militarized culture must find representative images that build identities and identifications that citizens internalize and around which people can mobilize in support of the policies of state power. Images of defeat, depravity and degeneration produced by the US attack on Vietnam produced a diminution of positive militarized images with which to individually and socially identify, thus producing a sense of defeat and shame (and contradictorily a moral cultural awakening regarding the criminality of mass killing) that could only be overcome by the production of images of victory and power, of which Rambo is an iconic image. In order for this to succeed there is the necessary disappearing in the public mind of the victims of US power, in this case achieved partially by the inverted portrayal of “us” as the victims. Ironically, such films work to reproduce the militarized conditions that led to the diminution and degeneration in the first place, for military power and mass destructive violence never solve political and social problems, they only intensify them, create conditions of trauma, suffering and brutality, kill a lot of people and destroy many of the conditions of life in the process. Thus they always create a new cycle of struggle for liberation from violence and injustices against which those committed to domination and hierarchy will, in failing fashion, continue the imposition of violence and, important for understanding the culture of militarism, the creation of myths that refuel drives to rearm and revitalize support for aggression and violence.

<sup>192</sup> This chant is not a movie invention. It continues in the present. Conversations with current veterans from the US attack on Iraq note chanting “kill, kill, kill” hundreds of times a day, along with the standard “blood, blood, blood,” repeated “over and over and over.”

<sup>193</sup> Stephen Prince, *Visions of Empire: Political Imagery in Contemporary American Film*, (New York: Praeger, 1992), p. 138

<sup>194</sup> The “film spectacle” points to one danger of the link between filmic form, grandiose imagery and tragic militarized content. Film possesses a tendency to stimulate forms of semi-pornographic voyeurism around mutilation and suffering by linking the beauty of the image (even in its ugliness) and the appeal of the spectacle, with the painful ugliness of violence and destruction. In the end, people can derive a perverse and de-moralizing pleasure from the mere spectacle of it all.

<sup>195</sup> Carl Boggs, *Imperial Delusions*, p. 149

<sup>196</sup> If people are not acting for a reason, it is difficult to assign guilt or innocence to what they do, so morality dissolves in unreason. If nature controls actions morality disappears in determinism because there is no choice. Again, if there is no choice, questions of guilt or innocence are irrelevant.

<sup>197</sup> Pollard, “Hollywood War Machine,” p. 323

<sup>198</sup> While in the end *FMJ* arguably presents a very potent anti-war (anti-all-war) discourse, herein there will be a narrow focus on how the film also serves to reinforce the common narrative projections that distance US audiences from historical, political and moral engagements with US aggression.

<sup>199</sup> This process of dehumanization is depicted quite powerfully in Patricia Foulkrod’s 2006 documentary *The Ground Truth* in which she was able to obtain real footage from inside Marine boot camp.

<sup>200</sup> We might ask “why is it that we find meaning in the destructive capacities of war,” and then ask instead “why not find meaning in preserving and nurturing qualities of peace?”

<sup>201</sup> There is a scene of a massacre of civilians. The massacre, however, is perpetrated by the NLF in the midst of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The massacre is an incident of questionable historical accuracy, but it cinematically serves to further legitimate, because of the de-historicized and de-moralized narrative, the US actions against what appear to be crazed, unforgiving, even suicidal killers.

<sup>202</sup> This narrow, and immoral, position suggests that though we might have questions or reservations about the legitimacy of “the conflict,” i.e. “maybe it is wrong, maybe it is right,” the honorable action is to proceed with bravery and professionalism to obediently (and criminally) perform one’s patriotic duty, as defined by others who have other interests in mind (but that is left unsaid). Here we might ask, “If Germany had ‘won’ WWII and produced films 15 years later in which the narrative followed this perspective (one in opposition to Principle IV of the Nuremberg Principles which recognizes that acting “pursuant to orders of [one’s] Government or of a superior does not relieve [one] from responsibility under international law...”), one suspects we would quickly note the morally compromised and criminal nature of the narrative.

<sup>203</sup> Even an evil Cuban torturer named Fidel is thrown in the mix, just in case anyone forgot that the US battle for freedom against tyranny is global.

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<sup>204</sup> A critically reflective film could reveal the savage and senseless 1972 US bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam that has been called the most intense bombing attack in human history. In eleven days more than 100,000 bombs were dropped on the two cities, more than five times the destructive power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. See Spartacus Educational, *Vietnam War Overview*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/VietnamWar.htm>

<sup>205</sup> As to the film's portrayal of the anti-war movement, it paints it as a fringe group of self-important lunatics and arrogant opportunists oblivious to the realities of "war," supportive of a subhuman US hating enemy, and whose primary goal in life was to undermine the troops. This approach not only portrays anti-war protesters as anti-American, but anti-realist and anti-human. This is, again, a portrayal with which it is difficult to identify or share an allegiance thus undermining possibilities for attracting people to a peace movement that might work to challenge the culture of militarism. It is important to keep in mind that the pedagogical function of these films is not so much to recreate history but to mythologize history in order to shape the ideas, values and attitudes of, and make "war" and militarism palatable (and peace unpalatable) for, audiences watching long after the events being depicted. The final insult in the film against the anti-war movement is uttered by the Vietnamese prison commander when he tells the airmen "the real war" is being fought on the "Washington Mall and at Berkeley," suggesting again that the real enemy is the anti-war movement and that the wrong people are being killed; so, if we are going to win future "wars" we must first, and fascistically, eliminate "the real enemy."

<sup>206</sup> There is an oblique reference to the Vietnamese struggle for national independence during a ranting interview near the end of the film, inside the Republican Convention in 1972

<sup>207</sup> This is also clearly a reference to Eugene McCarthy's 1972 call "Come Home America." The call didn't register as well as Nixon's assurances that the US was already home, that the US continued to maintain the high ground of morality, and our foreign policy continued to be guided by the highest of our founding principles and values. What this suggested about our basic values and principles, in the midst of the worst mass killing after WWII, is, or should have been, problematic. Nixon's reelection, and the seriousness with which his "call" was taken, reflects something of the depth of national faith in US mythology, much of it created through popular films over the years.

<sup>208</sup> Again we might reflect on a hypothetical scenario in which a similar film pronouncement was made and similar comforting cinematic mood created, in Country X, 14 years after country X destroyed ½ of US major industrial cities, 60 percent of other US cities and 80% of US towns, destroyed hundreds of millions of acres of agricultural land with chemical poisons and bombs, left behind 15 million widows, displaced from their homes tens of millions of people, etc. at a time when the country was engaged in major killing operations in four countries just south of its border? One suspects we would have serious questions about the public pedagogies at work in the culture, to say the least. For further descriptions of what was left behind in the "home" of the Vietnamese, see Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, (Boston: South End Press, 1988), chapter 5.

<sup>209</sup> One might also mention the sad irony of the ease with which we culturally accept the notion that democracy can be imposed using bombs and bullets.

<sup>210</sup> On the issue of collapsed manhood see Comber and O'Brien, "Evading the War: The politics of the Hollywood Vietnam film," *History*, 73, 246-260. It should be recalled that increases in Pentagon spending, often attributed to the rabid Reagan Administration were actually implemented by the "pansy" Carter Administration. In the present, while it is true that the Bush Administration has turgidly inflated public subsidies to corporations through the Pentagon system (499 of FORTUNE 500 companies get Pentagon money), there was already \$500 billion in the pipeline for new (largely unnecessary) weapons systems in early January 2001, before Bush took office. Clinton was better at hiding the militarism. The cultural studies emphasis on a deflated manhood crisis in the US that avoids the inflated "manhood" as expressed through the increasing militarization of the United States and the growing global threats of WMD catastrophes and US aggression works to ensure that these larger problems will continue to increase. It is part of the postmodern academic tendency to compose lengthy tomes on armpits rather than armaments, buttocks rather than bunker-busters, fashion rather than fascism. Much time is spent on the speculative, i.e. what we can only understand at a superficial level, for example, human behavior, or the socially oppressive impact of armpit hair or no armpit hair, etc., but little time is spent on what is perfectly clear: dropping bombs on people mutilates and kills them. We know that people have the capacity to drop bombs from airplanes, for whatever reasons; but we also know that in the absence of bombs, people will not use them, as clearly evidenced by history before 1911 when the first bomb was dropped from an airplane. In fact, knowing that people have the capacity to launch bombs, especially in an age of increasing threats of WMD annihilation, makes it appear prudent to abolish the material capacity to produce and use bombs, which in

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turn, over time, might shape the ideological tendency through a reciprocal relationship between facts in the world and values on the world, thus preventing the human experiment from coming to a close sooner than expected.

<sup>211</sup> Pollard, *Master of War*, p. 332

<sup>212</sup> Boggs, *Imperial Delusions*, p. 152

<sup>213</sup> Tom Doherty, "Review of *Saving Private Ryan*," *Cineaste*, 24(1), 1998, pp. 68-71; Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1990), p. 87

<sup>214</sup> Films that resort to "terrorism" as a plot device invariably hold the mirror outward rather than inward; they depict "their" terror, but never "our" terror. The look inward is pedagogically crucial if terrorism in all of its forms is to be understood, critiqued, combated and abolished. The US is ostensibly engaged in a global war against "terrorism," but the acceptance of that notion as "true," whether in films or in the rest of US culture, misses two vital points: (1) the current administration has done virtually nothing to address terrorism and virtually everything to increase terrorism, as even the CIA and Pentagon have noted; (2) if we accept standard definitions of terrorism, for example, the use or threat of force to coerce, threaten or instill fear in order to advance ideological, political or economic objectives, it quickly becomes clear that the US is the leading terrorist state in the world. (1) and (2) are crucially linked. Addressing (2), in other words, stopping US terrorism, will have positive consequences in addressing one of the root causes of the terrorism the US purports to be at war against. Radical culture critic Tom Pollard argues that the term "terrorism" is "murky and nebulous. I disagree. The term itself is perfectly clear, as are the reasons for US culture critics to claim it is "murky," and the reasons for the unfair application of the term by US state propagandists. Pollard is correct to note how "Hollywood films depicting terrorism tend to reflect ideological biases prevalent in the dominant culture." It is not a surprising conclusion given that Hollywood is part of the dominant culture. Much more surprising would be a Hollywood that did NOT "reflect [the] ideological biases prevalent in the dominant culture." What is most surprising is how frequently even "radical" critics and intellectuals refuse to hold the moral mirror inward. For example, in reading through hundreds of academic articles on US military or militarized films I have yet to see anyone mention "the US attack on Vietnam," the fact that the 5 million or so victims are disappeared from US films, or any mention of the US as an aggressor nation. There is much talk about turgid and limp masculinity in US culture, masculinized femininity or feminized masculinity, hyper-reality, and hyper-simulacrum, etc., etc. but no mention of the immorality of a film culture supporting the worse immorality of constant military aggressions that have killed and maimed tens of millions of people over 60 years of direct and indirect attacks, and 60 years of Hollywood filmmaking.

<sup>215</sup> The conflation misses a simple distinction vitally important to understand human conflict: the difference between biological and social evolution. The former is very slow and largely immutable; the latter is very rapid and highly mutable. Biology determines and society shapes, we know. How much, we don't know. We do know that humans, in working through society can overcome many of the biologically "determined" problems we confront. Biology says we can't fly. Society says we can (airplanes). Biology says we can't swim under the ocean for weeks on end, society says we can (submarines). Biology says some students can't see the blackboard because of poor vision, society says they can, (eyeglasses) etc., etc., etc. What nature tells us about humans is complex. For example, our nature makes us experience stress under certain circumstances; how we respond to the stress is a combination of our nature and our social being. Many films attempt to convince audiences that "military aggression" is somehow an inevitable, rather than a potential, part of human nature. Human nature is simply everything that humans do: love, hate, work, sleep, think, dream, build, destroy, feel anger, feel compassion, walk, work for peace, carry out aggression, etc. Some things are necessary if we wish to stay alive: food, for example. Nature determines what we can eat; society determines how much we eat, with whom we eat, when we eat, what we eat, who grows the food, who does the dishes, who takes out the garbage, etc. WMD are not a necessary part of our staying alive, but may very well become a sufficient means for ensuring that we do not. Creating weapons is a potential of our biology; it is a manifestation of our society. We know that even if we cannot alter our biology in significant ways, we can alter our society in significant ways. We make choices within the sets of choices available to us; that choice, and the choices, is part of what defines us. Making choices in an Amazon village presents a different set of choices than making choices in Burlington, VT. Having the choice often compels the choice, as anyone knows who owns a television. Its mere presence stimulates its use. A house without a television will not present the choice or the stimulation to make the choice. A similar argument holds regarding WMD, weapons in general, and the militarization of society. The material existence of cruise missiles, for example, not only makes the choice of using them possible, but it also stimulates their use, especially within an economic system that profits from the use and development

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of cruise missiles. A \$1 million cruise missile produces no new wealth until it is used and needs to be replaced. A world without cruise missiles will be a world in which humans will not send cruise missiles to destroy and kill. We know it is possible to live without cruise missiles as a look at most of human history and most of human lives will quickly reveal. The point is elementary; the will to make the point a reality is the challenge.

<sup>216</sup> This is a vital distinction. “Idealist” is often applied as a term of derision, suggesting that one who “dreams” of a better future is hopelessly naïve. The “realists” are depicted as those hardened to the “truth” that the future can be no better than the present, things are the way they are because they have to be that way (rather than noting that they are the way they are because they got that way), this is the best of all possible worlds, etc. The truth is that the latter perspective is the “idealist” perspective because it is abstracted from material reality. The “realist” perspective exists among those who recognize that the future will be much different than the present, though not necessarily better than the present. Because of this recognition that the things don’t necessarily have to be the way they are, they can be different, the realist can not only imagine a better future, but work to create that future. In some sense, “idealist” can be used as a term of “derision” when it is correctly applied to those who fatalistically attempt to cynically convince us that a better world is hopelessly impossible. One often hears those who consider themselves “realists” responding to suggestions that we should stop a war, or war in general, intone “but there have always been wars, that is just the way things are, so give it a rest.” One wonders if they would take a similar position after someone stole their wallet? “There has always been stealing, that is just the way things are, so forget about it.” Of course, this is an “idealist” not a “realist” position, because we know that the past was much different than the present, and we also know that the future will be much different than the present. It is called “realist” to suggest that no other position is possible, or permitted, which of course means it is an “idealist ‘realist’” position. Plato made it clear in the *Republic*, as it should be clear to all that the “idealist” perspective suggesting nothing can change always works in the interest of the powerful.

<sup>217</sup> As stated in *We Were Soldiers* by combat reporter Joe Galloway (Barry Pepper).

<sup>218</sup> Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser, “Never Having to Say You’re Sorry: *Rambo*’s rewriting of the Vietnam War,” in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. Editors Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) pp. 101-112. Albert Auster and Leonard Quart, *How the War was Remembered*, (New York: Praeger, 1988).

<sup>219</sup> Philippa Gates, “Fighting the Good Fight: the Real and the Moral in the Contemporary Hollywood Combat Film,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 22: 297-310, 2005

<sup>220</sup> One of the moral dilemmas in the film is whether it is right to sacrifice the lives of many to save the life of one. Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) and seven other soldiers are sent on a perilous mission to rescue Private Ryan, the only remaining Ryan brother of those sent to the war, and return him to his mother who lives amidst waving fields of golden grain in a pastoral and idyllic US Midwestern farm setting.

<sup>221</sup> R. A. Blake, “War Memorial,” *America*, August 15, 1998, p. 18. Blake is opining on Spielberg and gives him credit for resurrecting “for our contemplation those noblest sentiments of self-sacrifice in the service of justice, a side of the story that we in the snug world of academic speculation after the bomb and Vietnam too easily dismiss.”

<sup>222</sup> Louis Menand, “Jerry Don’t Surf,” *New York Review of Books*, September 24, 1998, pp. 7-8

<sup>223</sup> John O’Connor and Martin Jackson, *American History/American Film*, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1988), p. xxiv. They leave absent the more critical question, “what can we teach and what can we learn from films?”

## **CHAPTER 4 NOTES**

<sup>224</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, “On Genocide,” Second Session of the Bertrand Russell *International War Crimes Tribunal on Vietnam*, November 1967, online at: <http://www.tamilnation.org/humanrights/sartre.htm>

<sup>225</sup> Carlos Fuentes, “The Mirror of the Other,” *The Nation*, March 30, 1992, p. 411

<sup>226</sup> *Rules* was produced with much cooperation and support of the US Department of Defense, In preparing for the film the main actors were “embedded” with US marines forcing a deeper political and emotional attachment to “the mission,” as noted in a documentary that accompanies the DVD.

<sup>227</sup> Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*, (New York: Harper/Collins, 1992)

<sup>228</sup> Understanding history requires that we also understand that “history is distorted not only by the presentation of false historical information but also by the omission of other important historical facts” and, crucially, contexts. (Donaldo Macedo, *Literacies of Power*, Boulder: West View Press, 1994 p. 86). Career

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Special Ops soldier Stan Goff, regarding one of the more infamous massacres, not of US soldiers, but of Vietnamese civilians, notes, “My Lai? That shit was happening every day!” (Stan Goff in *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11 and the Selling of the American Empire*, Media Education Foundation, 2003, www.mef.tv). “Massacres were routine...when you [came] into an ‘enemy’ village...you kill[ed] everything that [was] living---women, children, and animals,” notes former Sergeant James Daley. A former US marine recalled an exchange preceding another massacre: “...Sir, we got children rounded up. What do you want us to do with them?...” An officer responded: “Goddamn it Marine, you know what to do with them: kill the bastards. If you aint’ got the goddamn balls to kill them, Marine, I’ll come down and kill the *motherfuckers* myself.” (James W. Gibson, *The Perfect War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) p. 146 and p. 147)

<sup>229</sup> Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, “The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism,” (Boston: South End Press, 1979), p. 317

<sup>230</sup> An estimated 50 million gallons of agent orange and other chemical defoliants was dumped on Vietnam, with life-altering consequences continuing more than 30 years later.

<sup>231</sup> The “wasting” has continued into the future beyond *Rules* in the US wasting of thousands of civilians in Afghanistan, and well over 100,000 in Iraq. Both acts of US aggression have been replete with voluminous destruction of villages, towns, cities and massacres of civilians, perhaps most visible (for those willing, or able, to look at the “blood in the streets”) in the US destruction of Fallujah in November 2004 in which up to 6,000 civilians were killed and “36,000 of the city’s 50,000 homes were destroyed, along with 60 schools and 65 mosques and shrines [while] up to 200,000 residents were forced to flee, creating a refugee population the size of Tacoma,” (indiscriminate bombing attacks and the excessive use of force, both war crimes under the Nuremberg Principles). (Mark Marqusee, “Falluja: A Name That Lives in Infamy,” November 10, 2005, *Guardian, UK*, online at: <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/1110-28.htm>. Jim McDermott and Dr. Richard Rapport, “Investigate Alleged Violations of Law in Fallujah Attack,” *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, January 11, 2005). A US army sergeant in Iraq noted, echoing *Rules*, “I like Fallujah. I killed a bunch of them motherfuckers.” (US army sergeant Tratner quoted in “The Second Trip to Fallujah and the Courteous Kidnappers,” *Circus2Iraq* <http://www.circus2iraq.org/updates.asp?page=62>). The Naval War College Review notes, referring to people resisting US aggression, “Retribution has been visited on the barbarians, and more will follow.” Ralph Peters, a retired US military officer, wrote in the *New York Post*, “Even if Fallujah has to go the way of Carthage [complete annihilation], reduced to shards, *the price will be worth it*...the world needs to see [Iraqi] corpses.” (Quoted in James Cogan, “Massacre Looms in Fallujah,” *countercurrents.org*, November 5, 2004, online at: <http://www.countercurrents.org/iraq-cogan051104.htm>). A US soldier captured the policy quite bluntly: “We had a great day today. We killed a lot of people...the Iraqis are sick people and we are the chemotherapy.” (John McDonald, “Oppose the War and the Warriors: Supporting These Troops?” *Counterpunch.org*, online at: [www.counterpunch.org/marciano11172004.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/marciano11172004.html)). A former US soldier seeking asylum in Canada candidly said, “The atrocious acts that are taking place in Iraq are not anomalies or isolated incidents but part of a plan of attack,” a part of the “rules of engagement.” He added, “I didn’t want to be complicit in a criminal enterprise and hence a war criminal...[it is] soldiers who pay the price for the policies that come from on high...” (US Army private Jeremy Hinzman in Paul Gains, “US Deserter Turns to New Line of Defense on Eve of Canada Hearing,” *The Sunday Herald (Scotland)*, December 5, 2004, online at: <http://www.sundayherald.com/46409>). While occasional testimony from individual soldiers is reported by the US press, the highly destructive US air war remains largely omitted. In Fallujah alone, during the US assault in November 2004, carrier based US Navy and Marine aircraft “flew over 21,000 hours of missions and dropped over 26 tons of ordnance...” (Dahr Jamail, “An Increasingly Aerial Occupation,” *zmag.org*, December 14, 2005). Complicity in the “criminal enterprise” of war crimes extends quite widely in the Nuremberg Principles to include “participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of [the] planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression or a war [or actions] in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances.” This definition draws the “circle of responsibility” quite widely, and at Nuremberg did include the crime of propagandizing for war. In the background of an analysis of films that promote tolerance and support for war crimes one might hold the question of complicity in preparing an entire culture and society to participate in wars of aggression or other actions in violation of international laws and conventions. In freer societies, such as the US, this responsibility is arguably even more pronounced, as producers have options other than singular subservience to state propagandists.

<sup>232</sup> See Scott Morris, “Wasting Fallujah,” [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

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<sup>233</sup> Robert Pape, quoted in, Seymour Hersch, "Up in the Air," *New Yorker*, November 29, 2005. The number of US air strikes has increased by a factor of five over the last year and they regularly kill "scores of non-combatants," including many children. (Bradley Graham and Ellen Knickmeyer, *Washington Post*, December 2005). *Jarhead* is a US marine based film imbued with the fundamental lesson that the only way to satisfy "real" men, i.e. hyper-masculinized, driven to kill, "born again HARD," US marines, is to shoot and kill Iraqis, and if we are unable to shoot Iraqis we will end up killing ourselves, suggesting some kind of suicidal instinct that can only be overcome by killing the "other." There is an important subtext in *Jarhead*, the demonstration that ground combat by the United States is no longer a critical part of warmongering because of US willingness to employ its primary force advantage, air power to "waste the motherfuckers." The film does allude to the infamous "Highway of Death" in Kuwait where US warplanes incinerated thousands of retreating Iraqis in 1991. This same theme is very subtly hinted at, as an afterthought, in *Tears of the Sun*. As noted earlier, the latest median estimate of Iraqis killed since the 2003 US invasion began is 655,000, as reported in the British Medical Journal *Lancet*, October 2006.

<sup>234</sup> Stuart Klawans, "Semper Fi, But Why?" *The Nation*, May 1, 2000, online at: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20000501/klawans>

<sup>235</sup> While "meddlesome" public opinion plays very little role in influencing policy formation at the Executive Level (the primary source of foreign policy planning and implementation) compared to the highly influential role of "internationally oriented business corporations," a culture of misinformed, disinformed or uninformed bystanders, spectators and passive recipients of history serves and services the interests of power more fruitfully than an engaged, active, participating public exercising its will and reason in the interest of public, rather than private, well-being. In addition, a well-informed public might call for observation of problematic and stultifying conventions such as international and domestic law. (Lawrence R. Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page, "Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 1, February 2005. That authors note that "the public does not appear to exert substantial, consistent influence on the makers of foreign policy; [in fact] officials tend perversely to move *away* from public opinion [so that a] plausible interpretation [of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy decisions] is that the public simply has no effect at all." The suggestion that there is very little correlation between "public opinion and policy making [is] sobering." In short, the study further confirms the results found in the Chicago Council on Foreign Relation study that demonstrated persistent "gaps" "between the foreign policy preferences of the public and those of policy makers or other elites..." where the public, as opposed to elite policy makers, express strong support "for a multilateral, cooperative foreign policy based on bolstering the United Nations, working closely with allies, and participating in international treaties and agreements." These studies suggest that the primary role militarized films play in manufacturing the public mind is one of inducing fear and terror and thus creating an alienated and atomized public one the one hand, and on the other hand producing a series of representations that compel the public to assume a reality of constant threat which has the concomitant effect of helping to ensure that public opinion does not manifest itself in loud vocal protest and organized forms of mass resistance. To the extent that the world of film representations correlate with the world presented through official pronouncements and other forms of elite media, the public will assume that the world is as it is presented, cower in terror and surrender the public's defense to hyper-masculinized supermen of the governmental or military sort.). Militarized films and culture then play a crucial pedagogical role as part of a larger "psychological operation of the kind the military conducts to influence a population in... enemy territory," which often manifests itself in creating a "culture of fear," subordination, alienation and blindness. (See Javier Giraldo, "Colombia: Genocidal Democracy," Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994, for a shattering discussion of the goals, risks, costs and consequences of the US creation of a highly militarized and physically, emotionally and psychologically violent "culture of fear" in Colombia and other countries in Latin America.). What these militarized films do, in their function as a form of militarized and militarizing public pedagogy in a growing culture of ideological and material militarism, is promote and inculcate tolerance for and acceptance of US aggression, violence and war crimes, as well as the expansion of the neoliberal-military-industrial-media complex, as they play out beyond the cinematic frame. Furthermore, they project the tolerance and acceptance backward into a rewritten past and forward into a prewritten future, while working to validate the rapidly reproducing present that might, given the gravity and foreboding nature of current directions, preempt the possibility of prewritten, or any, futures.

<sup>236</sup> Another link in the growing relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon

<sup>237</sup> This comment is based both on personal experience and the comments of the director William Friedkin who said in an interview in *The Independent/UK* "I have seen audiences stand and applaud the film throughout the States," in response to the interviewers comment that the film "outraged" him.

<sup>238</sup> *Rules of Engagement*, (2000)

<sup>239</sup> Joseph Tanniru, "A Comment on *Rules of Engagement*," *World Socialist Website*, 23 May 2000, online at: <http://wsws.org/articles/2000/may2000/rule-m23.shtml>

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<sup>240</sup> Hussein Ibish, communications director of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee stated, regarding *Rules*, “I’ve never seen anything quite so vile... it was mind-bogglingly vicious. I’m amazed that a major American entertainment company would actually release such a thing.” (The release of the film is not so mind-boggling given the pedagogical role it plays in shaping ideology and allegiance in the interest of US militarism, and given its #1 box-office placement for two weeks. Ibish quoted in Matthew Sweet, “Movie Targets,” *The Independent/UK*, July 30, 2000). In a letter of complaint sent to then US Secretary of Defense Cohen, Nihad Awad of CAIR reported how “in a recent screening of the film, audience members cheered and laughed when the American troops opened fire on [and killed] the crowd of demonstrators.” (See *Council on American-Islamic Relations Action Alert*, online at: <http://islam.about.com/blrulesmovie.htm>).

<sup>241</sup> Arab nations and Muslims in general, reduced to fundamentalist anti-American terrorists, have become the regurgitated stock enemy, a foreboding and violent enemy as depicted forcefully and rabidly in *Commando* (1985), *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1995), *GI Jane* (1997), *The Siege* (1998) in which Islamic terrorists threaten to blow up NYC, *Three Kings* (1999), *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *Tears of the Sun* (2003), etc. Even *The Insider* (1999) - a film about tobacco industry corruption manages to insert a subplot in which Al Pacino’s character takes on a group of mad Syrian mullahs. The stereotyping of Arabs as terrorists and “evil” was so embedded in US culture by 1995 that when the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed (by two U.S. army veterans with no foreign ties to the Middle East, other than having been trained as demolition experts for the US attack on Iraq in 1991), it was immediately blamed on Arab terrorists and the staid New York Times editorialized for the bombing of Arab countries.

<sup>242</sup> Godfrey Cheshire, “Only Military Guys Can Understand,” *Independent Weekly*, April 12, 2000, online at: <http://www.indyweek.com/durham/2000-04-12/movie.html>

<sup>243</sup> “Rules of Racism,” *Green Left Weekly*, online at: <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2000/415/415p28.htm>

<sup>244</sup> James Carroll, “Deconstructing Cheney,” *Boston Globe*, November 7, 2005

<sup>245</sup> One might imagine a film in which Chinese or Iranian warships, floating off the coast of the US, send helicopter gun ships and heavily armed soldiers into Washington, where a massacre of more than 1,000 US civilians is carried out, and in which the massacre is jingoistically celebrated and legitimated in the national interest. We might raise a few questions, one suspects.

<sup>246</sup> One sees this playing out in US media coverage of the US/Israel attack on Lebanon, where the AP reports, for example, “600 civilians have been killed on both sides,” leaving the impression that either 600 Israelis (surrogate Americans) and 600 Lebanese have been killed, or the total on both sides is 600, with some kind of equal distribution of dead across borders. The facts are quite different as there is a 10-1 kill ration (at least), Lebanese 600, Israeli 57.

<sup>247</sup> Here one might suggest a counter-reading. The film works against its own pro-military ideological pronouncements in presenting Childers as a hapless, lonely, angry, narrowly focused mass killer who knows no other existence other than that of war. The film thus suggests that a life in the military narrows human options, crushes human multiple individualities, and strips down the human to a lonely, hateful killer. One might read a racial angle into this as well. Childers is an African-American lifer, who knows he has nothing if they take away his uniform. The film thus implicitly critiques the narrow options available to black men in the US. It also presents a very cold and dehumanizing vision of military life, if one reads just below the surface.

<sup>248</sup> Regarding “one hand tied” always unmentioned is that the other hand was loaded with an endless supply of carpet bombing B-52s, agent orange, jet fighters, helicopter gun-ships, Navy destroyers, cluster bombs, artillery, napalm, chemical weapons, etc.).

<sup>249</sup> Here the film suggests that while eye-witnesses may “lie” or “misrepresent” the camera always tells the truth. There is a double-meaning implied. As noted earlier, the camera at the embassy recorded the events, but the tape was destroyed by Sokal. The audience, along with Sokal, has seen the footage. This use of the “camera never lies” trope bleeds over into the film proper to suggest to the audience that the film itself, presented in a documentary style, is also telling the truth, and the truth is one that challenges our basic moral commitments, i.e. mass slaughter is justified.

<sup>250</sup> Cao states that he would have committed the same crime in the same situation – it is not noted how that was an impossibility given power relations and given that the US was the aggressor carrying out attacks against Vietnamese in Vietnam.

<sup>251</sup> One should note that the salute is almost equalized, for not only is Childers standing symbolically above the “lowly” Vietnamese “gook,” but there is a moment of tension after Cao raises his hand in subservient salute in which it is unclear if Childers will “lower” himself to salute the demon enemy. The halting response and salute suggests that the Vietnamese have finally offered enough contrition and earned at least enough forgiveness for their crimes against us so that we can salute them. The absurdity of this suggestion



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of equalization is demonstrated by simply comparing the number of US citizens killed by Vietnamese forces inside the United States during the “Vietnamese attack on the United States,” = zero, with the number of Vietnamese killed by the United States forces in the US attack on Vietnam = over 3 million.

<sup>252</sup> Attacking forces, such as the US in Vietnam, or in the Middle East, or Africa, or Latin America, it could be noted, have no rights, only responsibilities, and one of the key responsibilities is to pay reparations for damage done, a lesson audiences should know regarding US operations in Iraq and elsewhere. In this film, however, the US embassy building is of greater importance than the lives of the Yemenis. The subtle lesson is that abstractions, such as states or buildings representing states, have rights greater than those of living, breathing human beings, and thus inculcates the notion that attacking and killing people simply because they live in some abstraction, some artificial creation, called a “state,” for example, Iraq, is somehow legitimate. The embassy is depicted as sovereign US territory so an attack against it is portrayed as an attack on the homeland, as Hodges puts it, “as though in Ohio or Maryland,” suggesting imperialistically that the world is our country and killing is our religion.

<sup>253</sup> In standard Hollywood-ese this translates as “I will be your lawyer, and will win the case, even though I am up against the rule of law, the best lawyer the marines can muster and a clear cut case of war crimes, because we will tap into the ‘assumed’ will of the people.” Again, the “will of the people,” is in one sense in line with this argument. So, again the film undermines its own pro-war crime ideology, at one level. The public generally understands that soldiers are following orders issued from above, and that war crimes are largely the responsibility of those in command.

<sup>254</sup> This manipulation of the audience is insidious on the one hand because it locates the viewer clearly on the side of the perpetrator of the crimes, but on the other hand it can be seen to work against the film’s portrayal of Childers as hero. The images we are privy to are the images that Childers projects through his memory of events (though there is a ridiculous subplot about a videotape of the events that demonstrates Childers version is accurate, against all other eyewitness testimony, and common sense). There is the intimation that Childers may be somewhat insane and delusional and that undermines his testimony, but also absolves him of guilt. The question then lingers, “what were the conditions that drove him over the edge?” Even if he isn’t crazy one might intimate that the filmmaker is somewhat delusional.

<sup>255</sup> The overemphasis in the US media on “insurgent” violence in Iraq, the highlighting of beheadings, the mutilation of US mercenaries, the car bombings outside hotels, suicide bombers inside hotels, and the attacks on civilians by Iraqi “insurgent” forces, with the accompanying blood, frenzy, screaming and rage often spread a sensationalized Hollywood spectacle effect that aggravates the already deeply held racist assumptions in US culture that Arabs are uncivilized barbarians with little or no respect for human life. A gut-wrenching glance at images presented on *Al-Jazeera*, *thenausea.com*, or *robertfisk.com*, for example, calls into question this reductionist presentation of violence regarding Iraq in the US media.

<sup>256</sup> Nowhere in the portrayals, whether at the real or symbolic level, is the US public directed to examine, critique or challenge the regular physical, emotional and psychological violence perpetrated against Arabs by US policies of arming dictators, overthrowing governments, imposing sanctions and funding heinous military repression throughout the region. The harmful consequences of US policies have been felt especially by Iraqis, who have suffered years of debilitating US sanctions, the repression of life under a largely US created and supported dictator, hunger, disease, dehydration, no electricity, inadequate health care, regular bombing attacks, and now a murderous and criminal attack and occupation accompanied by mass killing and the exploitation and robbery of land, resources, oil and state run industry and banks. Rather than opening up to scrutiny the ways in which the United States has assisted in creating the profound social injustices, repeated violence, and criminal and exploitive policies at the heart of the rampant inequality and misery in the region that contribute to the culture of anti-American violence that in turn has become an even greater tragedy for many Iraqis, the media and film world has redirected attention from US violence and criminality in the region to either a “Muslim duty to kill Americans,” as in *Rules*, Arab on Arab violence as revealed in much of the electronic media coverage of more recent events in Iraq, or Nigerian Muslims against Nigerian Christians in *Tears of the Sun*.

<sup>257</sup> Bill O’Driscoll, “Rules of Engagement,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, online at: [http://www.pittsburghcitypaper.ws/prev/archives/moviearch/r/mv\\_rulesof.html](http://www.pittsburghcitypaper.ws/prev/archives/moviearch/r/mv_rulesof.html)

<sup>258</sup> George W. Bush, “President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror,” June 28, 2005, online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050628-7.html>. In a world in which a Muslim “ultimate evil,” is out to conquer and destroy an American “ultimate good,” it is not irrational, in the name of fear and felicity, to support “ultimate good’s” “right” to exercise its absolute freedom to destroy in order to later exercise its freedom to create. This again suggests the idea that the US is free to operate beyond the limits of law and morality. But, it is limits that make us what we are, human, and the notion that we are

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absolutely free to carry out actions in the interests of “absolute good” in combating some metaphysical form of “ultimate evil” is destined to place us falsely in a domain beyond good and evil, and erupt in terrorism of a most destructive, inhumane and apocalyptic sort. And therein rests the real danger of a de-historicized, de-moralized and depoliticized American culture and cinema continuously reframed in and refocused on narrow cinematic misrepresentations of the “other,” and self-interested recreations of history that can only work in the longer term to undermine, and perhaps destroy, the very self-interests engraved and endorsed therein.

<sup>259</sup> See Joseph Nevins, “Beyond the Myth,” *Dissident Voice*, December 11, 2002. The Paris Peace Treaty provided for US reparations to the Vietnamese. Carter, while president in 1977, argued that there was no obligation or need for the United States to provide reparations to the Vietnamese to repair the massive destruction caused by the US aggression, because “the destruction was mutual.” He added that the US needn’t “apologize to the Vietnamese people.” In fact, in “Rules of Engagement,” one would get the impression that the United States was not the aggressor but the victim of Vietnamese aggression.

<sup>260</sup> Stuart Klawans, “Semper Fi, But Why,” *The Nation*,

<sup>261</sup> Katherine Dwyer, “Rogue State: A History of US Terror,” *International Socialist Review*, online at: [http://www.isreview.org/issues/20/rogue\\_state.shtml](http://www.isreview.org/issues/20/rogue_state.shtml). In the post-9/11 world of “terror wars,” cinematic and other media sounds, images and language have been extended and have worked to discipline US culture by reframing reality in the interests of US power while inculcating the ideology of militarism as the base of meaningful and efficacious, peaceful and secure, governance. The repression, in cinema and other media, of the material and ideological consequences of US aggression and war crimes, internally and externally, reduces the ability for US citizens to engage in effective critiques of historical evidence, differentiate between truth and falsehood, carry out decisions informed by discriminating thought, or “take the decisions that integrity demands.”<sup>261</sup> In short, a de-historicized and depoliticized cinema lends itself to a depoliticized culture as the very power of image, sound and language is reduced to cartoon-like stereotypes, and seemingly official discourses only simulate real communication. The effect is an undermining (especially in a dominant media that “communicates” in one direction, generally top/down) of opportunities for comprehensive debate, discussion and dialogue, or for developing tools and skills for decoding the fabrications, obfuscations and absences that permeate militarized cinematic presentations and much of official discourse that reflects many of the same sounds, images and language represented in cinema. A cinema of deceit and misrepresentation functions as a form of Orwellian Newspeak in the larger culture making it that much easier for official pronouncements to be shrouded in distortions and mis-designations (e.g. “collateral damage” as a euphemism for mass killing; “electronic interrogation” as a euphemism for torture, “downsizing” as a euphemism for terminating jobs, “Clean Skies,” as a euphemism for allowing more pollution, “No Child Left Behind,” as a euphemism for what Henry Giroux calls “Every Child Left Behind,”<sup>261</sup> “Extraordinary Rendition,” as a code for illegal arrest, kidnapping and disappearance, “defense of freedom and democracy,” a euphemism for state terror and aggression, “withdrawal” a euphemism for increased bombing, etc.) as forms of cover-up for not only reactionary programs and politics, but war crimes.

<sup>262</sup> Aside from the gross generalizations about Muslims, these combinations of image, language and sound, work to represent people in the Muslim world (and in Vietnam) as the perpetrators rather than as the victims of violence, thus legitimating the growth of the US culture of “defense.” While Muslim anger in *Rules* is reduced to “the same old America hating bullshit,” in Sokal’s words, in the Muslim world, 4.3 million children under five die every year from preventable disease and malnutrition, and 6 million children under five suffer various forms of stunting, often irreversible, related to malnutrition. Close to 25% of the total population in the Muslim world has no access to safe drinking water, and close to 50% lack adequate sanitation. In many Islamic countries, primary school participation remains below 60%. (“Investing in the Children of the Islamic World (Advance Summary),” *UNICEF*, 2005, online at: [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_28138.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_28138.html)). Ongoing conflicts in many countries, often fueled by US weapons, have destroyed social structures thus exacerbating already dreadful and life-threatening conditions. In general, women and children suffer disproportionately in armed conflicts (*RE* perversely suggests that they deserve it). The United States, as of 2003, “transferred weaponry to 18 of the 25 countries involved in active conflicts...with the vast bulk of the dollar volume going to Israel (\$845.6 million,” to support the continuing illegal occupation and repression of Palestinians. 13 of the 25 countries receiving US weapons totaling \$2.7 billion were described by the US State Department as “undemocratic” and 20 were perpetrators of major human rights violations. The leading recipients were all Islamic nations: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan. None of this should be surprising given that “the United States transfers more weapons and military services than any other country in the world.” While the military aid and transfer numbers reflect a growing concern, the greatest harmful impact

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is in the *image* that is portrayed, an image that undermines US “credibility” in the Muslim world, and elsewhere. (Frida Berrigan and William Hartung, “U.S. Weapons at War 2005: Promoting Freedom or Fueling Conflict?” *World Policy Institute*, June 2005, online at:

<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/wawjune2005.html#execsum>).

<sup>263</sup> “Protest Paramount’s Racist Film ‘Rules of Engagement,’” online at:

<http://www.adc.org/action/2000/11aprilb2000.htm>

<sup>264</sup> While conditions of repression in much of the Muslim world are grim, in Iraq, the story is much grimmer. Even US puppet Prime Minister Allawi admits that the conditions of “death squads and secret torture chambers” represent “abuse worse than under Saddam.” (Peter Beaumont, “Abuse Worse Than Under Saddam, Says Iraqi Leader,” *Observer/UK*, November 27, 2005, online at: <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/1127-02.htm>). There are many ways to kill aside from brutal barrages of body burning bombs, screeching and screaming helicopter gun ships, body lacerating machine gun fire, bone crushing tanks, artillery launched child-mutilating cluster bombs, people melting chemical weapons, etc. (We learned in November, 2005 the US used napalm and white phosphorus in Fallujah, leaving children, women and men burnt to the bone.<sup>264</sup> The US Army journal “Field Artillery” reported how, during the US attack on Fallujah in November 2004, “White Phosphorous...proved to be an effective and versatile munition [and...] a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents” when high explosives were ineffective in routing people from “spider holes.” White phosphorus was used “to flush them out and [high explosives] to take them out.” “High explosives” included “AC-130 Specter gunship support.” “Tactics, techniques and procedures” we are told “were effective and lethal.” The *Independent UK* reports not only that US troops used white phosphorus...an illegal chemical weapon against fighters in buildings or foxholes, [a weapon that] on contact with skin or clothing, ...can burn down to the bone, [but] many of the same tactics are [currently, in November 2005, one year after Fallujah] being employed during Operation Steel Curtain, which for the past few weeks has sought to drive insurgents out of towns and villages near Iraq’s borders with Syria and Jordan.” Regular reports of killed and injured civilians have accompanied reports on “Operation Steel Curtain”).

<sup>265</sup> The Christian Science Monitor called this US destructive capacity to waste Fallujah “a textbook example of urban warfare,” an example not so much of US “prowess,” which is all too obvious, but of US “tenacity,” i.e. the resolute US commitment to carry out atrocious war crimes, reflected with equal vigor in *Rules*. Predictably, entire neighborhoods were turned to rubble in Fallujah. “The street, once flat, has been hit with so many 500-pound bombs that it looks like the zone of collision between oceanic ice sheets, with huge dips and shelves of pavement and soil...some bodies were so mutilated it was impossible to tell if they were civilians or militants, male or female...rotting corpses piled up.” “[T]he outrage...generated...at the sight of obliterated mosques, cratered houses and ground-up streets [not to mention ‘rotting corpses’] will spread” reported Dexter Filkins in *The New York Times*. (Dexter Filkins, “Rubble: In City’s Ruins, Military Faces New Mission: Building Trust,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2004). The *NYT* wondered how residents of Fallujah would react when they returned to “blood in the streets,” what was, following weeks of US ground and air bombing attacks, a “post apocalyptic wasteland.” “Driving down highway 10, the main street...through the heart of Fallujah, is like entering a film that is set sometime on the other side of Armageddon...Perhaps strangest of all is the silence...there are no sounds of...life.” (Robert F. Worth, “As Fire Crackles in Fallujah, G.I.’s Look to Rebuild a Wasteland,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2004). Fallujah and Iraq are mentioned herein to reinforce the notion that a critical pedagogy of film will ask not only what the film teaches but also what we can teach from the film. Teaching from the film requires locating the film not only in its own historical conditions but also in the historical reality of people who bring their own knowledge, experience and reflections into discussions. Viewing this film with students or audiences in 2003-2006 inevitably locates the film in Iraq, as well as in Yemen and Vietnam. Locating the film across history marks for audiences the importance of understanding the systemic nature of US policies. In this way, people develop an understanding of problems of the system, as well as problems in the system, and are thus presented with an opportunity to crucially the link the two.

<sup>266</sup> In addition to the direct death and suffering that accrue when technological “prowess” lays waste to entire neighborhoods, “children in urban war zones die in vast numbers from diarrhea, respiratory infections and other causes, owing to unsafe drinking water, lack of refrigerated foods, and acute shortages of blood and basic medicines in clinics and hospitals (that is if civilians even dare to leave their houses for medical care).” (Jeffrey Sachs, “Iraq’s Civilian Dead Get No Hearing in the United States,” December 2, 2004). There has been a doubling of severe malnutrition in Iraqi children since the U.S. invasion, the UN reported in November 2004, yet the US onslaught continues. Approximately 400,000 Iraqi children (approximately 5 million relative to the US population) are suffering from chronic diarrhea and deleterious deficiencies of protein. They are victims of what is known as “wasting.” “Iraq’s child malnutrition rate now roughly equals that of Burundi, a central African nation torn by more than a decade of war.” Medea Benjamin, “Building Peace in a Time of Perpetual War,” *commondreams.org*, December 13, 2004, online at:

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<http://www.commondreams.org/views04/1213-20.htm>). It is these realities of suffering and victimization that get left behind in cinema representations that vilify and demonize Arabs but they are crucial realities about which US audiences must gain a critical understanding either by exploring histories and politics outside those presented in cinema or through demanding and creating alternative forms of cinema, and other forms of public pedagogy, that work to both overcome the disconnections between material reality, social and political responsibility and ideological productions in images, sounds, and language circulated by the dominant institutions. Without these alternatives, engaged politics and critical education will be weakened in the struggle to link global victimization with national responsibility, local suffering with militarized foreign policies, and personal problems with public issues. While the dominant cinema and media in the United States are critical of Muslim violence and the inhumanities sometimes perpetrated by “official Arab enemies,” such as Iraqi “insurgents,” they are remiss in examining or exposing the larger culture of violence that erupts from the US culture and institutions of militarism. Critical examinations of these matters could begin to explain Muslim anger, even perhaps the outrage that leads to such offensive and barbarous acts as beheadings and suicide terrorism, but more importantly they could open up to critique and scrutiny our own participation in and responsibilities for creating a spreading culture of material and ideological violence and aggression on a global scale.

## **CHAPTER VI NOTES**

<sup>267</sup> Quoted in Evan Thomas and Scott Johnson, “Probing a Bloodbath,” *Newsweek*, June 12, 2006, pp. 22-31

<sup>268</sup> Staff, “Film Review: Black Hawk Down,” *ChartAttack.com*, January 18, 2002, online at: <http://www.chartattack.com/damn/2002/01/1801.cfm>

<sup>269</sup> Bruckheimer, a Pentagon favorite, is also (in)famous for pro-military spectacles such as *Top Gun*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Crimson Tide*, *Armageddon*, etc.

<sup>270</sup> “Humanitarian Intervention” was also used to “justify” the US invasion of Haiti in 1993 (engaged mostly to protect the wealthy and US business interests), as well as the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 that killed several thousand and destroyed much infrastructure. That bombing precipitated a major humanitarian crisis, while in Haiti it intensified an already out of control humanitarian crisis. During the period of “humanitarian concern” the US also contributed greatly to increasing major humanitarian crises in Colombia, Turkey, Nicaragua and Angola raising serious questions about how “humanitarian” the concerns really were.

<sup>271</sup> Bill Chambers, “DVD Review: Black Hawk Down,” *Film Freak Central*, online at: <http://www.filmfreakcentral.net/dvdreviews/blackhawkdown.htm>

<sup>272</sup> The absence of air cover, i.e. gun ships and jet bombers, is reiterated through the film. The audience, along with the soldiers on screen, ask, “why?” No answer is given, but one is intimated. Washington bureaucrats are unwilling to use the full might of US power. It happens that the bureaucrats are Clintonites. The right-wing message intimates the need for a strong leader willing to use the necessary force to protect US soldiers. In this film, the absence of US airpower is employed differently, but with the same result: support for the primary cause of US violence and killing of civilians. As noted below, there was plenty of air support employed, including 50,000 rockets fired in one day from gun ships.

<sup>273</sup> President Bush has often “catapulted” the line “we are a peaceful nation,” into public space. For example, see George Bush, “Bush’s Remarks on U.S. Military Strikes in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, 8 October 2001, B6. Bush’s defense for the bombing of Afghanistan was the statement, “We are a peaceful nation.” The attack according to the NYT, as well as a number of major aid organizations, including UNICEF, threatened the lives of several millions people, mostly from starvation. These figures were presented before the bombing started, intimating a fairly low moral perspective on the part of the Administration given that actions are judged on the likely range of their consequences. Fortunately, the likely consequence did not develop. We might note that the infamous shoe-bomber is in jail, not because the shoe-bomb detonated, but because of the intention and the likely consequences if it had detonated.

<sup>274</sup> The 1947 name change from the Department of War to the Department of Defense was a rhetorical move intended to compel easier public support for the huge subsidies planners envisioned to enlarge the military-industrial complex. In a sense, the name change carries an air of truth. The US military is used to defend certain US interests on a global scale, namely corporate, and the Pentagon system itself is used to defend the “right” of corporations to maximize profits at the expense of the public. For a thorough background see Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, (New York: Wang and Hill, 1993), Ch. 1



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<sup>275</sup> Stephen A. Klein, "Public Character in *Black Hawk Down*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 22, No. 5, December 2005, ppl 427-449

<sup>276</sup> The image was used by the US media to demonstrate the "savage" and hateful nature of Somalis, a "savagery" which then served as a source of justification for the US assault.

<sup>277</sup> It has been argued that this rapid US retreat led Osama bin Laden to believe that the US was weak and vulnerable to attack, a belief that culminated in 9/11.

<sup>278</sup> See, for example, Staff, "Film Review: Black Hawk Down," *ChartAttack.com*, January 18, 2002, online at: <http://www.chartattack.com/damn/2002/01/1801.cfm>. Bill Chambers, "DVD Review: Black Hawk Down," *Film Freak Central*, online at: <http://www.filmfreakcentral.net/dvdreviews/blackhawkdown.htm>. Cast interviews on the DVD release argue the point that the film is an anti-war film.

<sup>279</sup> The film was released during a period in which the US was dropping yellow food packages on starving people in Afghanistan that looked quite similar to the yellow cluster bombs the US was dropping on the same people. I held one of each in hand (at a *Doctors without Border* presentation at MIT) in November 2001 and there was a frightening likeness. Perhaps the resemblance was a coincidence (though one can imagine that other color schemes and shapes were available) but it is suggestive of the way the US uses "humanitarianism" as not only a cover for aggression but as a direct component in that aggression (in Vietnam US cluster bombs were designed to look like toys so as to be attractive to children), and the deep cynicism and depravity which lies at the heart of US foreign policy, militarism and dehumanization of "the enemy."

<sup>280</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 141

<sup>281</sup> The cultural refusal to address the idea of US "killing," is witnessed on the cover of *Newsweek*, June 12, 2006. The issue is titled "The Haditha Question." The sub-title is revealing: "For U.S. Soldiers on the Front Lines in Iraq, Where is the Line Between Self-Defense and Shame?" The real question regarding the US massacre of Iraqi civilians in Haditha is not one of "self-defense and shame," but one of "self-defense and murder." By narrowing the question to "self-defense and shame" *Newsweek* repeats the cultural norm of blaming the victims and redirecting the suffering onto us. It is not their pain but our shame that is the problem. It is not that we have brought death into their lives, but disgrace into ours. It is not our aggression and massacres that is the problem but their terror against which we must defend ourselves. Missing in the entire discussion is any mention of illegal US aggression, crimes against peace, and the simple fact that aggressor/occupiers have no rights, only responsibilities and bombing and massacring people is not one of the "rights," and one of the key responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions (admittedly considered "quaint" by the current Administration) is the protection of civilians. The reporting is relevant to *BHD* in another way. *Newsweek* mentions that the perpetrators at Haditha, the Marine Third Battalion lost 17 men in fighting in Fallujah, but in the end "Fallujah was another victory for a Marine battalion with a bloody, valorous history." The 6,000 or so Iraqis killed in Fallujah remain absent, as well as the virtual destruction of the entire city. When mass killing and destruction, and joking about "putt[ing] a bullet in their f—king head," is culturally accepted as "valorous," i.e. worthy and heroic behavior, it is not surprising to witness the regular dehumanization of our "victims" that results in the celebration of killing in cultural productions such as *BHD* and other Hollywood "war" films. In the other national newsweekly *TIME*, a similar "blame the victim" question was posed on the cover. In that case, on the cover of the June 12, 2006 issue, the question was "whether the death of a U.S. Marine triggered the killing of 24 Iraqis," as though the killing of 24 Iraqi civilians would be justified if it can be demonstrated that it was triggered by the killing of a single U.S. Marine. A more pointed and revealing question would be "whether the illegal US attack and occupation triggered the killing of the Marine?" That question might lead to another question: "what are US Marines doing in Iraq in the first place?" The intimation that killing 24 Iraqis is somehow justified because one Marine was killed again points to the cultural ease with which we dehumanize our victims, elevate our own value over that of others, and disappear our victim's pain, suffering and death behind our own. It is especially degenerate when we remind ourselves that the US is the aggressor and occupier. Historical analogies will be left to the inquisitive reader. *BHD*, in a related fashion, suggests that the killing of 18 US soldiers in Mogadishu justified the murderous US response inside densely populated Somali neighborhoods.

<sup>282</sup> In F. Wetta and M. Novelli, "Now a Major Motion Picture: War Films and Hollywood's New Patriotism," *Journal of Military History*, 67, p. 38. The comments are depressing as they suggest that "killing for one's country," i.e. killing people in their own country, should be celebrated by the US population. Rather than condemn the killing (illegal under international and domestic law), he condemns the tepid popular response. Why should people celebrate "killing for one's country?" Should it have universal appeal? When three Arab Muslims were caught on camera apparently celebrating 9/11 did we

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cheer them or condemn them? Why celebrate when we kill but condemn when they kill? Is a Somali life any less human than an American life? Bowden leaves unclear what is meant by the phrase, “killing for one’s country.” It assumes a normalized investment across the US population in “the country.” And it assumes a US right to kill people in their country so long as it is done for “our” country. Simple questions arise to complicate matters: what do we mean by “country?” Is it an abstraction or is it real? If it is real, what material parts matter in the equation? What do we mean by “one’s, in other words, who do we mean by ‘we’” Who establishes the parameters in which it is acceptable to kill? Who benefits when soldiers “kill for one’s country?” What are the consequences when soldiers “kill for one’s country?” What part of the country are the soldiers really killing for: the unemployed; the homeless; those without healthcare; recent immigrants; major league baseball, NASCAR, corporate polluters, inmates in prisons. There may be a very simple explanation to the lack of celebration: most people simply do not like mass killing.

<sup>283</sup> For example, in the end the film uses soldiers as ideological fodder to contradict the very support for soldiers the film purportedly attempts to generate – in other words, just as soldiers are sacrificed in war to serve larger interests, soldiers are symbolically sacrificed onscreen to serve those same interests

<sup>284</sup> To the extent that Somalis are victims, their victimization is placed mostly at the feet of other Somalis, especially the Muslim warlord Mohammed Aidid lending further weight to their portrayal as savages.

<sup>285</sup> This theme works to prepare audiences for the coming attack on Iraq, partially sold by the Bush Administration as an operation to liberate the Iraqi people from the “evil tyrant.” The phrase “tyrant” was used repeatedly. For example, in Bush’s speechwriter’s words, “Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant...” “Saddam was a tyrant and used violence to exacerbate sectarian divisions...” “The tyrant will soon be gone...” The point is not that Saddam was not a tyrant, but US interventions have historically had less to do with overthrowing tyrants than creating them.

<sup>286</sup> It should be noted that the Somali “humanitarian catastrophe,” though to some extent real, was largely manufactured by US propaganda. The worst part of the famine had ended in late 1992. US food aid saved roughly 10,000 people (though US propaganda claimed 2 million), matched by the number killed by the US military. Alternative plans were introduced, plans that did not require massive military might and that would have avoided the hotbed of Mogadishu and concentrated relief where it was needed most in the “famine triangle.” Other options were dismissed because, “[they] failed to meet the US military’s new insistence on the application of massive, overwhelming force,” according to then US Assistant Deputy Secretary of Defense for African Affairs. See James L. Woods, “US Decision Making During Humanitarian Operations in Somalia,” in W. Clarke and J. Herbst, eds., *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Intervention*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 157. Demonizing the UN is standard practice, unless the UN serves useful in supporting US plans, as in the case of the 1991 US attack on Iraq. The UN is often condemned as a force that undermines the US mission in the world. There is some truth to the accusation. The UN does periodically weakly interfere with US global designs, but because of the US veto, actions by the UN, for example to stop the 2003 US attack on Iraq, are not possible. Cultural productions that demonize the UN aid and abet US power’s violations of international law by distancing US audiences from, and potentially making them hostile toward, the one international institution designed to prevent aggression in the world. It should be noted that even with the constant denunciations of the UN public attitudes and opinions in the US remain highly supportive of the UN and international law.

<sup>287</sup> Kent Delong and Steven Tuckey, *Mogadishu! Heroism and Tragedy*, Westport, Conn. 1994, p. x

<sup>288</sup> The concept of “worthy” and “unworthy” victims is from Edward Herman. “Worthy” victims are people killed by US enemies who then carry some propaganda weight used to legitimate US interventions or US military aid, training and support to some regime. Numbers around “worthy” victims are often inflated. “Unworthy” victims are the victims of US violence or the violence carried out by US proxies. They are often disappeared, in reporting, often in scholarship, and in films, for they have negative propaganda value.

<sup>289</sup> For an account of US war crimes carried out during “Operation Restore Hope,” see Alex de Wall, “US War Crimes in Somalia,” *New Left Review*, July/August 1998. The fighting and dying in *BHD* is often hideous as US soldiers fall from helicopters or are shot in combat. Completely absent from the presentation are the more than 50,000 Alpha rockets US helicopters fired in and around the Olympic Hotel, “a densely packed residential area of the city,” on October 3, 1993, the day depicted in *BHD*. 18 US soldiers were killed. More than 1,000 Somalis were killed. Present in the film is the suffering of the soldiers. Absent in the film, for the most part, are the Somalis, except as easily disposed of rifle targets. From the film one would get the impression that Black Hawks are merely troop transport copters, when in fact they are attack helicopters that in this case were largely responsible for most of the killing and destruction. The overall kill ratio was approximately 18 to 10,000. The film celebrates October 3, 1993 as

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a moral victory for the US, and the film generally received glowing reviews. Given power arrangements in the world analogies are extremely difficult, but one can imagine the critical response to a celebratory Al Qaeda film in which 18 “freedom fighters” were killed in the process of killing 10,000 Israelis in Israel. I have seen no popular reviews of *BHD* in which the above facts about rockets and mass killing were critically addressed. There are three possibilities: (1) every reviewer is unaware of the facts, suggesting an incredible disappearance of facts from the dominant media (largely true), though the information is readily available; (2) the facts were known but considered unimportant, thus suggesting a large scale successful dehumanization of Somalis; (3) the facts were known and believed to be important, but ideological constraints and career imperatives, along with editorial narrowness, kept the facts from public view. In any case, it represents a moral failure on the part of large parts of US culture and public education. The absence of the carnage suffered by Somalis leaves the audience uninformed about US military doctrine, i.e. massive retaliation against anything and everything when US soldiers are at risk, with the predictable effect (and therefore “crime”) of killing many innocent people. The US crimes in Somalia were one crucial reason why the US refused to endorse the International Criminal Court. The US objected to the court on the grounds that it would open up the possibility for malicious prosecutions of US peacekeepers. Given that everything the US does is, by definition, “peacekeeping,” even if it is sending 50,000 rockets into densely populated urban enclaves, the US argument is “fail-safe,” for any prosecution would in the end be “malicious.”

<sup>290</sup> See H. Bruce Franklin, *MIA: or Mythmaking in America*, (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1992)

<sup>291</sup> Arising from these themes was the pummeling Powell Doctrine which reduces to “anytime US soldiers are threatened employ massive force to protect them, regardless of the “collateral damage” incurred.

<sup>292</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change From Hawaii to Iraq*, (New York: Times Publications, 2006)

<sup>293</sup> In a sense this is linked to an impersonal or objective perspective on the world. From an impersonal standpoint we can recognize that the concerns, desires, interests, pain and happiness with which we are endowed is also true of others because we share, at a fundamental level, the same body. This perspective recognizes that every human life matters and no human life matters more than any other human life. In league with the principle of universality we can recognize that what occurs to anyone matters the same as if it occurs to anyone else. If ethics is linked to excelling at being human, as described in Chapter 1, it is also linked to our understanding of the necessity to transform social and political institutions to make the ethical a reality for all.

<sup>294</sup> Surrounding the US attack on Iraq, for example, there is the mythically heroic, Gary Cooper-like George Bush versus the mythically demonic Hitler-like Saddam Hussein. This caricaturizing often devolves further into conflicts between quasi-religious metaphysical forces of good and evil that further sanitize “war,” by keeping it in the realm of the abstract.

<sup>295</sup> Peter Beinart, *The Good Fight: Why Liberals—and Only Liberals—Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again*, (New York: Harper-Collins, 2006)

<sup>296</sup> The point of such comments, and filmmaking, is to focus blame for “war” on the victims and again reinforce the notion that our “warring” is only driven by the highest principles of peace and freedom, a position that can be viewed, from a slightly skewed perspective, as morally superior. In brief, we all rationalize our “crimes.” It is basically a version of Orwell’s “war is peace.” Rarely does power sell its own criminal violence using the carnage and gore imposed on the victims. In the US such honesty would undermine the national narrative of moral superiority. The point is obvious, and historically highly predictable. As the public becomes more aware of the “rigged game,” the institutions of power and propaganda must develop more sophisticated mechanisms to control and shape the public mind. The “few bad apples” damage control device is standard anytime the moral superiority is sullied by massacres, torture, war crimes, etc.

<sup>297</sup> Peter Rainer, “Shell Shocker,” *New York Magazine*, January 7, 2002, online at: <http://nymag.com/nymetro/movies/reviews/5554/index.html>

<sup>298</sup> Soldiers are not soldiers without both the military institutions that produce them and the militarized society, history and culture that supports those institutions politically, and especially, economically. But, society, to survive, does not necessitate soldiers; and, soldiers (and society), to survive, do not necessitate war. In fact, war is probably the greatest threat to society’s survival. War, however, to survive, necessitates soldiers and a society that produces soldiers. Like a disease that kills the very host that gives it life, thus eliminating the disease, war produces the contradiction of requiring for its survival the very society it threatens to destroy in its baleful wake. “War” films create in audiences a plausible desire to support the institutions of militarism that in the end might very well destroy them (in this case, to be “pro-war” is to be

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“anti-war,” by necessity, because it follows logically that an apocalyptic “pro-war” position will create conditions against war...no people). A culture of militarism lives the contradictions of feeding on the beast that might very well devour it and living in the beast that might kill it. In a sense, we are both host and parasite to the military beast, feeding the beast and living in (and some on) the beast. The beast needs us, but we do not need the beast. War makes soldiers necessary (but disposable), i.e. war brings “soldiers” to life and war brings soldiers to death, but soldiers do not make war necessary, while society makes soldiers and war possible, though not necessary. War can kill the society that nourishes it, but society can prevent war from being born. So, war itself is not ontologically necessary, and war is not possible without the society and soldiers to carry out its designs and atrocities. War, an abstraction, has no existence of its own. It comes to life and to death through the ideologically and material wombs of society. Therefore, those committed to war and military aggression must materially and ideologically convince both society and soldiers that war is necessary (so that it becomes possible) and that society should produce and support the soldiers (and other machinery of war) that war requires to survive. The warmongers face a problem that must be ideologically and materially (i.e. pedagogically) overcome. The mass killing of others, and the killing of US soldiers in “war,” is unpalatable for many (as is the threat of annihilation), and the means to nourish and carry out war often require enormous public resources that are redirected from the trough that feeds the public good. Public pedagogies must be created that both create the threats that generates support for militarism (protection), but hide the threats that militarism creates (destruction).

<sup>299</sup> Mark Bowden, “Black Hawk Down,” interview, *National Public Radio Morning Edition*, January 28, 2002. Bowden assumes a US right to accomplish its military goals around the world. One can imagine the US response to an Iranian author talking similarly about the need to prepare the Iranian public to support the accomplishment of Iranian military goals around the world. In that case, one assumes, accusations of depraved totalitarian propaganda would be offered.

<sup>300</sup> Stephen A. Klein, “Public Character in *Black Hawk Down*,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 22, No. 5, December 2005, ppl 427-449

<sup>301</sup> Here one would want an argument to demonstrate how the soldiers’ interest equates with the national interest.

<sup>302</sup> F. Wetta and M. Novelli, “Now a Major Motion Picture: War Films and Hollywood’s New Patriotism,” *Journal of Military History*, 67

<sup>303</sup> Klein, “Public Character in *Black Hawk Down*.”

<sup>304</sup> The insulated presentation in *BHD* does not provide the audience an opportunity to separate the category human from the category troop (except to demonstrate that troops die to), categories that are separable, and vital for developing a pro-peace position. *BHD* does however attempt to separate the category troop from the category war, categories that are, at least in standard film presentations, inseparable. Outside the film world, the category “troop” is not necessary to the category “human,” we can have the human without the “troop,” but we cannot have the “troop” without the “human.” “Troop” is an abstraction that must be filled by the material “human.” While “war” and “troops” are “real,” (we see them everyday), they are still abstract categories that only come into existence through the materiality of human beings in human society. In short, the categories “troop” and “war,” are unnecessary, and we could get along quite well without them. The sutured world of militarized films within the culture of militarism naturalizes these abstract categories, providing them with an aura of material necessity thus making them appear **necessarily real** rather than **contingently real**. In the world of Hollywood film, the category “troop” is necessary to the category “war,” and the category “war” is necessary to the category “troop,” and, in fact, both are necessary to the category “human.” In the film world, we cannot have “troops” without “war” (because war is the force that not only gives them meaning but gives them existence), and we cannot have “war” without “troops” (because troops carry out war). Because of these categorizations in film, it is not possible to be pro-troop and anti-war, or pro-war and anti-troop. Because “war” is necessary to bring meaning and existence to “troops,” and both are necessary in the film world for the category “human,” the lesson is that if one is anti-war one is anti-troop and therefore anti-human, a position that is difficult to sustain. The safe way then for one to be pro-troop in the context of brutal war is to want the conditions of war for the troops to be less onerous, brutalizing and deadly, and in fact, as long as “troops” and “war” remain intertwined that is the only way to be pro-troops when being anti-war is impossible. Sadly, this translates not into positions that call for the end of military aggression in order to keep troops out of harms way, but calls for increases in Pentagon budgets to produce more weaponry to “protect” troops engaged in “conflict.”

<sup>305</sup> The urban combat portrayed in *BHD* along with the film’s post 9-11/Afghanistan attack release suggests that the film played a meaningful cultural role in not only reflecting back on and re-furbishing the calamitous 1993 US intervention in Somalia but garnering support for the attack on Afghanistan, and in



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projecting forward into the streets of post-2003 Iraq where the United States is embroiled in a long term even bloodier battle in the streets, this time with plenty of the deadly air support absent in the film. The film's release date, along with that of *"When We Were Soldiers,"* was moved forward to tap into post-9/11 national sentiment. See N. Wapshott, "Hollywood Moguls Enlisted to Bolster War Effort," *The Times London*, November 10, 2001. Wapshott reports a November 2001 meeting between White House Advisor Karl Rove and a number of Hollywood studio executives. The goal was to enlist Hollywood in producing patriotic and inspiring films that would build support for the "war on terrorism," and help heal the wounded national ego.

## **CHAPTER IX NOTES**

<sup>306</sup> Pamela Hess, "US Lacks Moral Authority in Iraq," *United Press International*, October 6, 2005

<sup>307</sup> "Troops Called In With Order to Shoot to Kill," *Capital Hill Blue*, online at:

[http://www.capitolhillblue.com/artman/publish/article\\_7314.shtml](http://www.capitolhillblue.com/artman/publish/article_7314.shtml)

<sup>308</sup> Ed Rampell, *Progressive Hollywood*, (New York: Disinformation Company, 2005), p. 39

<sup>309</sup> *Alexander* is the tale of an imperial power illuminating the world – not ironically shown from an eagle's eye perspective – a saga about both dominating strategic projects and mystical quests for superiority

<sup>310</sup> That this simple truth is rarely noted in the US provides depressing evidence of how affective are the public pedagogies that portray the US as altruistic and benevolent savior of the world. One suspects that US audiences might raise some questions about Chinese intentions in the world if they saw ten films in which Chinese soldiers were shown killing, burning and torturing people in ten different countries. The first question might be: "What the hell are Chinese soldiers doing in ten different countries?"

<sup>311</sup> Istvan Meszaros, *Socialism or Barbarism*, (NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001). Given the increasing threat of weapons of mass destruction proliferation resulting from these US policies directed toward global domination through military might, a disengaged and deeply indoctrinated US population unwilling to intervene in ways to undermine US intentions bodes poorly for the future of everyone. Hence, it should be noted, the public pedagogies under discussion, and their ideological and material consequences, are not mere academic exercises, but directive political and ethical formations that have potentially catastrophic and dooming consequences in the lives of increasing numbers of people around the world.

<sup>312</sup> This refers to the complex interaction between what audiences bring to and take from films, because of the politics and experiences in their cultural and social lives outside of a particular filmic event or general series of films, and what politics and experiences films bring to and take from audiences. In brief, it is not only about how audiences experience politics in and through films, but the politics of the experience itself, i.e. the cultural and social mechanisms and public pedagogies that shape ideologies and identities, thoughts and identifications, emotional attachments and detachments and psychological affirmations or rejections. This notion is not dislinked from what C. Wright Mills intimated was the primary purpose of all substantive analytical endeavors regarding social, cultural, economic and political matters, i.e. to ensure that we work to proffer relevant and meaningful connections between the lives of individuals and the institutional structures in which individuals circulate, especially the structural inequalities that condition our lives. It was through such an approach that Mills suggested we could begin to de-atomize our personal problems and difficulties by relating the personal to the political, by contextualizing more broadly individual issues with the institutional forces of race, class, bureaucracy, authority, militarism, and power relations. Raymond Williams suggested that any serious critical cultural politics or pedagogy must take a serious detour through questions regarding both the ways in which people are shaped by the institutions of which they are part, how people in turn color those institutions that have conditioned them, and the relationships of power that shape the people and the structures. Developing a critical cultural understanding is no small intellectual task given that the political and ideological biases that are transmitted, and the differential rate of their reproduction in the culture is dependent on a cultural environment that is itself largely a consequence of culture, so that any of the cultural developments, alterations, conversions, or changes that occur through culture are both the cause and effect of their own evolution through culture. In short, there is a culture of culture in which culture is produced by and circulates through and within culture, and vice versa.

<sup>313</sup> This pattern, like most, requires much decoding. Because of the intense individualization of calamity in US films, it is easy to miss the victimization of US soldiers in US war films by US power. Herein, the term "victimization" refers to a general redirection back on US culture as a way to mobilize Nationalist sentiments in support of US foreign policies, always carried out in the interest of power and at the expense of victims in the US and particularly in the country under attack or occupation, for example, Iraq in the latest manifestation of US military aggression.

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<sup>314</sup> Terrence Rafferty, "No Man's Land," *New Yorker*, March 20, 1992

<sup>315</sup> Roger Ebert, "Tears of the Sun," *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 7, 2003. Here we could also add, William Freidkin's, stupendously reactionary, Jesus in Yemen doing the right thing, war crimes endorsing, bad-ass black man out of control, Vietnam Syndrome erasing, Arab demonizing, aggression whitewashing, hero worshipping, vengeance fest, mass-murderizing, "waste the motherfuckers," *Rules of Engagement*, (2000); and, Tony "Top Gun" Scott's relentlessly torturous, Jesus in Mexico doing the right thing, "little brown brother" demonizing, bad-ass black man out of control, tiny white angel saves strapping but emotionally wracked angry black man, Samuel L. Jacksonesque, finger-chopping, rectum wrecking, *Birth of a Nation-esque*, violence will set you free, "impressionistic nightmare, *Man on Fire* (2004).

<sup>316</sup> This "defensive" struggle to protect national identity that legitimates sadistic horrors has played out in Abu Ghraib and other US torture centers in Iraq where "interrogators" are told they are interrogating "insurgents" who are in the streets killing comrades and threatening the US mission. The interrogators then interpret their sadistic actions as a necessary form of self-defense against those who may be launching mortar attacks against the prison and protection of comrades in the field who are killed daily by "insurgent" violence. See the PBS *Frontline* program "The Torture Question," for interviews with soldiers, critics and policy makers. The program fails to ask a crucial question regarding US torture: why are US soldiers, intelligence operatives and private military contractors in Iraq illegally to begin with? Because that question is avoided another point of grave import is also avoided: US war crimes in Iraq, of which torture and abuse are but a small, but grisly, component.

<sup>317</sup> *Rules of Engagement* engages some of these questions in using a deceitful manipulation of Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* device of looking back at an historical event through the eyes and representations of various participants, during a "show trial" of a US Marine Corp colonel, Terry Childers, played powerfully and angrily by Samuel L. Jackson. Colonel Childers is accused of carrying out "war crimes" (a phrase conveniently edited out of the DVD version of the film, one suspects on the grounds that the very notion of US war crimes, let alone the reality, is not permitted to enter US consciousness) in ordering his small band of murderous Marines to "waste the motherfuckers." The "waste the motherfucker" actions kill 83 Muslims, and injure many others, women and children included, during a regular protest outside the US embassy in Yemen. In following a standard practice of Hollywood films engaged in representing US military adventures, the film never reveals why people in the Arab world might be protesting outside a US embassy thus contributing to the dehistoricizing and depoliticizing of the events. A critical stance working to situate the film historically and explain Arab anger might ask: is it because of massive US military, economic and diplomatic support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and Israel's illegal occupation; is it because of US sanctions against Iraq and the mass deaths that ensued; is it because of US support for authoritarian regimes in the region; is it because of US exploitation of resources in the region, especially oil; is it because of the presence of the US military in the Holy Land, Saudi Arabia, etc. The absence of context undermines opportunities for historical and political understanding, and tends dangerously close to intimating that Arabs are possessed of some form of abstract, perhaps biological, or metaphysical, "evil" hatred for the United States.<sup>317</sup> The "absence of context" approach has two negative consequences: (1) it tends to absolve the perpetrators of violent protest of any responsibility for their "terrorist" actions; (2) it absolves us of seeking any explanation of what may have led people to "hate the United States," and be willing to employ violence as a form of protest or expression of outrage. Both consequences have a concomitant negative effect: they ensure that the conditions that promote anger and violence will continue, and almost surely proliferate.

In *Rules of Engagement*, the "show trial," functions pedagogically as another representative "instrument of American destiny," in David Barsamian's acute phrase,<sup>317</sup> and is really a public pedagogical exercise, directed at a US film audience, with five overt purposes: (1) it is an act of cultural conditioning that directs a US audience to demonize all Arabs/Muslims during a historical period when the US had/has designs on using military might to establish both a force presence in the region and to gain access to and control of Middle East energy reserves for their strategic, political and economic advantages;<sup>317</sup> (2) it is part of a repeated exercise in creating new "evil" demons in the world, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in order to create a culture of fear and terror in the US for the purpose of compelling US citizens to continue to support both the bloated Pentagon system and US imperial adventurism, and to compel US citizens to subjugate themselves to new forms of authoritarianism inside an increasing US culture of militarism; (3) it is an attempt to rewrite the US attack on Vietnam by suggesting that the military violence in Vietnam was perpetrated at some level of equivalence, or worse, that the US was the real victim; (4) it maneuvers to suggest, quite blatantly, to a US audience that we live in a world in which irrational, terror driven and savage people are possessed of an unfounded and deep seated anti-Americanism that we must be prepared

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to confront and defend against in order to protect our dignity, honor, nation, nobility and lives; (5) it is an experience of bigoted cultural politics that creates an insidious politics of experience by circling through a reality-bending, emotions manipulating, identification directing cycle of *condemnation* of the violence perpetrated by reluctant US marines ordered to kill innocent civilians by an out-of-control, Vietnam-damaged, bad-ass black US marine officer (Childers). The *condemnation* is accompanied by an initial deep emotional *sympathy* for the Arab victims that results in an initial *acceptance* of what we perceive as lower levels of Arab violence (a *sympathy* that makes the later violation of that *sympathy* even more powerful and cunning on the part of the film), seen sensibly as “defensive” and in immediate retrospect legitimate (although, again, largely de-contextualized), carried out by a few Muslims angered by the presence of US marines at a weekly protest in front of the US embassy.

This *sympathy* and *acceptance* is maliciously maneuvered through an overt *demonizing* of Arabs/Muslims within a re-representation of events that demonstrate an escalated, illegitimate and unsympathetic violence carried out by blood lusting untrustworthy Muslims at the protest (and it is made clear that it is American blood after which they lust), including women and children, simply because, we learn, they hate Americans and all things American. This *demonizing* is cycled through a new *sympathy* (and empathy) for Colonel Childers, a potent manic *distrust* for all things, and persons, Arab (even those who dedicate their lives to helping the sick and injured, those in whom we place our utmost trust, “the Doctor”), and a clear *endorsement* of far more vicious and deadly US military violence that is eventually presented as both self-defensive of the Marines, the embassy, the flag, and as a defense of American honor, life and national identity. All of this finally leads to a deeper *acceptance* of, *support* for, and *legitimizing* of a generalized notion of US violence and militarism (with a not so subtle attempt to erase the “Vietnam Syndrome,”) that is always self-defensive, always protective of National identity against “evil” and hate infested forces arrayed against us, always carried out by courageous heroes who in the end always “do the right thing,” even if the violence the US perpetrates is far worse than the Muslim violence, or the violence of any “Other” we have learned to violently condemn to the Hellish suffering imposed by US military violence. The bottom line lesson is that US violence, especially against the “little brown” Others, whether in Vietnam (as shown in the prologue of the film) or in the Arab world, is not only permissible and endorsable, but also *necessary* for both self-protection against an America hating enemy, and for the pursuit of decency and freedom around the world. The inculcation of notions of the *necessity* of violence again closes down ideas, imaginings or options for “rules of engagement” that do not include mass violence, but that might rely on diplomacy, discussions, dialogue, respect for international law, and a commitment to international solidarity and peace

<sup>318</sup> This “most unimaginable thing” might be taken to heart by US audiences in consideration of the many Iraqis, Afghans and Palestinians, etc., who have watched, and are watching, their families die at the hands of US perpetrated or sponsored violence.

<sup>319</sup> Another more practical reason from the studio’s perspective is it made the film considerably shorter (along other cuts) thus allowing for more screenings, and hence, more money at the box office.

<sup>320</sup> Walter Davis in the forthcoming *Death’s Dream Kingdom*, (London: Pluto, 2006) presents a figure of 600,000 killed in the two atomic bombings. This excludes the many hundreds of thousands more killed in the US fire bombings of over 60 Japanese cities.

<sup>321</sup> Demonizing the enemy is, of course, not new. In a sustained and calculated effort to stimulate and maintain a complete war mentality during WWI there was an effort to control imagery, and reporting. Not surprisingly, there was little imagery or reporting of US casualties, plenty on enemy casualties, and a regular presentation of the enemy as “baby-killers” dedicated to the destruction of civilization and as the incarnation of pure “evil.” See Paul Wombell, *Face to Face with Themselves: Photography and the First World War. Photography/Politics: Two*. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney, ed. Comedia Publishing, Group, London: 1986. p. 76-77.

<sup>322</sup> In most of these colonial/imperial films a complicated notion of “freedom” is revealed: freedom as demon/freedom as savior; freedom as destroyer/freedom and creator; freedom to save/freedom to kill; freedom to safety/freedom to danger. In Terry Eagleton’s words “An animal which can perform life-saving surgery can also torture.” The cinematic machinations manage audiences in ways that induce support for the freedom to destroy by allowing the viewer to participate in the celebration of a moral growth and victory of the hero protagonist so that, in traditional “liberal” fashion, the presence of an individual moral victory leaves absent the wider repercussions and historical maneuverings and aggressions of US power as well as the wider destructiveness of the employment of US institutional military power. As Lila Kitaeff points out this “narrative trajectory allows viewers to accept [because of its absence] that larger social immorality [and criminal institutional actions and structures] will remain unchanged.”

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<sup>323</sup> It is rather odd that US officials can regularly refer to “outside terrorists” fomenting violence in Iraq and nobody inside the dominant media seems to notice that the “outside terrorists” fomenting the most violence in Iraq are from either the US military or private contractors (not to mention the “inside” terrorists in the “new” Iraqi military that is working with, armed and trained by the United States). It is also odd that people defending themselves against an illegal US attack and military occupation are considered “insurgent terrorists.” Films perform a crucial role in shutting down US citizens’ ability to unpack terms such as “terrorism,” “aggression,” “insurgent,” etc. In addition to the individualization process described herein, films “absent” crucial political, historical and military information that would assist viewers in placing both film violence and aggression and real world violence and aggression in moral and political contexts that would provide us the tools to take up these issues in critical ways.

<sup>324</sup> Edward Said in Gauri Viswanathan, *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*, (New York: Pantheon, 2001)

<sup>325</sup> The notion that US intervention is “humanitarian” plays out repeatedly in cinema. Like most cinematic representations of US military power in film, however, it is quite distanced from reality. While “official” propaganda often describes the US as compelled by humanitarian concerns surely on the grounds that it is more palatable to audiences, the reality is much less ingratiating. The “humanitarian intervention” in Yugoslavia in 1999 actually precipitated a humanitarian catastrophe of mass killing and displacement, while at the same time the US was a major participant in ensuring that humanitarian catastrophes in Colombia and Turkey, key US allies, and Iraq, only worsened. The pattern repeats itself regularly, hence the importance of cinematic representations to re-encode humanitarian visions that hide the nightmares of reality. The same has played out in “the liberation” of Iraq where it is becoming increasingly clear that conditions under the US occupation are even worse than they were under Saddam with rampant torture, abuse, starvation, disease, and death squads roaming the streets and countryside almost surely linked to the US “Salvador Option.” When real humanitarian intervention was called for in Rwanda, or more recently in the Congo, the US balked, apparently on the grounds in the first case that the US did not want to legitimate the UN call for intervention or place US troops under UN command which itself would have legitimated the UN at a time in history when the US is working overtime to undermine, if not dismantle, the legitimacy of the UN, and in the latter case the US does not want to legitimate the International Criminal Court because of its mandate to punish war criminals, something the US only supports when it is applied to others but not when it is applied to the US. For a lengthy discussion of US “humanitarian intervention” see: Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanitarianism*, (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1999)

<sup>326</sup> Earlier in the film Lt. Waters announced that “God has left Africa;” and the implication is that Waters, symbolic of Jesus, especially after his moral resurrection, is the Savior. The closing image of Italian beauty Monica Bellucci cradling Waters/Willis in her arms unmistakably calls to mind Mary cradling a post-Crucifixion Christ in her arms in Michelangelo’s “La Pieta.” They ascend to the heavens (in a helicopter).

<sup>327</sup> Here again, as in many filmic representations it is the military that carries out the “mercy killing” while in the backrooms the United States power structure is covertly supporting the tyrannical Muslim government in Nigeria.

<sup>328</sup> One is reminded of a US soldiers comment from Iraq: “Iraqis are the cancer, and we are the chemotherapy.”

<sup>329</sup> Lila Kitaeff, “*Three Kings*: Neocolonial Arab Representation,” *Jump Cut*, No. 46, Summer 2003

<sup>330</sup> Said in Viswanathan.

<sup>331</sup> *Tears of the Sun*’s Nigerian setting may have something to do with another “darkness:” oil. Africa currently supplies 18% of US oil and the largest producer is Nigeria with 34 billion barrels in known reserves. More importantly, according to the World Bank’s 2003 Global Development Finance report this region of the world provides “the highest returns on foreign direct investment of any region in the world” largely because of oil. Control of oil, both for its stupendous profits (see Exxon’s nearly \$10 billion in the third quarter of 2005), and for the lever it provides over global politics, suggests that the US will be willing to employ military force to ensure that Nigerian and other sources of West African oil remain in the US orbit. One is reminded of Thomas Friedman’s insightful and honest comment, “For globalization to work, America must not be afraid to act as the almighty superpower that it is ...the hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist...And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for [maximizing profit potential, i.e., “highest returns”] is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”

<sup>332</sup> Robert Fisk, “US Coming Around to the Truth,” December 7, 2005, online at:

<http://www.commondreams.org/views05/1207-26.htm>. Determining “success” or “failure” in the US adventures is no easy task, and depends on whose interests one examines. For significant sectors of US

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corporate and elite culture the invasion of Iraq has been quite successful. Exxon/Mobil's nearly \$10 billion in third quarter profits are one testament. There are many others.

<sup>333</sup> The cleansing is doubled when one considers that it is Lt. Waters calling for both the crossing over into new non-hierarchical structuring of decision making and a cleansing of the immoral past muddied and stymied by self-interest.

<sup>334</sup> One does not want to overstate the case, for the film uses the emotions to in the end support mass killing. Nevertheless, if one of the goals is to ask what we can teach and learn from films we must open up the films to "utopian" possibilities.

<sup>335</sup> A similarly "courageous" violation of "rules" is carried out in each of the other films under review, always in the name of violence, yes, but also in the name of some concept of social justice and protection of the innocent, and always haunted by the question of whether the violence was worth the pain. A goal of critical pedagogy is to find ways to direct the courageous and anti-authority positions toward social justice while leaving behind the violence, killing and corruption.

<sup>336</sup> It should be noted that the Nigerians are excluded from the "democratic" meeting thus reinforcing a different form of hierarchy and exclusion, ethnic and racial, and demonstrating that the colonial and paternalistic mentality has not been fully erased.

<sup>337</sup> It is intimated in *MF* that Creasy comes to the conclusion "a life that only knows violence and killing" is a life not worth living. Creasy's life has been narrowly conditioned by his ideological and material experience as a US Special Forces soldier. He suggests that there is no forgiveness for the kind of life he has led. It is a powerful indictment of the US military and the impact the military experience has in the lives of those who serve.

<sup>338</sup> In *Man on Fire* it is Denzel Washington, in *Mystic River* it is Sean Penn, and in *Rules of Engagement* it is Samuel L. Jackson. In each of these films, and many outcast hero others, the already well-developed renegade superstar hero is further enhanced as rebellious problem solver by his belonging to some wing of the typically desperado-like US Special Forces.

<sup>339</sup> This serves the generally conservative role of distancing people from government (except when government represented the Pentagon), in line with conservative US administrations, and the interests of corporate power.

## **CHAPTER VII NOTES**

<sup>340</sup> Adam Tanner, "Iraqi Victim Says U.S. Torture Worse Than Saddam," *Reuters*, January 12, 2005

<sup>341</sup> *El Salvador Update: Counterterrorism in Action* (Los Angeles: 1987) p. 14

<sup>342</sup> The photos were startling, but the torture revelations were only "revelations" to those who were not paying attention. Reports of torture were widespread in Iraq, through Amnesty International, Christian Peace Teams, Human Rights Watch, etc. In fact, CBS news reported on July 19, 2003, eight months before the release of the photos, Amnesty International was investigating a number of cases of "suspected torture" perpetrated by U.S. authorities in Iraq. One of the victims, Khraisan al-Aballi, noted that the treatment was so horrendous that he finally said to his tormentors "kill me." See Howard Zinn, "An Occupied Country," *The Progressive*, August 2003

<sup>343</sup> Paul Klite, "TV News and the Culture of Violence," *Rocky Mountain Media Watch*, May 24, 1999. One should note the horror of acts of torture, sadism and summary execution, but not allow these horrors to distract from the much worse abominations of US bombing. Summary executions range in the dozens, torture in the hundreds, perhaps low thousands, but killing by US air power is well-over 100,000 in Iraq. The sadistic films include: Quentin Tarantino's predictably awash in verbal insult, mental abuse, physical torture, and mass killing *Kill Bill, Vol. 2*; *Walking Tall*, an ultra-violent, right-wing vigilante fantasy; and the torturous "vengeance is natural" *The Punisher*, a "dark and endlessly depressing example of fascist retribution" (Wesley Morris, "The Punisher Makes a Fetish of Torture," *Boston Globe*, April 16, 2004), guided by the maxim "if you want peace, get ready for war."

<sup>344</sup> Terrorism often goes under the guise of counter-insurgency warfare, or low-intensity conflict (not low intensity for the victims), or counter-terrorism when it is state terror. The definition for counter-terrorism, is essentially the same as it is for terrorism, "the use of force and violence, or the threat of force and violence, to coerce, intimidate, or instill fear, in order to advance political, ideological or religious objectives." Counter-terrorism is official US policy. An uncomfortable conclusion must be drawn. If counter-terrorism is official state policy, and terrorism and counter-terrorism are similarly, if not identically defined, then it follows that terrorism is official U.S. state policy. For a more detailed examination of this see Noam Chomsky's "*Hegemony or Survival*." This conclusion, and this juxtaposition, is, for many people in the U.S., not as jarring or startling as it might have been just one year ago. We are moving dangerously close

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to a society that tolerates what would under normal conditions of “human decency and good taste” be seen as intolerable. Torture, abuse, humiliation, imprisonment, indiscriminate killing, summary execution, and the excessive use of force are becoming routinized. One suspects that Hollywood, either consciously or unconsciously, either in league with, or out of league with the Pentagon, is playing a crucial role in this routinization of the abominable. In a telephone conversation with Phil Strub, the Pentagon’s Hollywood liaison, he claimed that the Pentagon has not played an active role in shaping projects or scripts in Hollywood, but does maintain some degree of script control when military equipment or installations are used for the primary purpose of enhancing recruitment of soldiers, sailors and marines. He did suggest, “people within the White House may be working more directly with Hollywood producers in creating projects.” Calls to the White House have proved inconclusive.

<sup>345</sup> Deborah Hornblow, “‘Man on Fire’ film review,” *Hartford Courant*, April 23, 2004

<sup>346</sup> Screenplay by *Mystic River*’s Brian Hegeland.

<sup>347</sup> Drill Instructor Hartman in Stanley Kubrick’s, *Full Metal Jacket*, 1987

<sup>348</sup> The militarized sports spectacles include the US Army sponsorship of a National High School Football “All-Star Game” that functions essentially as a recruitment advertisement for the Army. In addition, there is the regular militarized spectacles presented at major sporting events such as the National Collegiate Football championship bowl game between USC and Texas, replete with fighter jet overflights, military choirs singing patriotic songs, soldiers parachuting into the stadium, a pop superstar singing the Star-Spangled Banner, hundreds of US flags, live hook-ups to Iraq, etc.

<sup>349</sup> Theodore Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)

<sup>350</sup> This initial violence is ironically both softened and hardened by the rather subtle and elegiac voice of the kidnapper (known, we later discover, as “the voice”), telling us, and the victim’s family, “Family is everything” followed by the question, “do you love your son?” The soothing tones underlie a demonizing and hate-inducing cinematic message: the “other” is attacking “the family,” our most cherished “value,” and subverting what we long for most - love - with violence.

<sup>351</sup> There is also the intimation that Creasy and the killers are not all that different. Read critically this could open up questions about the conditions and pedagogies that lead to such horrific behaviors, questions about definitions of terrorism, question about the legitimate and illegitimate uses of violence, etc. On the other hand, on a more sutured reading, one could simply leave the theatre thinking that such violence is simply “natural,” everywhere, and unavoidable. The latter reading supports a “survival of the most ruthless” mentality which lends support to increasing the US culture of militarism and its ruthlessness...all in the name of self-defense in a war of all against all world. For those committed to militarism, visions of a war of all against all world is a no lose proposition, for the more they employ violence the more they are detested and the more they are detested the more they produce the bogeyman they need to justify their continuing call for more militarism. The perverse desire for violence thus needs to stimulate violent opposition to the desire for violence. Where violence is linked to profits it makes sense to stimulate as much violence as possible for it feeds the coffers, as well as the graveyard. These type film projections of terror and torture do suggest that the differences between “our” violence and “their” violence are not so clear-cut. One could read this as a suggestion that the violent alien other is mostly just a mirrored projection of ourselves, and conclude that most violent films carry the shadow of Shiller’s line from *The Robbers*, “Ohy, fool that I was, to suppose that I could make the world a fairer place through terror, and uphold the cause of justice through lawlessness...” (Act 5, Scene 2).

<sup>352</sup> This contrasts with the film’s denouement that restores, for “us,” because of Creasy’s martyrdom, both the truth of the words and the commitment to family thus pushing further our identification with and approval of Creasy’s heinous, destructive and torturous actions.

<sup>353</sup> Disproportionate violence has been witnessed again in Iraq where close to 3,000 US soldiers have been killed while as many as, or as few as, 655,000 Iraqis have been killed, a ration of roughly 1 to 220.

<sup>354</sup> There are a number of scenes in which Creasy drops a bullet he is trying to catch. When he finally is able to catch the bullet it is symbolic of the “lost sheep” finding himself again.

<sup>355</sup> A critical reading would note that the businessmen who exploit the “forced cheap labor” and thus perpetrate the “kidnapping” of an entire population of people to maximize profits are never questioned, nor does that systemic form of “kidnapping” suffer the wrath of Creasy, the righteous avenger who is only interested in reclaiming his right to violence in pursuit of retaliation and salvation for the kidnapping of Lupita, not working to create social conditions in which both forms of kidnapping would be abolished. Creasy carries out his violence mostly against poor and working class people, not the rich. He protects them, especially those with pale skin.

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<sup>356</sup> Only after Creasy's reconnection with his violent, torturous self, i.e. his redemption, might an audience member suspect what Creasy must have been doing in Colombia as part of his service to the country with the worst human rights record in the hemisphere, and, more importantly, his service to his masters in Washington who provide the aid, training and support to the abusers.

<sup>357</sup> The "hand of God" is an underhanded reference to Creasy's hands, mutilated in Christ-like fashion as though someone pounded stakes through his palms. We soon learn that Creasy will die, not for our sins, but to legitimate our sins.

<sup>358</sup> Following a standard pattern, In this "with us or against us" world, we are "worthy victims" and they are "unworthy victims," we are "freedom fighters" and they are "terrorists."

<sup>359</sup> In nearly three hours of film in Mexico City, however, we are given no space to empathize with the millions of Mexican children suffering from hunger, misery, poverty and despair, forms of "kidnapping" from life all too frequent in Latin America. We see underclass Mexicans demanding, and getting, millions of dollars in ransom money, but still inhabiting slums, reproducing like rabbits in hovels, and deceiving one another at every turn. The implication is that poor Mexicans are inherently criminal, incapable of living like us, and therefore they deserve to be killed.

<sup>360</sup> In a dangerous world where audiences are convinced that "We" represent ultimate good, and "They" represent ultimate evil, it is not an unreasonable conclusion to support the suppression or elimination of ultimate evil in the service of ultimate good and defense of child-like innocence, even if it requires harrowing violence; hence, the great danger of this reductionist world view: it tends to create an approval of cruelties within a whole population and permits hard-core killers to carry out their duties more efficiently. Shultz demonstrated in the early 1980s a long standing positive correlation between human rights violations in a foreign country and the amount of US military aid, training and support the country received. In other words, the more a country tortured, assassinated, disappeared, repressed and massacred its citizens the more US military support, training and aid they received.

<sup>361</sup> Perhaps an even more important pedagogical task is undermined in that it prevents people from extrapolating from the former point to make a latter point: the future will be the way it is not because it has to be that way, but because it gets that way as a result of human vision, informed imagination, planning and creation.

<sup>362</sup> The over the top violence may actually work against the films celebration of torture and mass killing for it places the audience in the position of asking "Why is such violence necessary, why am I being asked to support and even enjoy the grotesque spectacle, why does Creasy have no other options in his life, etc.?" The film can direct the audience to ask why Creasy is so alienated and so self-abnegating, and then consider, following Walter Benjamin, why the self-alienation of humanity under neo-fascist conditions "has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as a pleasure of the first order"? Here questions of self-sacrifice arise as well as the conditions that lead to self-sacrifice: is it hopelessness, is it solidarity, is it concern for others, is it lack of concern for self, is it cynicism, is it revolution, etc.?

<sup>363</sup> While one would want to guard against drawing false conclusion or intimation from the film text, one could plausible note that this dictum plays into the current obsession with operating outside and in violation of international and domestic laws and conventions among the reactionaries running the current US administration. Courts and tribunals are deterrents to US pursuits of its version of "justice," especially for an Executive Branch and Pentagon system that understands "The ultimate step in avoiding periodic wars... is to make statesmen responsible to law." Accepting responsibility to law would undermine the "inevitable [international violence and aggression] in a system of international lawlessness," an inevitable aggression and violence to which the US has been persistently committed since at least 1950. (Text in Richard Falk, Gabriel Kolko, Robert J. Lifton, eds., *Crimes of War*, New York: Random House, 1971, p. 85). In a world in which the Pentagon and White House are committed to lawlessness, pre-emptive strikes, violation of international treaties, conventions and the U.S. Constitution, subversion of collective agreements, attacks on democracy, illegal wars of aggression, and pursuit of war on a worldwide scale, this frontier reframing of "justice" as outside of "courts and tribunals," i.e., outside collectively agreed upon norms, and inside the world of the "artists of death," provides a discourse of legitimacy for those who are "planning, preparing, initiating, [and] waging wars of aggression, [and other violations] of international norms, treaties and assurances." (Here quoting Nuremberg Principle VI, a. (i), "Crimes Against Peace," "the Supreme International Crime")

<sup>364</sup> This falls in line with the Nietzschean *ubermenschen* "will to power" fascist overtones in the film. The "lesson" seems to teach that only when we free ourselves from a deplorable and wretched human weakness that finds violence abhorrent, or bound by courts and law, and when we surrender to a higher knowledge, a higher authority, a higher morality that is beyond good and evil, will we achieve our true greatness, our

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oneness with self, goodness and God. Again, the lessons are crucial within a culture of militarism in which power reserves the right to act outside of convention and in clear violation of not only the most fundamental human rights but in violation of international and domestic laws.

<sup>365</sup> In going beyond the question “What does the film teach?” to “What can we teach from the film?” we might extend this discourse around our “freedoms” that they hate. For example, borrowing from Arundhati Roy, we might note that they hate “freedoms” such as “our” freedom to carry out aggressive wars with impunity in violation of the UN Charter and Nuremberg Principles; “our” freedom to rob, exploit and dominate third world countries, their labor and their resources; “our” freedom to impose economic agreements on countries that increase poverty, misery and despair; “our” freedom to pursue the development of weapons of mass destruction, and our freedom to use them, or threaten to use them, placing the entire world under the constant threat of terror; “our” freedom to subvert international norms of conduct such as the Geneva Conventions; “our” freedom to exclude ourselves from the International Criminal Court; “our” freedom to destroy the environment and extricate ourselves from any of the binding conditions in the Kyoto Protocol; “our” freedom to act against the political will of a huge majority of the world’s population in attacking Iraq; “our” freedom to sign and ratify international human rights conventions but with reservations that exclude the United States from the provisions of those conventions, the Genocide Convention being perhaps the most infamous example; “our” freedom to overthrow foreign governments and install brutal dictators; “our” freedom to arm, train and support the worst human rights violators in the world; “our” freedom to subvert governments that do not follow orders; our “freedom” to destroy without responsibility to rebuild; our freedom to act against the will of the United Nations; our freedom to impose murderous and illegal sanctions, etc. Here, introducing a new set of facts could open up new understanding about values such as “freedom,” and thus lead to new forms of emancipatory knowledge.

<sup>366</sup> We learn in the course of the hyper-documentary opening of the film that there is one kidnapping every hour in Mexico City, and 70% of the victims do not survive.

<sup>367</sup> Here again we have an allusion to the Powell Doctrine ideology of “zero losses,” which calls for massively destructive violent retaliation whenever US soldiers are threatened or killed.

<sup>368</sup> This is a convenient inscription given the history and recent actions of the US and likely continuing plans in Iraq.

<sup>369</sup> It is virtually impossible not to feel deep empathy with and sympathy for children when they are victimized (Pita is kidnapped and presumed murdered), and this film exploits that natural tendency in arguably sordid ways in order to justify the heinous use of violence against ethnic others who in the end are not guilty of the crime (murder of a child) for which they have been tortured and executed en masse by Creasy. This bonding between Pita and Creasy, always with an undertone of the seductively salacious, prepares the audience to cheer Denzel when he metes out his torturously vicious justice. The dynamic between Creasy and Pita includes some risqué sexual intimations verging on the pornographic (part of a “perversion sells” Hollywood ethos that is also part of the continuing marketing of adulthood to children and childhood to adults) that suggest their relationship represents something more than simply protector and protected, father-figure and abandoned daughter, virginal mother-figure and wayward son, but verging on seductress and seducer thus perversely linking the hyper-masculine “ideology of hardness” to a kiddie-porn ethos. The latter is suggested not only in Creasy’s, and the camera’s, penetrating gaze every time Pita appears in her swimsuit, but also when Creasy discovers Pita’s diary in which she has written, “I hope you love me Creasy? I love you Creasy, I love you Creasy, I love you Creasy, I love you Creasy,” and during the “double date” lunch celebrating Pita’s victory in the swim competition during which the main topic of conversation is love and relationships. Pita gives Creasy two gifts: a small stuffed bear, representing her Goldilocks child-like innocence, and a St. Jude medal, the patron saint of lost-causes, representing her adult-like overseer sophistication. All of this sets up three standardized themes: the black man will find fulfillment only through the superior knowledge and wisdom of the white women (even if she is only nine years old); the subordinate worker must be willing to sacrifice for the domineering boss, as the soldier (even if retired) must be willing to die to protect honor, dignity and our innocence; and, until violence is accepted as a form of regeneration and liberation we, and our causes, will remain lost

<sup>370</sup> David Mamet, “Bring it On...” *The Guardian/UK*, July 2, 2004

<sup>371</sup> The “no negotiations” position harkens back at least to the atomic bombings of Japan, and then forward to Vietnam, the 1991 US attack on Iraq, the 1999 attack on Yugoslavia, and the latest 2003 US attack on Iraq. In each case diplomatic resolutions to often US manufactured conflicts were readily available but dismissed as an affront to US power. In effect, the position represents the US “mafia don” style of world affairs. One would not expect the mafia don to seek court assistance or diplomatic engagements in a campaign of breaking knees.



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<sup>372</sup> Culturally, when linked to US unilateralism and disengagements from international treaties, conventions and institutions this suggests that as a nation the US has undermined or dismissed the capacity to respond to conflicts and crises through dialogue, discussion, diplomacy or negotiation and has chosen violence as its primary form of communication and statecraft. Here again one would ask “What can we learn and teach from the film regarding US militarism?”

<sup>373</sup> At this point in the film, as the shoulder launched missile races across screen towards its target, one waits for subtitles in English to roll across the screen announcing “Noble ends are worthy of extreme prejudice in the application of punishment.” The subtitles are unnecessary, for the notion is already deeply embedded in the cinematic and moral consciousness of the audience.

<sup>374</sup> Here quoting descriptions of the aftermath of the November 2004 US attack on Fallujah in the *New York Times*. Of course, these apocalyptic scenes regularly appear in the media outside the US. One might compare the discomfort and outrage film characters experience, and how they typically respond, when anything of similar filmic destructiveness is carried out inside NYC or Washington. Perhaps this simple lack of discomfort when we are perpetrating the cinematic destruction and death exposes what may be most harmful about the saturation violence we experience through film. It is not that film violence leads people to perpetrate similar acts of violence in their lives outside of cinema, but that the real violence perpetrated on a massive scale by U.S. power is almost always mediated through film, video and television images creating the theatricalizing effect noted in the epigraph. It is film, video and television images of violence to which we have become so accustomed that they are comforting, rather than discomforting, distancing rather than engaging, theatrical rather than real, de-moralizing rather than moralizing, but they contaminate us while they decontaminate us. One wonders how U.S. audiences might respond to a film in which an al-Qaeda assassin went on a similar killing and destruction spree in the heart of New York City or a small town in Ohio after he suspected that a young Arab-American girl had been killed by US kidnapers still unknown to him.

<sup>375</sup> This theme of killing without evidence plays well in a post 9/11 world where no evidence is required to launch massive violence against the territorial integrity, political sovereignty and innocent civilians of foreign nations, and “bad intelligence” is only a temporary inconvenience that suggests corruptions and misdemeanors but a continuing convenience in that it serves to distract from the criminality of the illegal aggression and mass killing. With *Man on Fire*, in the end, we can leave the theatre comforted to know that Denzel liberated Mexico City from the “terrorists,” his rampage through the streets, though far more destructive than anything the Mexicans were capable of, was not “terrorism,” and we can remain untroubled by the illegality and brutality of his murderous actions for he “saved” innocence. Similarly, we can rest comfortably knowing that Bush has liberated Iraq from its non-existent WMD, freed them from tyranny, and brought democracy to the Iraqi people, and remain untroubled by the criminal nature of the murderous aggression as the “war on terror” nobly marches on.

<sup>376</sup> Alex Cox, “Action Man, Torture Hero,” *The Guardian*, August 14, 2004, online at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/08/11/1092102515703.html?from=storyrhs>

<sup>377</sup> Walter Chaw,

<sup>378</sup> Film critic Armond White points out that this “bad-ass black behavior” that is supposed to be “somehow emancipating” is really a form of “self-hatred,” since the vengeance in *Man on Fire*, is perpetrated entirely against “a nation of color,” people who are for the most part “desperate and socially deprived.” A similar theme plays out in *Rules of Engagement* where “bad ass blackman” Samuel L. Jackson slaughters people of color. We might add, the Bible/gun fusion provides a divine warrant and powerful justification for human pursuits as evidenced in the regular reliance by US presidents on the will of God to justify US aggression

<sup>379</sup> One is reminded of Teddy Roosevelt’s infamous quote celebrating US foreign policy violence: “No triumph of peace can equal the armed triumph of war.” Cited in Gore Vidal, *The Decline and Fall of the American Empire*, (Chicago: Odonian Press, 2000) p. 16. Left unstated is, of course, “and what about the victims?”

<sup>380</sup> State Department planner George Kennan lamented the communist’s ability to have something to offer to the poor (most of the world’s population) while the United States had nothing to offer. It was, for Kennan, an unfair advantage.

<sup>381</sup> David Sterritt, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 26, 2001

<sup>382</sup> The narrowing of US consciousness through the inculcation of these cinematic codes creates not only an absence of understanding the material and practical consequences of US violence in the real lives of people across the world, but also the reasons why most of the world vigorously objects to the militarized compulsions and political imperatives that infuse and generate the constant employment of US power.

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<sup>383</sup> These regularly repeated “hymns to violence” and myths of self-protection and self-preservation arguably grow out of a guilt ridden national consciousness that at some level understands that US “Manifest Destiny” is built on genocidal mass slaughter. In addition, because this consciousness remains largely hidden under layers of triumphalism, it is difficult for Americans to consciously understand the distrust and disgust aroused by these US national myths as well as the manifestation of the myths through global violence. At a more unconscious level one suspects that most Americans understand that the restoration myths of the redemptive and regenerative force of violence and aggression have little to do with redemption and regeneration and much to do with power projection, aggression and imperialism sure to arouse outrage and indignation globally and its eventual concomitant “blowback.” This in turn fuels recognition for ever bigger and more destructive weapons systems to defend against the blowback violence that the power projection and aggression virtually guarantee. A simple, but seemingly obvious point is avoided in the redemption myths: since the US is far superior in force and destructive capabilities, and willing to employ those advantages globally and regularly, isn’t it the victims of US violence that require regeneration and redemption through reparations and other forms of assistance?

<sup>384</sup> Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (New York: Disinformation Company, 2002), p. 172

<sup>385</sup> The truth, of course, can be seen in the bones dotting the landscapes of countries around the world, not least of which are the bones of the Native population in what is now the United States where there were an estimated 10-20 million people at the time of first contact and by 1890, as a result of the multiple calamities of disease, deprivation, degradation and butchery, only 200,000 remained.

<sup>386</sup> Jimmie Durham, “Cowobys and...” *Third Text*, 12, Autumn 1990, pp. 5-20

<sup>387</sup> These themes play out too in *Rules of Engagement* when Yemeni civilians sully the symbols of our innocence and righteousness, the embassy, the flag, and US marines and therefore justify their slaughter and when Vietnamese soldiers provoke the war crime depicted in the prologue thus directing blame upon themselves; in *Tears of the Sun* by blaming Muslims for creating the conditions of violence in Nigeria thus justifying our mass killing at the close of the film; and in *Mystic River* where responsibility for victimhood is placed on the weakness of the victim, etc

<sup>388</sup> Lewis Lapham, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 220

<sup>389</sup> A.O. Scott, “Vengeance is Ours, Says Hollywood,” *New York Times*, May 2, 2004

<sup>390</sup> Jeffrey Overstreet, “Man on Fire,” *Christianity Today*, April 23, 2004

<sup>391</sup> *Man on Fire*’s neo-con Jesus, the cleansing Avenger, “kill ‘em all” ethic of torture, execution and illegality is especially confounding and contemptible when not only, at the time of the film’s release, was abuse, torture and summary execution rampant in U.S. prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, Diego Garcia, and Guantanamo, but, in the streets all over Iraq “Americans are shooting randomly at anything that moves,” (Jeffrey D. Sachs, “Iraq’s Civilian Dead get no Hearing in the United States,” December 2, 2004), virtually omnipotent U.S. airpower is responsible for killing most of the 100,000 dead civilians (as of October 2004), and for U.S. soldiers in Iraq having “a great day” means “we killed a lot of people.” (See John McDonald, “Oppose the War and the Warriors: Supporting These Troops?” *Counterpunch.org*, [www.counterpunch.org/marciano11172004.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/marciano11172004.html)). The discomfiting connect between the film and reality is really part of the comforting disconnect between citizens and reality.

<sup>392</sup> Referring here to Richard Slotkin’s book titles.

<sup>393</sup> But, we should carefully note, this is true only in the minds of the victimizer, not the victims, thus setting the stage for both a growing disgust, anger, outrage and blowback within and by the victim against the victimizer, and a continually escalating dialectic between violence by the powerful against the disempowered,<sup>393</sup> and retaliatory violence by the weakened against the strong;. The standard structure of “powerful and powerless” must be challenged. The term “powerless” stifles understanding of the conditions that create a small class of people with enormous political, economic and military power at their disposal, and a large class deprived of power under current conditions, but not powerless. In fact, as David Hume pointed out several hundred years ago, the masses have power on their side by virtue of their numbers. Hume raises the compelling question, how is it that the few, lacking in power by virtue of their smaller numbers, are able to maintain power over masses of people? His answer was that control is exercised through both force and opinion, what Althusser later called “repressive and ideological” forms of state control.

<sup>394</sup> Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, “Postmodern Cinema and the Demise of the Family,” *The Journal of American Culture*, Volume 26, Number 4, December 2003, p. 449

<sup>395</sup> Quoted in Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: the United States since the 1930s*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 159

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<sup>396</sup> A.O. Scott, "Vengeance is Ours, Says Hollywood," *New York Times*, May 2, 2004

<sup>397</sup> Summary execution is now, apparently official U.S. policy. In the case of *Gherebi v. Bush*, argued before the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, the court's opinion noted, "under the government's theory, it is free to imprison...indefinitely...as it will, when it pleases, without compliance with any rule of law of any kind...without acknowledging any judicial forum in which its actions may be challenged. Indeed, at oral argument [by Deputy Solicitor General Paul Clements, representing the Bush Administration], the government advised us that its position would be the same even if the claims were that it was engaging in *acts of torture*, or that it was *summarily executing* detainees...a grave and startling position" (my *italics*). The court noted that this is "a position so extreme that it raises the gravest concerns under both American and international law." That Hollywood continues to produce films that endorse and celebrate the most egregious and sadistic form of torture and summary execution within a society that maintains an official policy that supports, endorses and perpetrates sadistic torture and summary executions, not to mention the more horrendous crimes against peace and crimes against humanity, should startle us and raise "the gravest concerns" among educators, cultural workers, politicians, and citizens of all stripes, both domestically and internationally.

<sup>398</sup> *MF* like its precursors and concomitants, and like the murderous, torturous and imperial policies it reflects, endorses and prepares, is suffused with virulent forms of racism and bellicose xenophobia, and paints white, blond North Americans as the victims of violence perpetrated by the darker, evil, outside the borders, "little brown brothers," while completely divorcing the film narrative from any suggestion that Mexican history, and Mexican poverty (largely absent on screen) is in any way linked with European colonialism, or, more to the point, with a U.S. history of violence, conquest, robbery, investor rights agreements such as NAFTA, and exploitation of people and resources south of the border, including the stealing of half of Mexico only several generations distant. For example, in a tale of abduction in Mexico, where the focus is on a wealthy, precocious, advantaged, blue-eyed, blond, North American angel (who mysteriously bears absolutely no trace of her father's Mexican ethnicity), there is no indication of how so many Mexicans, especially young women, are treated as "throwaway people," who often struggle to exist within "plumes of toxic waste," and oppressive conditions of life both inside and outside the workplace, a workplace where they spend most of their lives. Nor, would we come away with any idea that it is not so much little white angels who are suffering the brunt of violence in Mexico, but young Mexican working-women, hundreds of whom have disappeared over the past ten years. Estimates suggest that up to 300 have been murdered, and another 450 have been disappeared (this often means they have been killed, but no body has been found), including girls as young as ten years old, the approximate age of Pita the abducted heroine in *MF*.

The worth of these women and young girls, who often travel from the city or small rural villages to work in *maquiladoras*, is measured by their capacity not to be human beings, but producers of wealth for owners of factories. They produce "first class lives" for the owners, but their 72 hours of work per week are "rewarded" with wages that pay for only 19.3% of a family's basic necessities. Heavily subsidized U.S. agribusinesses, has driven two and a half million poor Mexican farmers and their families out of local markets [often into bankruptcy], and off their land creating a burgeoning sea of "pueblos fantasmas," i.e., ghost towns, in rural Mexico. Typically they become part of the 70% of Mexicans who live in poverty amidst "the mushrooming city slums." These "slums" are shown briefly in *Man on Fire*, but only to suggest that Mexican women are always pregnant, completely subservient to exploitive husbands, and choosing to live in poverty and squalor. "The growing culture of crime and violence in Mexico [is the result of]...the widening gap between rich and poor," traceable largely to the U.S. imposed NAFTA which has benefited big business and foreign investors at the expense of the poor working people. The Mexican government was compelled to rewrite its Constitution to annul its agrarian reform laws, and open up much of Mexico's publicly owned resources and institutions to U.S. transnational corporations. Cutbacks in public assistance and increases in sales taxes have disproportionately impacted the poor, thus creating further hardships as well as increasing the "pandemic of street children, drug trafficking, petty crime...kidnapping and assaults, [and] precipitating a backlash in police brutality, corruption, and unsolved human rights violations." One would not gather from a screening of *Man on Fire*, unless one watched with a magnifying glass and brought some history and politics into the theatre, that much of the kidnapping related physical violence we witness on screen is largely the "fruit of structural violence," in which the well entrenched regressive socioeconomic policies and institutions both inside and outside of Mexico produce conditions that allow the rich to get richer while forcing the poor and middle-classes deeper into poverty.

Mexico, for example, today has more billionaires per capita than any other nation, while the number of people living under stultifying conditions of destitution and poverty, and children suffering

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malnutrition, continues to increase. In the ten years of NAFTA, wages are down more than 40% (in part the result of the massive influx into the cities of destitute job hunters), the cost of living has increased almost 250%, malnutrition has increased six-fold, 20% of the population is severely malnourished, the incidence of dengue, cholera, and other diseases related to poverty and malnutrition is ten times higher than it was before NAFTA, the public health system is near total collapse because of under-financing, overcrowding, and understaffing (standard and predictable results of privatization under structural adjustment programs), and eight million people have dropped from the middle class into poverty. Unlike Denzel's lone-hero Creasy who crosses the U.S. border into Mexico to take numerous lives and protect American innocence, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans continue to risk their lives crossing the border to escape poverty and seek low-wage, exploitive, but in many cases, life-saving, jobs in the U.S. Audience identification with Creasy and Pita locates us (the US) in a position of innocent victims at the hands of evil Mexicans exploiting our vulnerability in order to maximize their easy access to wealth thus distancing us from the harsh reality that it is largely an inverse relationship in which the United States is guilty of victimizing vulnerable and thus exploitable Mexicans in pursuit of easy maximizing of profits. Even in the face of ostentatious wealth, and unbearable poverty, in Mexico, "no cheap labor, is cheap enough," and there is no level of exploitation that is unacceptable. "If [women] disappear, they can and will be easily replaced," and Hollywood will not make a movie about their disappearance, and ostensible murder, nor will a Messiah appear from U.S. Special Forces to rescue her from either her abductors, or liberate her from the factory that has kidnapped her, and millions like her, from life, or work with a collective of women to form a union to fight back against the low wage/high-exploitation conditions. Many of those who have disappeared are women who did not learn a basic lesson of work life in Mexico: "shut up and work harder." In the words of Rosario Acosta, mother of one of the exploited and then disappeared factory girls, "the lack of response to this cry for justice, the inability to stop the crimes, is a way of saying... 'We don't care that women keep disappearing and are being murdered.' It places low value not only on women's lives but on the basic right to live for everybody."

*Man on Fire's* emphasis on "us" and disappearance of "them" as victim subverts this most basic notion of human rights. Additionally, in *Man on Fire* we are left largely unaware of other forms of violence perpetrated against Mexicans such as life threatening poverty, malnutrition, and "lack of elementary social services, such as running water and electricity in their homes." This absence and invisibility of suffering Mexicans, and especially Mexican women and girls in *Man on Fire*, coupled with its emotionally razor sharp focus on one de-Mexicanized wealthy white child, reduces further the value of the lives of the Mexicans in the eyes of North American viewers, while at the same time devaluing "the basic right to live for everybody."

<sup>399</sup> The film's obsession with removing fingers, and its suggestive phallic bomb in the rectum, intimates a de-phallicizing of the macho Mexican hoodlums by the even more macho Special Ops persona.

<sup>400</sup> See [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org) for historical documentation, along with Michael McLintock's *Instruments of Statecraft*, (New York: Pantheon, 1992).

<sup>401</sup> It is painful but it did elicit howls of laughter, yelps of endorsement, and approving applause in the two screenings I witnessed in State College, PA. The torture continues...Denzel, still trying to extract information about the leader of a kidnapping group, then cuts off the man's ear (one suspects this is a second hidden Van Gogh reference to Creasy's "artistic qualities...i.e., 'artist of death'," later revealed by Rayburn). After the man shares the information Denzel/Creasy is seeking, a bullet is fired into his temple, but only after the generous Creasy gives the man a requested cigarette. The car and the man are then pushed over a cliff to the strains of Luciano Pavarotti singing Verdi.

<sup>402</sup> On Denzel as "matinee idol thug" see Armond White, "Africana Reviews: Man on Fire." Applying what White calls "'Denzel's law'" we discover that "people of color are expendable" – himself included so long as the sacrifice is for a higher cause, in this case, protecting and saving the white angel. One wonders how this marketing of Denzel's law plays in African American communities? Does it serve as a recruiting tool for a U.S. military that is made up of a disproportionate number of people of color? White points out that "D.W. Griffith's deeply racist *The Birth of a Nation* was founded on a similar principle of killing black men to protect white females."

<sup>403</sup> Alex Cox, "Blockbuster Barbarism," *London Guardian*, August 6, 2004

<sup>404</sup> For example, "audience members at Tuesday night's Austin screening applauded several of Denzel's mad-dog, search-and-destroy shenanigans," Glen Oliver, April 23, 2004, online at: [filmforce.ign.com/articles/508/508706p1.html](http://filmforce.ign.com/articles/508/508706p1.html). "If [the film] works the way [director] Scott wants, it will have audiences cheering scenes of excruciating torture and applauding murder as righteous payback...[the film] incites in the audience a hideous thirst for blood..." Eric Harrison, *Houston Chronicle*, April 26,

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2004. Radha Mitchell, an Australian actress who plays Lisa, mother of Pita, commented on a screening of the film in which she was “taken aback and excited” by the torture and violence. She troublingly was asking herself during the screening, “Why am I enjoying this?” She added, “You find yourself very pleased when he’s cutting that guy’s fingers off, and you don’t know why.” It should be noted that *Man on Fire* topped the box office the week it opened, a week that coincided with the Abu-Ghraib revelations.

<sup>405</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, (London: Polity Press, 2002), p. 171. Perhaps, in Rush Limbaugh fashion the audiences saw the torture scenes as nothing more than a schoolyard prank, a fraternity hazing ritual, or a Skull and Bones style initiation rite.

<sup>406</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback*, (New York: Henry Holt), p. 7

<sup>407</sup> Walter Wink, “Babylon Revisited: How Violent Myths Resurface Today,” *Center for Media Literacy*, online at [www.medialit.org/reading\\_room/article95.html](http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article95.html)

<sup>408</sup> See Raymond Bonner, “Questioning Terror Suspects in a Dark and Surreal World,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2003

<sup>409</sup> After the torture, abuse, execution and extraordinary rendition revelations, reflection on this deep darkness should reveal that the only surprise should have been that anyone was surprised given U.S. support for and training of torturer’s, and direct participation in torture, over its history, going back to the brutalization of the Native American population, through the Imperial horrors of the U.S. “splendid little war” on the Philippines where “villages were burned, civilians were murdered, prisoners were tortured, and citizens were herded into infamous ‘zones’ [i.e. concentration camps],” and up to the present. Very conservative estimates of civilian casualties in the Philippines approached 200,000. “So astonishing...and so inflammatory were the tales of atrocities...” that Congress was compelled, under pressure from the public to conduct criminal investigations into what we would now call crimes against humanity. (Christopher McKnight Nichols, “Not Splendid: hardly ‘Little’: The Spanish-American War, the Origins of American Intervention Abroad, and its Salience for Current Policy,” *The Long Term View: A Journal of Informed Opinion*, Volume 6, Number 2, Spring 2004, p. 34).

<sup>410</sup> Private phone call with Phil Strube, July 2004.

## **CHAPTER VIII NOTES**

<sup>411</sup> The symbolic intimation here, related to pedagogy, knowledge, experience and reflection, is that which is inscribed early has a lasting effect. The boys cross a line protecting a not-yet solidified cement sidewalk and carve their names. It is a symbolic act of violence against that which is still unformed and malleable. Thirty years later the impact of the violence, the boys’ names, remains chiseled in the cement. Soon thereafter, Dave, a young kid, still malleable, is violated: a line is crossed, he is kidnapped, brutalized and raped. The scars, etched into his being, remain thirty years later.

<sup>412</sup> A phrase uttered in the film when Dave returns from his abduction. Also, in the “Mystic River Press Kit,” director Clint Eastwood says “all three of these men have unresolved issues in their lives. They have all been traumatized by the past. All became *damaged goods*.”

<sup>413</sup> See *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, released 17 September 2002. George W. Bush said “The United States of America has the sovereign authority to use force...” Quoted in Michael Gordon, “Allies will move in, even is Saddam Hussein Moves Out,” *New York Times*, 18 March 2003

<sup>414</sup> On the illegality of the US attack on Iraq see Jim Lobe, “Law Groups Say US Invasion Illegal,” *OneWorld*, 21 March 2003, [www.globalpolicy.org](http://www.globalpolicy.org). “The U.S...invasion of Iraq violates the basic rules of the United Nations Charter requiring countries to exhaust all peaceful means of maintaining global security before taking military action...”

<sup>415</sup> Chalmers Johnson, “Assassins R Us,” [www.TomDispath.com](http://www.TomDispath.com), 17 November 2003

<sup>416</sup> Just prior to the US attack on Iraq, though no credible evidence had been presented to link Iraq with 9-11, and while “US intelligence [was saying] there is no evidence that Hussein played a role in the Sept. 11 attacks,” “45 percent of Americans believe[d] Mr. Hussein was ‘personally involved’ in Sept. 11.” See “The Impact of Bush linking 9/11 and Iraq,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 March 2003. In MR, though no truly credible evidence, only highly circumstantial, links Dave to the murder of Katie, Dave is attacked and killed by the “Imperial” Jimmy. The brutal murder is soon after justified by Jimmy’s wife because of Jimmy’s “Kingly” qualities. One wonders why the police who could track the murder weapon to a bullet used in a robbery 15 years earlier could not tell the difference between Katie’s being beaten by a hockey stick and Katie’s being beaten with a fist. Dave’s swollen fist was a primary source of “evidence” in attributing Katie’s murder to Dave, as though he had beaten her with his fist.



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<sup>417</sup> A significant number of the more than 60 “Mystic River” reviews read in preparation for this piece alluded to Greek Tragedy, Shakespeare or Lady Macbeth. Andrew Sarris, because of the Shakespearean heights, calls MR “a masterpiece of the first order.”

<sup>418</sup> See US Space Command, *Vision 2020*. Full Spectrum Dominance refers to, among other things, “the ability of US forces, operating unilaterally...to defeat any adversary and control any situation [and] given the global nature of our interests...to rapidly project power worldwide [so that we win] victory in war [and] we will win [but] we should not expect...it to be...bloodless.”

<http://www.betterworldlinks.org/book12a.htm>

<sup>419</sup> See John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2002

<sup>420</sup> there is one other semi-embrace, between Dave and Celeste, and that too occurs after Dave has murdered the pedophile (we find out late in the film).

<sup>421</sup> “*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*” and “*Kill Bill*” blood soaked kill-fests, were the #1 and #2 money-earning films in the second week of “*Mystic River’s*” release.

<sup>422</sup> Gabriel Kolko explores this notion on a global scale of 20<sup>th</sup> century war in his monumental tome *A Century of War*, (NY: New Press) 1994

<sup>423</sup> The violence of representation is a representation of violence that “creates a world after its own image,” an image free of the physical, emotional and psychological suffering and pain that accompanies violence. It is a form of political, emotional, and pedagogical violence committed against viewers who need: (#1) *to see and understand violence in a broader institutional, structural and historical set of power relations, formations and struggles, i.e. see and understand violent texts in the context of manifold power relations; (#2) to feel and understand the real suffering, disruptions and damage that accompany personal and social violence in its many forms; (#3) to develop a politics, an ethics, and an expanding base of knowledge and tools to confront, challenge and abolish the conditions and institutions that promote, tolerate, justify and impose violence.* In other words, in order to challenge the violence of representation, teachers, students and citizens must carry out the vital pedagogical and political task of learning to see, feel and think through and beyond the dominant media’s *fetishization* of violence.

<sup>424</sup> The media’s *fetishization* of violence provides violence with mysterious and intractable powers to overcome and solve all problems, suture all wounds, obtain whatever it desires, elicit praise and adoration, and cleanse itself of, distance itself from, or simply avoid, the pain suffered by both victimized and victimizers. Because of the realities of violence, violence cannot be presented by the “consciousness industry” (film, TV, spectator sports, advertising, military, etc.) as itself, but always as something other accompanied by sets of ideas and images that glorify and celebrate it, apologize for or sympathize with the perpetrators, and crucially, disguise its harmful real affects.

<sup>425</sup> Maintaining credibility presents a very serious danger in a belligerent militarized culture circulating within a profit-based market economy. The obsession with maintaining “credibility,” i.e. the right to impose “the rule of force and domination,” is that it ensures continued and escalating violence on the grounds that the use of violence to maintain “stability” never solves the political and social problems that generate challenges to “the right to use force and dominate” in the first place. It thus plants the seeds for the violent destruction of the very credibility one is hoping to protect. In short it creates conditions so that those who live by the sword die by the sword. It also points to a contradiction in a highly militarized economic system designed around production and expansion to ensure profits and survival. On the one hand, the militarized market, in order to maximize profits, demands unfettered distribution of goods, i.e. weapons. Weapons are profitable. The more they are used the more profits one makes. It is in the interest to sell to anyone, with no allegiance to anything but making more money, which requires making and selling more weapons. One of the best advertisements for weapons is war, so war, according to the logic of the market, should be encouraged and promoted and pursued, for it not only “sells” war, it uses weapons that then need to be replaced. It is also in the interest of the market to sell to the most murderous people and states that use the most weapons – used weapons need to be replaced. All of that fulfills the logic of the market. When combined with a market driven by libertarian notions of ephemerality, discontinuity, insatiability, unrestrained freedom, plurality, aroused desire for more and more, etc., conditions of chaos tend to be created. To balance the chaos a firm hand with strong foundations is required. In the current world, US military power holds the “strong hand,” and it is committed to force. Military values are generally conservative and authoritarian; capitalist market values are generally “radical” and libertarian. The combination is deadly. The conservative military values are committed to maintaining control and credibility through weapons based violence, while the market values are simultaneously undermining the control by creating unstable conditions of increasing violence by selling more weapons to anyone. So, the latter (market) feeds the values of the former (military) by propelling the former to increase its military might (also good for the market) in order to maintain control and credibility, while simultaneously creating conditions through increased weapons sales and distribution everywhere that create the chaos and calamity

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which threaten the control and credibility of the dominant state. In short, the chaos demands and creates control, but the control demands and creates chaos. Increasing violence, the promised outcome of this upward and downward cycle of contradictions is not auspicious.

<sup>426</sup> David Denby, "Buried Alvie," *New Yorker*, July 15, 1996, 47-58; Jane Caputi, "Small Ceremonies," in *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media*, ed. Christopher Sharrett, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 1999

<sup>427</sup> Sean Means, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 10-15-03, [www.sltrib.com](http://www.sltrib.com); K.J. Doughton, [www.filmthreat.com](http://www.filmthreat.com), 10-21-03; Lisa Schwarzbaum, *Entertainment Weekly*, 10-01-03; Cynthia Fuchs, [www.celebritywonder.com](http://www.celebritywonder.com), October 03; Glenn Kenny, [www.premiere.com](http://www.premiere.com), 10-8-03; Jonathan Foreman, <http://www.nypost.com/movies/7158.htm>, 10-03-03

<sup>428</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux) p. 114 Sontag adds that one value of the portrayal, "a good in itself," is that it expands our "sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world." Put simply, she adds "There is simply too much injustice in the world." True, on both counts, but without an ethical and political project to develop knowledge and understanding of the roots of the violence carried out in concert with organized and growing popular resistance, there is the grave danger of drowning hope in a river of despair.

<sup>429</sup> *MR* provides an image of violence in working class communities that suggests a pathologized working class. By refusing to present a challenge to that notion, *MR* not only demonizes the working class but does not provide a sense of the depth of problems facing working class people in the US, nor the complex causes and reasons behind various forms of violence and insecurity that may shape and inform life in increasingly impoverished working class communities in the US. This leaves viewers with, "it's their fault, blame the victim" associations. At a time of rapidly increasing expenditures on the military, 1.4 million additional people in the US were sent into poverty in 2002, nearly half of them children. 12.2 million children live in poverty in the US, and about 35 million people total, according to official poverty statistics (considered an underestimate by poverty experts). The increasing poverty is largely blamed on increasing unemployment. See Economic Policy Institute for a careful breakdown of poverty in the US that extends well beyond the US Census Bureau figures, and, "Poverty Up in the USA, Opportunities Down for Leaving Poverty," AP Report, 2 September 2003

<sup>430</sup> Rosenbaum suggests a link between spectacles such as "Triumph of the Will," and "Mystic River," which hide their ideology behind their glorious aesthetics in a time of imperial national pursuits. See "Vengeance is Theirs," *Chicago Reader*. Rosenbaum adds "the success of *Mystic River* as melodrama and art is precisely what I mistrust about it...artistic effects are often enhanced by being perceived as artistic, propagandistic effects...are often enhanced by not being perceived as propagandistic."

<http://www.chireader.com/movies/archives/2003/1003/031024.html> While the aesthetics of the film are given significant exploration in the reviews little is said about ideology, and nothing is said about power.

<sup>431</sup> John Pilger, "Silence of the Writers," *New Statesman*, 11 November 2003. The lesson points to one of the dominant pedagogical themes of our time, the idea that education is a neutral activity, that somehow films, as teaching machines/indoctrination machines, exist outside of ideology and culture, outside of economics and politics, outside of society and militarism, outside of the values and ideas that dominate. *MR* began filming just as the new "grand imperial" US National Security Strategy was unleashed and just as the propaganda campaign began for the US attack on Iraq. In the year between filming and release the US "shock and awe" attack on, and occupation of, Iraq were central news items in the culture, as was the US dismissal of the UN and International Law in its drive to attack, as well as continual warning from both left and right that the Bush Administrations unilateral policies were placing the world on an increasingly dangerous footing. The three main male actors were outspoken critics of the attack on Iraq. And the release of the film coincided with increasing resistance activities in Iraq. Nevertheless, nowhere was it suggested that the film might be read in the context of these national and international dilemmas.

<sup>432</sup> Rosenbaum, *Chicago Reader*

<sup>433</sup> As noted elsewhere, if all conditioning were absent from our lives, acting with purpose would be impossible. Reasoned and purposive action requires some form of engaged interpretation of the conditions that bear in upon our lives, otherwise we would simply be like bowling pins knocked about by bowling balls. Some parameters of freedom are required for an active interpretation of conditions to occur and moral choices to be made. Complete internal control (absolute freedom) and complete external control (absolute determinism) both absolve beings of responsibility. We don't hold the alarm clock responsible for ringing. Actions that are moral are also action with a reason. We may disapprove of the reasons for the actions, but if actions are taken without reasons the actions are neither morally repellent nor morally praiseworthy. The argument that individuals are completely in control, sometimes assigned to semioticians

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and post-structuralists, is a form of “full-blown libertarian” absolute freedom that “has helped to consign so many to death row in the United States,” (Terry Eagleton) and prevented a large portion of US culture from looking at social and institutional structures that lead to criminal activity, especially when the crimes are crimes of state.

<sup>434</sup> In fairness to the film, it should be mentioned that MR does present quite strongly, as suggested, the notion that violence produces pain and suffering that is not easily ameliorated, and a sense that once you have been victimized (as either perpetrator or victim) by violence, as Dave says, “it is in you forever.” MR drives home the point that in a working class world of increasing unemployment, disintegrating infrastructure, collapse of social safety nets, and crumbling community support, responsibility falls on the individual to confront the demons. In a MR world where the only things that are reliable are repeated patterns of violence, distrust, betrayal and murder, one’s choices for confronting the demons are quite limited. This “pessimistic notion that there are no alternatives to the present [dis]order reinforces the message” (Henry Giroux, *The Abandoned Generation*, (New York:Palgrave) 2003, p.117) that the forces of violence are outside of our collective control, inevitable and immutable, and thus, any forms of collective mobilization that might challenge social, political and economic formations that contribute to violence in our lives, are, in the end, doomed to failure. The only rallying in MR is the rallying to support Jimmy in his time of loss and despair, and the rallying behind Jimmie to pursue the killer of his daughter. Collective sympathy is permitted, and encouraged. Collective support of violence is permitted, and encouraged. Both play powerfully in the post-9-11 world. It might be argued that the violence is not only permitted and encouraged, but also celebrated if one considers the post “imperial” scene Columbus Day parade as a glorification of filmic and historical violence. And while Jimmy has some capacity for mobilizing people in the community, there is no hint that it would be done to form, for example, a food coop, or a worker support and solidarity space, or a community political organization to address poverty, homelessness, crime, hunger, unemployment, youth disengagement, dwindling opportunities, neighborhood violence, etc. While there is a sense of obligation presented in the film, it is the obligation of personal allegiance (not to be underestimated as we become more and more isolated and alienated from one another). Regarding “Columbus Day,” one might recall Bartolome de las Casas, in speaking of the Columbus mission in “the New World,” who wrote “Our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy...” He wrote that one day the Spanish dismembered, beheaded or raped three thousand people. “Such inhumanities and barbarisms were committed in my sight as no age can parallel.”

<sup>435</sup> It is easy to imagine that Dave’s son, rendered mute, solemn and afflicted at the end of the film, because of the murder of his father, will soon be caught up himself in the perpetration of violence, perhaps killing one of Jimmy’s other daughters, in the never ending cycles of bloodletting that undergirds not only the film but so much of a US history and culture that “suffers the addiction [to violence] in spades, as even a cursory read of pop culture suggests.” (Michael Eric Dyson)

<sup>436</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*, (New York: Basic Books) 2001, p.125

<sup>437</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, “Why Does Neo-Liberalism Hate Kids? The War on Youth and the culture of Politics,” *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 23:2 (2001), p.117

<sup>438</sup> Anatole Lieven, “The Push for War,” *London Review of Books*, 3 October 2002,

<sup>439</sup> on the value and application of speculative, indirect and even far-fetched interpenetrations and explorations see Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist*, (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press) 1985

<sup>440</sup> Dick Cheney, 1992 draft copy of the Pentagon’s “Budgetary Planning Guide.” Similar terminology can be found in both Project for a New American Century and National Security Strategy documents.

<sup>441</sup> Robert Jervis, “Weapons Without Purpose? Nuclear Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2001

<sup>442</sup> Henry Giroux, *Breaking Into the Movies*, (London: Blackwell) p.37. Giroux is discussing the “politics of the unpolitical,” the ways in which the details of our daily lives are “saturated with the paralyzing norms” of the society that often “lock people into the status quo.” As suggested, MR both reinscribes the “paralyzing norms,” and presents, in ways too subtle given the urgency, warnings against those norms.

<sup>443</sup> Henry Giroux, *The Abandoned Generation*, p. 120

<sup>444</sup> Bryan Bender, “Bush signs \$401b defense bill,” *Boston Globe*, 25 November 2003. Senator John McCain suggests that much of the spending is unneeded “big ticket items” such as submarines, jet fighters, and missile defense. He added “the incestuous relationship between the contractors and the Pentagon and the lawmakers is just the worst.” In order to compel the public to support enormous military spending it is necessary to create a culture of fear, a culture in which the common sense understanding of reality is that it is violent. Furthermore,



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the violence must be seen as outside of the public's control, thus, defense against the ruthless and foreboding world "out there" will be supplied by noble and imperial leaders "in here (US)."

<sup>445</sup> See John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2002

<sup>446</sup> Anatole Lieven, "The Push for War," *London Review of Books*, 3 October 2002,

<sup>447</sup> Richard Falk, "Will the Empire be Fascist," [www.transnational.org](http://www.transnational.org); Wendell Berry, "A Citizen's Response to the National Security Strategy of the United States of America." *Orion*, March/April 2003

<sup>448</sup> J. William Fulbright, *The Price of Empire*, (Ontario:Random House) 1989

## **CHAPTER V NOTES**

<sup>449</sup> From Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation," quoted in Jonathan Wallace, "Are We A Nation," *The Ethical Spectacle*, January 1997, online at: <http://www.spectacle.org/197/nation.html>

<sup>450</sup> Quoted in "GIs in Bosnia Shun Hunt for War Crimes Suspects," *New York Times*, March 2, 1996

<sup>451</sup> Sartre quoted in Mona Anis, "An Echo of Silence," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 12-19 April, 2000, Issue No. 477, online at: [http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2000/477/bk2\\_477.htm](http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2000/477/bk2_477.htm)

<sup>452</sup> Chuck Kleinhans, "Images after 9/11," *Jump Cut*, No. 45, Fall 2002, online at:

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc45.2002/lastword.html>. The idea of presence and absence spreads beyond the screen. It links to two basic features of moral and political pedagogy whether cinema related or in general: political knowledge is based on patterns of knowledge and ignorance; it is based not only in what we know but in what we don't know and requires that we pose a number of questions. The questions include: why do we know what we know rather than something a little different, why do we know what we know rather than something a lot different, are there things we know that require critique, challenge and transformation, are there things that we don't know that we should know, and if so, why don't we know them and how can we come to know them? The latter is a question that links to another question: "who controls the patterns of knowledge and ignorance and what are the consequences of those patterns?"

Additionally, moral action is based not only on what we do but also on what we do not do that we could do. This raises troubling and difficult questions about why we do what we do, and why we do not do what it seems we could do in the face of human suffering and atrocities for which we are, at least to some extent, responsible. If we discover that many German citizens during the Nazi horrors were willing to look the other way, remain apathetic and indifferent, adopt a mood of passive compliance, concentrate on personal gain, and revel in the symbols of national grandeur and the glories of national power, we rightly hold them responsible for their inactions, as we hold the leadership responsible for their actions. The probing and critical question that hangs in the air is, "why do we not, as a culture, hold ourselves and our leadership to the same moral standards?"

<sup>453</sup> The concept here is that the world is always already political, always maneuvering through power relationships and changing social structures, arrangements and human interrelationships. George Lukacs noted, "Everything is political, every human thought and action is bound up with the life and struggles of the community;" and, Antonio Gramsci added, "Everything is political, for everything is based on humanity's activities within the context of society. Nothing human can happen apart from politics..." So we are always experiencing the political, through cinema, media, social institutions, relationships, art, economics, schools, etc. The political becomes pedagogical when new knowledge is produced through reflecting critically on that experience in the light of previous knowledge and experience. The pedagogical becomes radically political when the critical knowledge of the political is employed in acts of mobilized collective intervention that address the social conditions that forge the political world and work to shape those conditions in the interest of peace, social justice, equality under conditions of fairness, peace and social justice, human well-being and happiness, and substantive freedom. The pedagogical becomes political when we work "from the good of all for the good of all."

<sup>454</sup> Gabriel Kolko, "The Great Equalizer: Lessons from Iraq and Lebanon," *ZNet*, September 5, 2006, online at: [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

<sup>455</sup> J. Douglas Beason, "The E-Bomb: How America's New Directed-Energy Weapons Will Change the Way Future Wars Will be Fought," *The Heritage Foundation (Lecture Series)* <http://www.heritage.org/Press/Events/ev112905a.cfm>

<sup>456</sup> The liquefying of Iraqis by B-52 carpet bombing was witnessed by "Voices in the Wilderness" founder Kathy Kelly and reported at a "Public Forum on US War Crimes in Iraq," in October 2004 at Penn State University.

<sup>457</sup> See Seymour Hersh, interviewed about his *New Yorker* article "Up in the Air: Where is the Iraq War Headed Next?" by Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*. Hersh noted, "Clearly there's all sorts of anecdotal

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reason to believe that the bombing has gone up exponentially, certainly in the last four or five months in the Sunni triangle, the four provinces around Baghdad.”

<sup>458</sup> The figure of “zero” can be contrasted with reports issued by the US Central Command Air Force (CENTAF). For example, on December 6, 2005 CENTAF reports 46 bombing missions over Iraq flown on December 5<sup>th</sup>. The report adds that “Navy F/A-18 Hornets provided close-air support to coalition troops in contact with anti-Iraqi forces near Balad and Ramadi.” It is interesting to note that Iraqi’s defending themselves against an illegal US attack and occupation are called “anti-Iraqi forces.” The Navy “close-air support” is not included in CENTAF official numbers for air attacks. These “air support” attacks are generally carried out in heavily populated towns and cities in Iraq. Dahr Jamail, reporting from Iraq as an unembedded journalist, notes “the increasingly devastating air war being waged [by US forces]...and, as usual, Iraqi civilians continue to bear the largely unreported brunt of the bombing.”

<sup>459</sup> Again, one should ask, “What are US soldiers and bombs doing in their homeland?”

<sup>460</sup> It might be added that because the emphasis on individual soldiers or small units is a standard representation in militarized cinema it is easier to distance oneself from and become desensitized to the cruel realities of military violence because it is “just like the movies.”

<sup>461</sup> This notion is linked to the individualization of morality in US culture that is used to distance us from asking difficult political questions by reducing all matters of the personal. In what is called the “war on terror” we are often told that the terrorists are “evil.” Again, it is a device employed to undermine the pursuit of historical and political explanations as to why people might carry out abominable acts of violence. The approach is a time saving device, but not a life saving device.

<sup>462</sup> One is reminded of the US Air Force slogan, made “famous” in *Dr. Strangelove*, “Peace is our Profession.” The irony is, of course, that the institution in possession of the most destructive of all weapons of war, nuclear bombs, projects itself as an institution of peace. Perhaps they had in mind Plato’s notion, “only the dead know the end of war,” in other words, “only the dead know peace.” Nuclear annihilation will surely bring “peace.”

<sup>463</sup> It should be noted that *MR* does allude to questions of historical events and their impact on lives as when Jimmy asks what his life and Sean’s life would have been like if they had been kidnapped rather than Dave? Still, he links it to a story about Hitler’s mother considering abortion, but in the end deciding to move forward with giving birth to Adolf. The implication is that “history is driven by individuals,” rather than larger forces, and again the film collapses the social and the historical into the individual. Fascism did not rise in Germany because of Hitler; Hitler rose in Germany because of fascism and the larger social institutions that supported the Nazis in their rise to power. The generally stable pattern of US militarism and aggression across Democratic and Republican administrations points to the role of large institutions in shaping policies, even though there may be moderate policy differences among and across individuals.

<sup>464</sup> It is true that many of the Mexicans are shown living in slums possibly suggesting for the critical viewer that there are systemic issues at hand, but it is intimated that it is because they hide their millions of dollars in trash cans. One suspects the filmmakers were suggesting poor Mexicans are too stupid to know what to do with all that money, i.e., even when they have tens of millions of dollars they still live in poverty, either because they prefer squalor or because they lack intelligence.

<sup>465</sup> Robert Jackson quoted in Edward Herman’s review of Michael Mandel’s *How America Gets Away With Murder: Illegal Wars, Collateral Damage, and Crimes Against Humanity*,” (London: Pluto, 2004), online at: <http://zmag.org/JulAug2004/herman0804.html>. It should be noted that the United States rejects being held accountable for war crimes, even genocide. The US signed and ratified the Genocide Convention in 1948 on the conditions that the US not be held accountable to the provision of the Convention. The same held for the International Criminal Court until the Bush Administration simply removed the US signature. The US argument is that any crimes carried out by US soldiers or citizens will be tried inside the United States by US courts. One might ask what the results at Nuremberg would have been if the Wehrmacht had conducted the trials?

<sup>466</sup> There is a concomitant to the “it is good for us” argument which is the “it is bad for us” argument which is a variation on the “it is good for us argument.” Immoral US aggression is often addressed from a perspective of “noble intentions gone awry,” and the calls for an end to US atrocities are often within the parameters of “it is bad for us” for various reasons including it is harming our glorious image around the world so “it is good for us” to stop harming our image in order to polish it, it is causing too much disruption at home so “it will be good for us” to clean up the disruption, it is no longer financially viable (i.e. it is negatively impacting profits so “it will be good for us” to disengage from our “benevolent” mission), it is bad for US credibility, etc. “Us” of course refers to elites and dominant institutions, rather than the general public.

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<sup>467</sup> What should be noted in discussions about collateral damage is not that it is accidental damage but that it is inevitable destruction. If we know in advance that the damage to human life is inevitable there is a high moral calling to prevent the engagements that inevitably kill innocent people.

<sup>468</sup> Throughout the film it is implied that the life of Hodges has been one large failure because he has spent it behind a desk as a marine lawyer (after being wounded in Vietnam) rather than “in the shit” killing people. It is intimated that the real crime perpetrated in Vietnam was the crime the Vietnamese committed against Hodges by robbing him of the possibility of spending his life as a Marine “killing machine.” Later, Childers, while clearly contemplating suicide, notes: “if they take away my uniform (i.e. my “freedom” to carry out atrocities), they might as well just shoot me.” Herein lies a peculiar filmic expression that links US “killer” to terrorists through a strange but illuminating dialectical link between

<sup>469</sup> The film fails to take into account the “Powell Doctrine,” i.e. the use of massive force to deter any perceived threat, which suggests that US soldiers must be protected at all costs. In reality, in the case of US marines under the kind of “threat” portrayed in the film, the US would have simply sent in helicopter gun ships, or F-18s to employ excessive force (in violation of international law) to obliterate the threat. The Powell Doctrine is used regularly in Iraq, and by Israel against Palestinians, often armed with rocks and stones. The definition of “threat” is typically determined by those who pose the most threat.

<sup>470</sup> In terms of middle-east conflicts this “discrepancy” was most graphically exposed by an Israeli Rabbi who claimed “one million Arabs are not worth one Israeli toe-nail.”

<sup>471</sup> This doctrine plays itself out daily in the US air war against Iraqis, an air war, as noted, left absent from US coverage, as well as US proxy Israel’s disproportionate attacks against Arabs.

<sup>472</sup> To the extent that this is true it follows that the greatest honor an American can have is becoming Commander-in-Chief, who ultimately imposes orders for mass killing. It arguably follows that the second greatest honor is supporting the first greatest honor.

<sup>473</sup> Richard Dyer, *White*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 159-160

<sup>474</sup> One impact of this is to distance the citizenry from the one institution, government, that is, albeit in limited ways, in a position to protect citizens against the more tyrannical institutions of power, corporations and a growing culture of militarism.

<sup>475</sup> In the latter films, the main characters operate in a separate moral universe, but less directly linked to the malfeasances of official Washington.

<sup>476</sup> An audience familiar with the unsavory history of Seals participation in assassination missions, torture campaigns, and sabotage, might think twice about their heroic savior status.

<sup>477</sup> Not long after the release of the film the US attack on Iraq began, and not long after the attack George Bush intoned about the United States in Vietnam, as part of a combined rewriting of history, claiming it is a place where “Americans...amply displayed [our] willingness to sacrifice for liberty...[and] the defense of freedom is worth our sacrifice.” (George Bush, “Remarks by the President at the Twentieth Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, November 6, 2003. Online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>, and And George Bush, “President Discusses War on Terror at National Endowment for Democracy,” October 6, 2005, online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051006-3.html>. While one expects the President to

“dissimulate,” the point here is simply to link various forms of public pedagogy that work in combination to condition the public mind around notions of liberation, sacrifice, freedom, aggression, etc.) The Bush pontification may not be as eloquent as Edmund Burke’s “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil, is for good men to do nothing,” the very emotional post-script for the film, but it attempts to carry forth the same message related to the global “war of terror,” and tap into the same kind of audience identification with those who are willing to sacrifice in the name of liberty and against “evil.”

<sup>478</sup> The protection of the innocent with mass violence theme also plays out in *MF* wherein the audience is set-up to support the violence in order to protect the young kidnapped child.

<sup>479</sup> Again, I witnessed audiences cheering in celebration at two public screenings during this flaming scene of mass killing that demonstrates the obliterating capacity of US air power. We might ask if people would applaud scenes of US soldiers being obliterated by Nigerian bombs? The answer would surely depend on was viewing...

<sup>480</sup> In order to legitimate the use of US firepower one would have to first justify the presence of US military special forces in Nigeria as well as US power’s support – in the DVD version only – for the Nigerian dictator ordering the rampaging internal slaughter.

<sup>481</sup> Note the *Lancet* study demonstrating that up to 100,000 Iraqi civilians killed mostly by US air strikes, as of October 2004, the US attack on Panama in 1989 in which entire neighborhoods of poor folk were obliterated by US air power, or Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Korea, the fire bombing of Japanese cities, etc., where many millions of people were killed by bombing missions of densely populated areas, etc. .

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<sup>482</sup> Two points should be made: (1) the US continues to use outlawed napalm/fuel air bombs in Iraq: called Mark 77 firebombs. Colonel James Alles, Marine Air Group Commander in Iraq, said “We napalmed...unfortunately there were people there...you could see them in the video...it’s no great way to die. The generals love napalm. It has a big psychological effect.” Robert Musil, of “Physicians for Social Responsibility adds, “most of the world understands that napalm and incendiaries are a horrible, horrible weapons. It takes up an awful lot of medical resources. It creates horrible wounds.” (2) The consequences of the use of US air power is not an academic argument, it is real. For example, while most news reporting of violence in Iraq concentrates on “insurgent” bombings, the US has increased its use of air power in “close-support operations,” that are virtually guaranteed to kill civilians. These bombing attacks are generally directed against buildings or city blocks. The number of “close-support” missions is impressive. The U.S. Central Command Air Forces press release from November 28, 2005 reported “46 close-air support missions [on] Nov. 27...to create a secure environment.” On November 28 there were 42 missions. In two days there were 88 close-air bombing missions. In a month, the average is over 1,200. Because of the nature of the weaponry and the proximity of bombings to civilians this means civilians are killed regularly. 500 pound bombs rarely kill just one or two people. See Ron Jacobs, “Toward a Greater Air War on Iraq?” *uruknet.info, information from occupied iraq*, December 1, 2005, online at: <http://www.uruknet.info/?s1=1&p=18340&s2=02>

<sup>483</sup> In the case of *MF* the police officials are part of the ring of kidnapers planting an even deeper seed of distrust. One should point out that this seed of distrust of authority is a potentially fruitful seed. The main problem with this cycle of films is that they create a distrust of authority in order to create an allegiance to a much worse form of authority, the authority of violence and aggression and killing.

<sup>484</sup> What is left unresolved in the director’s cut DVD version is US power’s support for the dictatorial regime. Here Fuqua does present the audience with a contradiction to work through as he offers up a backline story related to Nigerian oil that suggests soldiers are merely pawns sacrificed in the interests of the machinations and interests of power. The incineration of Nigerian Muslim soldiers is carried out only after they cross into Cameroon. In the DVD version it is clear why: the US has made a backroom oil-related deal with the Nigerian dictator and will not violate Nigerian airspace. The point is simply that the US does not want to alienate its new “client” regime and lose access to plentiful and profitable Nigerian oil. While this “lesson” is alluded to in the DVD version in very subtle ways, it is completely absent in the theatrical version. That these segments were excised from the theatrical release is perhaps the most interesting public pedagogical feature of the film. In essence, vital background information, subtly critical of US institutional power structures, and intimating a US willingness to do whatever is necessary to gain access to oil (even abandon US soldiers to be murdered in the field), was removed from the lessons taught in the cinematic classrooms across the country. Background information on Nigerian oil is relevant to a deeper understanding of the film. Nigeria is the world’s fifth largest oil producer. In 1958 oil exploration by Shell began in Nigeria transforming much fertile land into a wasteland of pollution and contamination. Protests against this continuing ecological destruction by Shell and other oil companies culminated in the 1995 hanging of protest leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his comrades. International outrage followed. A Voluntary Principles for Security and Human Rights was produced, but there is little evidence of compliance by oil companies and no evidence that the US State Department is monitoring human rights violations in Nigeria. The United States is the largest purchaser of Nigerian oil. The film release was proximate with the US attack on Iraq, initially called “Operation Iraq Liberation” or OIL. It may be the case that the film was edited to prevent uncomfortable allusions to one of the crucial reasons for the US attack on Iraq.

<sup>485</sup> One should distinguish between intended impact and real impact. While planners may wish to rule the world mafia style, and might assume that the National Security Strategy of “preemptive strikes” required a demonstration to allow the policy to manifest itself in action in order to provide the world with an update of Nixon’s “madman theory,” wherein the US must occasionally carry out a “crazy attack” to keep the world on edge and quaking because of US “irrationality,” the real consequences are much more portentous. Much of the rest of the world is responding, especially other powers such as Russia and China, not by quaking, but by building more weapons in hopes of deterring the US global domination project. An even more frightening consequence of US global malfasance is that lesser powers are working to develop WMD with the hope that their possession might prevent a US attack. One can imagine that in the not too distant future countries, or “rogue” groups sponsored by countries, will not wait for a US attack that they know will destroy them, but will launch a first strike BEFORE being wiped out. The predictable consequence of the NSS and the attack on Iraq was an increase in terrorism and recruitment for terrorists. The US National Intelligence Council, the organization that coordinates US intelligence agencies released

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projects that for the next 15 years Iraq will be a training ground for Jihadi terrorists and Islamic terrorists. They further note that a primary threat to the US will be biological weapons. Meanwhile the United States has worked to gut the biological weapons treaty of all effective measures on the grounds that any sort of inspection regime will have negative consequences for US pharmaceutical companies. Hence, the threat of bio-weapons continues to increase as does “the appreciable threat of ultimate doom” in the words of John Steinbrenner and Nancy Gallagher in the *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. They add that the political system of the United States, i.e. the public and government, will have to recognize and acknowledge that the US power “is now the dominant threat to everyone else...[the] super outlaw state.” They argue that the public pedagogy of fear and intimidation through National Security Strategies and demonstration attacks is having the opposite effects, not the creation of a world quaking in its boots ready to subjugate itself to US power, but, on the contrary, a world ready to pursue “a competition in intimidation and action/reaction cycle[s], creating rising dangers, potentially unimaginable ones...” With an “appreciable risk of ultimate doom” on the horizon, it seems imperative for educators to expand the notions of literacy to include critical literacies in content areas outside the normal curriculum, including literacies around corporate power, growing threats of militarism, global climate change, political moves toward authoritarianism, global poverty and inequality, neoliberal economics, and the multiple sites in culture and society in which public pedagogies are produced and ingested that promote and protect the institutions that are at the root of many of these potentially “dooming” problems.

<sup>486</sup> Edward Herman, “Q&A on the Iraq War,” *ZNet*, November 29, 2005, online at:

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=15&ItemID=9215>

<sup>487</sup> Henry Giroux, *Breaking Into the Movies*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p. 221

## **CHAPTER 10**

<sup>488</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *The Age of War*, (Boulder: Reinner Publishers, 2006), p. 175

<sup>489</sup> Michael Gordon and Gen. Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, (New York: Pantheon, 2006)

Andrew Bacevich, “Why Read Clausewitz When ‘Shock and Awe’ can make a Clean Sweep of Things?” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 11, June 8, 2006

<sup>490</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 223

<sup>491</sup> See Borzou Daragahi and Julian Barnes, “Officers Allegedly Pushed “Kill Counts,” [in Iraq],” *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2006. US “commanders [in Iraq] created an atmosphere of excessive violence by encouraging ‘kill counts’ and possibly issuing an illegal order to shoot [all] Iraqi men [of military age]....Officials believe that the shooting of three detainees and the killing of 24 civilians...in Haditha reveal...loose rules allowing wanton killing and tolerating violent, anti-Arab racism.”

<sup>492</sup> While a critical pedagogy focuses on the politics and morality surrounding militarizing film narratives and the larger culture of militarism it should avoid moralizing, while still maintaining a critical focus on how the ideological and ethical components of cinematic forms and cultural texts impact the wider political and social culture. While audiences may cheer when the cinematic hero engages in torture or massacre, the cheering should elicit critical questions about the larger culture that has produced in audiences the urge to cheer in response to such grotesqueries, a point that in itself can be used to open up counter readings of the film narratives. For example, we might ask “how would we look on a culture that cheered during film presentations of our friends and families being tortured or massacred by foreign military forces?” A moralizing assault on cinema becomes an alienating attack on audiences who often derive pleasure and meaning, or simply distraction from often frustrated lives, from cinematic experiences. Moralizing may simply lay a burden of guilt upon already blighted lives. Furthermore, people are the way they are because they got that way, not because they have to be that way. Part of the critical pedagogical task is to unravel why people are the way they are (rather than a little different, or a lot different), while also recognizing the empowering lesson that people will be the way they are in the future, not because they have to be that way (within certain sets of limitations and possibilities, of course), but because they get that way, and that always opens the possibility for hope. Furthermore, even in the context of cheering, audiences typically derive meanings that are quite rich and complex. Still, without public mechanisms for shared expression and dialogue these rich and complex meanings often remain internalized and privatized and thus add to the frustrated lives. Hence, there is a need for alternative institutions that will provide space for public interactions and interventions where visions, goals, plans, actions, and criticisms can be shared around notions of substantive and participatory citizenship which could include not only critiques of Hollywood productions but also local film and other media productions that provide a voice for the public to share



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through and within the public. Moralizing, aside from its haughtiness, also tends to narrow the critique and avoid historical explanations while focusing on victim blaming. The *essence* of the critique should be on how militarism, and its attendant values, beliefs and attitudes, function within the larger social and political culture to produce violence, jingoism and support for US aggression, with a goal toward both understanding the multiple levels of human violence and suffering that result and overcoming the institutions, conditions and actions that promote and produce the violence and pain. These are three crucial points for public dialogue around both militarized films and the culture of militarism.

<sup>493</sup> Douglas Kellner, "Reading Giroux," in Henry Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 154

<sup>494</sup> Hamid Dabshi interviews by Foaad Khosmood, "Lolita and Beyond," August 4, 2006, *zmag.org*, online at: <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=67&ItemID=10707>. In this quote, Dabashi is referring to Stephen Kinzer's 2006 book on US Empire, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (2006),

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>496</sup> Andrew Bacevich, "Why Read Clausewitz When 'Shock and Awe' can make a Clean Sweep of Things?" *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 11, June 8, 2006

<sup>497</sup> Portentous threats from militarism are very immediate as anyone knows who has had bombs fall on their heads. The instant death toll from WMD employed on a grand scale will be unmatched in history. Environmental threats in the long term may be more devastating, if the species is around to suffer that experience.

<sup>498</sup> For an excellent and foreboding overview of the collapsing global economy see Gabriel Kolko, "Bankers Fear Economic Meltdown," July 26, 2006, *counterpunch.org*, online at: <http://counterpunch.org/kolko07262006.html>. Kolko advises that we listen to the defenders of global capitalism for it is they who are now taling of the immorality of the system and they who are warning that we are "on the verge of serious crises."

<sup>499</sup> See Jeremy Lovell, "Global Arms Shipments Out of Control: Amnesty," *Reuters*, May 10, 2006, online at: <http://peacejournalism.com/ReadArticle.asp?ArticleID=8753>. Brian Wood of Amnesty International notes that "Arms supply chains are...completely out of control." The "World Policy Institute" reports that "the United States [is] the world' leading arms exporting nation [and these weapons] all too often end up fueling conflict[s]." In 2003 (the last year for which solid information is available) the US transferred weapons to 18 of the 25 countries involved in active conflicts. The primary recipient was Israel, again engaged in illegal aggression in Lebanon in July 2006 using US military equipment to carry out attacks against civilian targets in violation of the U.S. "Arms Control Act." 80% of the countries receiving US weapons were designated as either undemocratic of countries carrying out major human rights abuses by the US State Department. The report (online at: <http://worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/wawjune2005.html#execsum>) notes, "The greatest danger emanating [from] U.S....military aid is not in the numbers, but in the potential impacts on the image, credibility and security of the United States. Arming repressive regimes in all corners of the globe...undermines the credibility of the United States."

<sup>500</sup> In the face of this overwhelming presence of militarism, Carl Boggs, in *Imperial Delusions*, notes the near total, and stunning, absence of academic discussions of US militarism. Boggs argues that the obscured, "deflected and sublimated discourse of U.S. militarism has become one of the tragedies of American public life, obscuring from view the terrible *costs and consequences* of Empire." The obfuscation feeds into the reproduction of the culture of militarism and its high risks, costs and continuing tragedies. Given the scope and impact of these costs and consequences of militarism one would assume that they have received careful and widespread attention within public and academic research, debate and discussion. There is, however, an intellectual, cultural, social and political "poverty of discourse," on these matters of US military power and imperial pursuits, an obfuscation and mystification that has "deepened" since 9/11.

For example, Boggs examined 36 popular college texts in fields including history, political science and sociology and found that 27 of these "wide-ranging texts," varying in length from 300 to 600 pages, contained "absolutely *nothing*" about any dimensions of the US military. There were only minimal references to US militarism, extending from one paragraph to a few pages, in the 9 remaining texts. He notes that the disappearing of US military power extends beyond classroom texts to include popular histories and social science studies. The field in which militarism is most disappeared is the one dedicated to the study of politics, i.e. political science. The exception to the rule within political science studies is international relations in which not U.S. but foreign military power and culture is examined. The *American*

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*Political Science Review (APSR)*, the main professional journal for the field, essentially ignores US military power. In the more than 40 years since the US attack on Vietnam began in 1962 the APSR has published only one article about the costs and consequences of a US act of international aggression that can surely be considered a milestone series of events in post WWII US history. Five of the leading textbooks in political science contain no reference to the US military, outside of a brief mention of the president's role as "commander-in-chief of the armed forces" in James Q. Wilson's *American Government* (2000). International Relations texts are only slightly better. The widely used anthology, with eighty-one contributions, *Global Politics in a Changing World* (2000), contains no entries on the topic of US militarism. In a whole range of noteworthy books written for general readership that explore matters of power, violence, globalization, politics and global conflict, ranging from Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1997) to Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) to Francis Fukuyama's *The Great Disruption* (1999) to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilization's* (1997) to Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2001), the subject of US military power is either ignored or examined uncritically and often as a "positive force behind world order, justice, democracy, even peace." Read by millions of students over the years and hugely influential for radical intellectuals, G. William Domhoff's classic progressive "class domination theory of power" examination of the workings of US power structures and the positions and people who influence decision making "in all of [their] ramifications," is carried out in his popular sociology textbook, with the alluring title, *Who Rules America?* He argues that the positions, commands and demands of the upper class, as manifested primarily through corporations that self-interestedly deploy enormous power over most corners of culture and society in the United States, are "carried out with relatively little resistance, which is possible because that group or class has been able to establish the rule and customs [employing various forms of public pedagogy] through which everyday life is conducted." While seemingly all encompassing, there is one glaring absence in his influential tome: US military power. The Pentagon system vanishes from view in Domhoff's meticulous examination of US power structures and their influence on and repercussions for research, development, investment, production, distribution, employment, income, wealth distribution, the health and well-being of the general population, and the role of "special interests."

The failure to include the Pentagon system in a discussion of "special interests" in the US is truly an astonishing absence given that the Pentagon is "the largest and most consequential 'special interest' of all," and that "every major aspect of American life is being shaped by our Permanent War Economy...which has endured since 1945 [while]... government financing is lavished without stint to promote every kind of war industry...[and] top federal government executives are a partnership of top political and corporate managers who operate a war economy to enlarge their power..." The largest, and arguably most consequential, military institution in history, with its monstrous tentacles spread into virtually all aspects of US culture, education, workspace, the media (radio, television, films, internet, etc.), politics, toys, sports, NASCAR, etc., and whose power, linked with US economic and political power, has permitted the US to influence, and often dominate (with impunity), in the interest of US transnational corporations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, various trade agreements, the United Nations, mysteriously disappears from the "comprehensive" discussion.

Similarly, in much of the commentary and analysis of globalization US militarism remains invisible. In Lechner and Boli's mammoth *Globalization Reader: Second Edition* (3), which includes 58 essays in various sections devoted to economic, cultural and political globalization, as well as resistance, the media, environmentalism, fundamentalism, etc., there are no essays that direct their primary attention to the role and importance of the US military in globalization or to the largest global military institution in history, the Pentagon. Many of the discussions talk of "transformations in the technological base and subsequent global scope of the mass media... [and] changes in economic structures" through the globalization of production and capital investment, and a new international capitalist class of elite bureaucrats, politicians, executives, intellectuals, and professionals who, operating beyond the nation-state, will maneuver through various spheres in the political, economic and cultural arenas and reproduce its power through the mechanisms of "transnational capitalism" and a "culture-ideology of consumerism." While there is truth in the notion that many nation-states are subordinated to the machinations of the global economy, it is clearly less-true for the global hegemon, the United States. Arguably, two of the reasons for the devaluing and invisibility of the role of US military power in global affairs, is the power of the US public pedagogy of militarism to shape assumptions about the role of US military might (i.e. benign), and the ability of popular and academic discussion to "disappear" US militarism. Even some progressive analysts have adopted largely uncritical views of US militarism. Hardt and Negri, for example, assume a benevolent and noble US superpower dedicated to intervening only on "humanitarian" and magnanimous

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grounds in order to promote “universal values” of liberal democracy, justice and peace. The majority of the discourses on globalization tend to focus on an increasing commodification of all aspects of life dominated by transnational corporations working with and through international banks, firms, the most powerful states (G8), and corporate dominated international agencies such as the WTO, IMF and WB. In all of this, “the coercive side of Empire somehow vanishes [as does] the self-interested, blatant, violent exercise of American national power.”

The much more progressive/radical “*The Global Transformations Reader*,” edited by David Held and Anthony McGrew, an impressive collection of 43 scholarly articles spanning 30 years (1972-2002) referred to as “the most comprehensive collection of readings on globalization” (Steve Smith) containing “everything you wanted to know about globalization,” (Stuart Hall) leaves US militarism largely unmentioned, and unexamined, in terms of its global power, influence, destructive capacities, its cultural pedagogical role, and its political, economic, environmental and human costs, risks and consequences. Militarism itself (i.e. “military power” and “military hardware”) appears only 7 times in over 460 pages of meticulous scrutiny, analysis, theorizing and criticism of globalization and the “fate of national communities.” David Held mentions militarism by noting “few states now consider unilateralism... as a viable defence [i.e. offense] strategy,” adding that “national security has become a multilateral affair [while] globalization... is eroding the capacity of nation-states to act independently in the articulation and pursuit of domestic and international policy objectives.” Fair enough, with one glaring and unilateral exception, the United States. Anthony Giddens mentions “global military order” in the context of “all states possess[ing] military strength far in excess of that of even the largest of pre-modern civilization,” but fails to mention that the US has “military strength” far in excess of the rest of the global order combined (see facts below), is indubitably the most powerful and destructive military force in history, and has used that “military strength” around the globe “to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit,” in pursuit of global hegemony far more than any other state over the past 60 years. Michael Mann comes closest to intimating the global impact, dominion and force of US military power, noting that the US is “an unusual state, dominated by its unique war machine,” and that defense [i.e. offense], health care and illicit drugs, are the biggest industries in the US economy, but adds, “the current plan is to downsize the military... the original backbone of the nation-state [that] is now turning to jelly... and it is doubtful that the American electorate has the stomach for warfare...”

While it is true that the Pentagon plays a uniquely powerful role in the US economy, culture and politics, Mann fails to address the unique role that US military power plays in global affairs, for among other effects, “the principal (but not exclusive) danger the entire world confronts is America’s capacity and readiness to intervene [... with] superior military strength... virtually anywhere.” For example, a “comprehensive” examination of globalization would look carefully into the role the US military machine performs in protecting, enhancing and extending U.S. international, corporate and security policy. That role is described by Noam Chomsky in what he calls “the Fifth Freedom [which] has as its primary goal the preservation of [the US assumed ‘right’] to rob, to exploit and to dominate [third world people and their resources and] to undertake any course of action to ensure that existing privilege is protected and advanced.” While Mann’s article was written before 9/11, it was already clear before 9/11 that the “backbone” of the US economy, the Pentagon system and its role in US pursuit of global hegemony (evident, as noted, even in the early 1940s), was in no way “turning to jelly.” Mann also fails to understand that a downsizing of the military does not equate with a downsizing in Pentagon spending. The general level of quietude among the US electorate in the face of illegal aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan, tens of thousands killed, hundreds of thousands injured, war crimes, abuse, torture, summary executions, international outrage, etc., gives pause to Mann’s comments about the US “stomach.” In the book’s remaining discussions of “transformations of state power,” “changing patterns of national culture,” “development of the world economy,” global inequality and environmental challenges,” “the nature and desirable future of the global order” and other “attempt[s] to characterize globalization,” the largest military machine in history, “the enormous military-technological power of the US [that] is well beyond challenge,” understood by George W. Bush, and other “world-supremacist ideologists in Washington,” as a machine in “a position of unparalleled military strength... and political influence...,” with global reach, impact, influence and destructive capacities unmatched in human history, a machine that represents both the “megalomania of US policy” and an “imperialism... that is [no] less militaristic than the old variety [because US] military force is still central to the imperialist project,” goes remarkably unmentioned.

<sup>501</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *The Age of War*, (Boulder: Reinner Publishers, 2006), p. 176



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<sup>502</sup> A look at the daily news offers endless indicators. See, for example, “US Plans \$4.6 Billion in Mideast Arms Sales,” *Reuters*, July 28, 2006; or David Cloud and Helene Cooper, “US Speeds Up Bomb Delivery for Israelis.” Both headlines appeared in the midst of the US/Israeli aggression against Lebanon that numerous commentators have warned may easily spiral out of control and end in a nuclear attack against Iran. And from there... See Jorge Hirsch, “Nuke Iran, Blame the Jews,” July 24, 2006, [informationclearinghouse.org](http://www.informationclearinghouse.org), online at: <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article14176.htm>

<sup>503</sup> Robert Fisk notes a shift in attitude in the Middle East regarding US (and Israeli) militarism, a shift that points to another crucial reason to study, critique and overcome the culture of militarism, whether that study is generated through films, television, textbooks, literature, foreign policy analysis, etc. In brief, “the people are no longer afraid;” they jump in their cars and drive to join the battle. He insinuates that after so much humiliation and violence people have lost their fear, they have grown tired of being afraid and have come out the other side more daring and fearless than ever with a feeling that history is now on their side. “Once you lose your fear, you can’t start being frightened again...” “They are not running away anymore, and that is what is going to *doom* us in this crazed conflict.” Robert Fisk Reports From Lebanon On the Intensifying Israeli Attack, Qana, Tony Blair and the Possibility of a Ceasfire,” *Democracy Now*, August 1, 2006, online at: <http://www.democracynow.org/print.pl?sid=06/08/01/1434244>. One assumes there are good reasons to fight against all odds, become fearless and to make the ultimate sacrifice. Aquinas believed that humans had a built in tendency toward “the good.” That seems fairly plausible. Suicide bombers and those willing to join a fight that virtually promises death (call them “suicide fighters,”) probably assume what they are doing is a good thing; otherwise they might not do it, unless they were simply psychopaths, and that doesn’t seem to be the case. Suicide bombers/fighters are part of the pedagogical cycle of militarized state and non-state terrorism, fear and fearlessness, domination and emancipation, repression and freedom. One assumes that many of the suicide bombers/fighters are carrying out the attacks or fighting because: (1) in many cases their lives, and the lives of those close to them, have been reduced to humiliation and insignificance, so they respond by carrying out actions that are meaningful and significant in the world; (2) in the act of killing and dying they are oddly most alive; (3) suicide bombers/killers believe that their act is part of a process of liberation for others from oppression and violence, so they kill and die not so much in the name of death, but in the name of life, it is just that it is the lives of others they are hoping to emancipate while believing they are emancipating themselves in some way too. In fact, at one level, they are emancipating themselves from the conditions that led to the fearlessness in the first place; (4) it is a sacrifice of individual freedom in the immediate in the hope of opening up a long-term freedom for others; (5) they probably understand that what people hold most dear is life, so the most significant sacrifice one can make is to take it away, from the self and from others; (6) suicide bombers/fighters kill and die for a cause, so they probably think that their action, like the cause itself, is for the long-term, so, in a sense, they go on living through “the cause;” (7) it is not difficult to imagine that the suicide bomber/fighter believes he, or she, is actually winning a victory over those oppressors who are unwilling to make the ultimate sacrifice, and in this sense, in the mind of the bomber, they are superior, more significant, more committed, more heroic, more fearless, and more eternal...once the suicide bomber has carried out the action there is really nothing the living can do to punish the bomber/fighter – of course, until some victory is won against the masters of violence the retribution is typically monstrous (as evidenced in Israel’s July/August 2006 attacks against Lebanese civilians); (8) something else circulates through the mind of the suicide bomber/fighter, the notion that they can escape power’s grasp by taking away from power the authority to determine who lives and who dies; in that sense they might consider themselves to have finally achieved freedom in overcoming the fear of death, both one’s own and that of other’s; (9) pedagogically, the suicide bomber may be attempting to teach the world that “you have made my life, and the lives of everyone I know, so deplorable and wretched that killing and dying is preferable to this utterly miserable existence. In short, power has made life so deadly that the suicide bomber will bring death to life to end the cycle; (10) in the mind of the suicide bomber there might be a belief that the action is one of autonomy, an expression of real freedom and self-determination. So, the need to express freedom and self-determination through a grotesque act of violence is an expression of the lack of freedom in life. In nothingness, the suicide bomber/fighter finds somethingness. In short, the pattern of militarism produces, in the end, its own undermining. In an age of WMD, this pattern of undermining promises to produce every greater and more destructive participants in the culture of militarism and suicide bomber/fighter dialectic. The key question, of course, is what are the conditions that led to the suicide bomber/fighter and what must be done to undo those conditions so that people will not seek liberation through acts of violence? The answers should be clear; the will to act on what should be obvious is a little more muddled. If one believes in a Christian notion of the universality of love along with

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a socialist notion that there are no bad people only bad ideas and bad institutions, then one task is to free our “enemies” from the ideas and institutions that compel them to engage in despicable actions. It is an act in solidarity with both the victims and the victimizers, for it frees both to explore a fuller and freer notion of what it means to be alive.

<sup>504</sup> See A.J. Muste, “Pacifism and the Class War,” in *The Essays of A.J. Muste*, (New York: Clarion, 1967), p. 181. Muste adds, “In such a world [of institutionalized violence and aggression] a non-revolutionary pacifist is a contradiction in terms, a monstrosity.”

<sup>505</sup> “Credibility” refers to a simple notion, made famous in mafia films: do what we tell you or we will smash you in the face. If that doesn’t work, we will kill you. The simple point is not so much directed at the victim, but at everyone else who must remain quaking in their boots while maintaining a level of acceptable obedience and subservience to the master. The position is redolent of the authoritarian mind and a contradictory belief in natural inequality and hierarchy. The contradiction arises when one notes that one must recognize, at some level, even while one works to ensure conditions of inequality, the capacity for equality among those one is oppressing, otherwise there would be no need to oppress them, for they would be naturally inferior to begin with and thus pose no threat. The threat to power comes from their humanness, not the savage barbarianism attributed to them by power. The materially strong are frequently the morally weak, and the combination often expresses itself in violence. The violence protects against this recognition, for if you can dominate another being, it is not a difficult leap to consider oneself superior, physically and morally. Aggression and terror, contrary to popular views, are weapons of the materially strong (they possess the resources to carry out aggression and terror), and weapons of the morally weak (those who find “salvation” not in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, tending to the sick, assisting the weak, or supporting the poor against the violence of the rich, but those who find “salvation” in exploiting the hungry, poor, weak, etc. in order to ensure the exploited cannot express their equality as humans, for that expression of their full and equal humanity would both relativize the lives of the exploiters in ways they would find unpalatable, and relativize the lives of the exploited in ways the exploiters would find unapproachable.

<sup>506</sup> This point of “self-interest” is one that educators and other cultural workers could employ to stimulate interest in critiquing, challenging and overcoming the US culture of militarism. Though perhaps not high on the moral scale, it is high on the survival scale.

<sup>507</sup> Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein Manifesto, issued in London, July 9, 1955

<sup>508</sup> See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2005 *Yearbook*. Reuven Pedatzur, “The US Removes the Nuclear Brakes,” May 26, 2005, *Centre for Research on Globalization*, online at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=PED20050526&articleId=65>

<sup>509</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Failed States*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 8. Reuven Pedatzur, “US Removes Nuclear Brakes, May 26, 2005.

<sup>510</sup> Henry Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives*

<sup>511</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, cited in “Handel Kashope Wright, “Pressing, Promising, and Paradoxical: Larry Grossberg on Education and Cultural Studies,” *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2000): 21

<sup>512</sup> Henry Giroux, “Public Time and Educated Hope,” *The Initiative Anthology*, February 28, 2003, online at: <http://www.units.muohio.edu/eduleadership/anthology/OA/OA03001.html>. Giroux, in discussing “educated hope” points to the importance of developing not only “different histories but different futures.” In quoting Paul Ricoeur on how hope is “a major resource as the weapon against closer,” Giroux makes clear that hope cannot remain abstract but it must be linked to material changes in order to foster dissent, while providing “an activating presence in promoting social transformation.” “Educated hope” provides tools, skills and understanding to “challenge the presupposition that there are no alternatives to the existing social order.” One of the challenges of educated hope is to present the possible in ways that appear feasible to an often skeptical public.

<sup>513</sup> Paraphrasing Terry Eagleton, “Office Politics,” *The Nation*, October 25, 2004. He reminds us that “the future is not in fact inexhaustible [as capitalists would have it]. We are closing down some of its possibilities forever by the actions we take in the present.”

<sup>514</sup> Regarding redirection of resources: The direct money cost of the US aggression in Iraq is approaching \$300,500,000,000 as of August 1, 2006 (largely a handout from the public to corporate industry). The human costs, of course, are immeasurable. The US public has for years called for a diminishing of the Pentagon budget and a use of those funds for education, healthcare, infrastructure improvements, etc. The money for bombs, etc., might have been used for more socially productive investment: for example, instead of spending on militarism and aggression, that money could have hired well over 500,000 new

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public school teachers for ten years; or, built 10,000 new schools on a \$30 million model; or, built close to 3 million new housing units; or, provided over 14,500,000 four year scholarships to public universities; or, paid for close to 40 million children to attend Head Start programs; or, provided health care for 18 million children for ten years; or, pay Alex Rodriguez (New York Yankees third baseman) his yearly salary of \$ 25 million for the next 12,000 years or so (side note: and the Haitian woman working 12 hours per day, 7 days a week, year round, earning, if she is lucky, \$250.00 per year making baseballs, will require 100,000 years of labor to earn what Alex will earn this year batting around those balls)...etc.

<sup>515</sup> Giroux, "Public Time and Educated Hope"

<sup>516</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Anticipated Revolution," *Political and Social Writing*, Vol. 3, edited and translated by David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1993), pp. 153-154

<sup>517</sup> John Brenkman, "Raymond Williams and Marxism," in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 263

<sup>518</sup> This reality points to a problem in organizing opposition to the structures of militarism. Telling someone that a bomb might blow them up in ten years if we don't stop militarism seems rather abstract, while challenging something so monstrous seems impractical and improbable. Putting food on the table and keeping a job in the immediate, however, is very palpable and practical. People generally understand that as an individual, one does not win rewards for challenging power, in fact, as an individual one seldom wins anything against power and can lose very much. On the other hand, the only potentially fruitful way to challenge power is collectively, in which case some individuals may or will suffer, but there is the possibility that in the long run everybody will gain.

<sup>519</sup> John Binde, "Toward and Ethic of the Future," *Public Culture*, 12, no. 1, (2000), p. 65

<sup>520</sup> Douglas Kellner, "'Film, Politics and Ideology: Reflections on Hollywood Film in the Age of Reagan,'" online at: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner)

## **APPENDIX**

<sup>521</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, No. 1, Winter 1979, p. 144

<sup>522</sup> Bacevich, "Why read Clausewitz..."

<sup>523</sup> *Terminator Magazine*, 2003, p. 52-53

<sup>524</sup> Andrew Bacevich, "The Normalization of War," *TomDispatch*, April 21, 2005

<sup>525</sup> See, Kari Lydersen, "US Plan for Global Domination Tops Project Censored's Annual List," *AlterNet*, September 27, 2003

<sup>526</sup> Andrew Bacevich, "The Normalization of War," *TomDispatch*, April 21, 2005, online at: <http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=2334>

<sup>527</sup> In brief, what is meant by "neoliberal ideology" is an ideology, intertwined with material pursuits, that supports notions such as: profit making is the essence of democracy; individualism and greed are values to be encouraged, inculcated and endorsed; government should be removed from any regulating capacity over corporate power; all things public should be privatized (i.e. placed under corporate control); everything is for sale and looted under a "produce and expand in order to profit and survive" economic system, i.e. land is plundered by oil and mining companies, agricultural giants, timber combines, and land "developers," public airwaves are given to corporate communications conglomerates in a \$70 billion dollar boondoggle and then the airwaves are used to pummel the public with advertisements and programming intent on convincing the public to support corporate friendly lifestyles and purchasing patterns, wars are prepared for, engaged in, and followed-up for profits and power, schools become more like boot camps, prisons, or shopping centers and teachers more like drill sergeants, prison guards, and sales clerks, the environment is pillaged and despoiled in the name of profits, etc.; citizenship is reduced to maximizing consumption potential within an increasingly commodified society; human misery and suffering are defined as a result of individual malfeasance, irresponsibility and choices rather than being understood as social in nature; economic contributions to corporate wealth production determine one's value as a human being; all material and mental spaces that are non-commodified must be colonized by corporate power; democracy, as a fundamental threat to neoliberal capitalism's move to concentrate power, privilege, authority and decision making, is constantly under attack; power is centered in corporations and markets rather than in citizens and governments; the "third world model" of economic inequality and police state repression creeps into the first world, including Social Darwinist mantras such as "survival of the most ruthless," "self-interest at the expense of others," "winner take all," etc., social securities are undermined, wages are reduced, pensions are emptied, unions are destroyed along with worker democracy, public enterprises and spaces are increasingly privatized, government is denigrated for being inefficient, overly bureaucratic, and

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an attack on individual freedom (in effect, government is denigrated for doing what corporations do), a creeping militarism accompanies attacks on social welfare and any notion of a social contract (that is, a social contract built on the assumption that people are responsible for one another's well-being, happiness and survival), language is emptied of its capacity to critique, challenge and overcome neoliberal corporatization, etc.

<sup>528</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "The New Imperialism," June 26, 2005, online at:

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=11&ItemID=8167>

<sup>529</sup> Richard Maxwell Brown quoted in Ira Leonard, "Violence is the Engine of U.S. History," *The Black Commentator*, online at: [http://www.blackcommentator.com/144/144\\_think\\_violence\\_1.html](http://www.blackcommentator.com/144/144_think_violence_1.html)

<sup>530</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim – An African Perspective," online at: [www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/mamdani\\_text\\_only.htm](http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/mamdani_text_only.htm)

<sup>531</sup> Anatole Lieven, "America's Messianic Mission," online interview by Jill Kitson at: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/booktalk/stories/s1285634.htm>

<sup>532</sup> Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942). P. 236

<sup>533</sup> Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism without Colonies*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), p. 115

<sup>534</sup> See James Sterngold, "Cheney's grim vision: decades of war." *San Francisco Gate*, January, 15, 2004, online at: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/01/15/MNGK14AC301.DTL>

<sup>535</sup> Patrick Regan, *Organizing Societies for War: The Process and Consequences of Societal Militarization* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994)

<sup>536</sup> Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, September 2002, p 725

<sup>537</sup> For example, oil companies are raking in record profits and giving their executives exorbitant raises. Exxon's "soon-to-retire" CEO is agonizing over how to spend the enormous windfall wrought by \$55-a-barrel oil. FORTUNE refers to "the headache of what to do with *all that cash*." (my italics) Exxon's cash, i.e. profits, reports the *Wall Street Journal*, could approach \$40 billion in 12 months. Exxon-Mobil was the most profitable company on the 2005 list of "FORTUNE" 500 companies with \$25 billion in *profits*. Oil and gas executives' total direct compensation in 2004 averaged a \$16.5 million (median). The median percent change from 2003 was a staggering 109 %. In addition, the oil and gas industry is provided \$3.3 billion in new tax breaks along with \$2 billion in taxpayer funds for the researching and development of ultra-deep water resources. 5 of the top 7 ranked companies in the "Fortune 500" are oil companies or automobile companies.

<sup>538</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 23. Enloe quoted in "Why War is All the Rage," online at: <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0529-20.htm>

<sup>539</sup> James Carroll, "Invented Symbols," *Boston Globe*, January 3, 2006

<sup>540</sup> Tom Pollard, "The Hollywood War Machine," in *Masters of War*, Carl Boggs, ed., (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 340

<sup>541</sup> **Public Pedagogy is material and ideological:** Public pedagogy is *material* because *ideologies* require social mechanisms and structures to obtain materiality, i.e. the ideology of militarism requires militarization to obtain materiality. The idea of "public" is abstract until the required social mechanisms and apparatuses give the public existence. How those social mechanisms and institutions are arranged condition what kind of public materializes. A public gaining materiality within a non-militarized culture obtains a different materiality and ideology than a public becoming itself within a militarized culture possessing the attendant military institutions. "Pedagogy," also is an abstraction. What it is and what it does is a consequence of both the material and ideological conditions in which it becomes itself and the people and institutions through which it is expressed. "Militarism" too, like "war," is an abstraction. Militarism as an idea has no capacity to act until the conditions are available for militarized actions to manifest themselves. Militarism develops the capacity to "act" when it mobilizes agents to create the institutional and social mechanisms for its realization. Public pedagogy is a crucial component in mobilizing those agents. In US culture film is a vital part of how that pedagogy influences public thought and action. Public pedagogy is *ideological* because material mechanisms become themselves through the ideas that form and guide the agents that produce (or don't) produce them. Public pedagogy in this interpenetrating sense is the cause, agent and effect of itself. Militarized film is a form through which public pedagogy acts, though it is not necessary for public pedagogy. Film is a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for the production of militarized films. A militarized society is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for the production of militarized films. Whether or not a society is militarized will, however, perform a pedagogical role in determining how films are produced and received in the culture that produces



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militarized films. What that pedagogical impact will be on individuals in the society is virtually impossible to determine, even if an army of researchers was mobilized to record their every move and thought. Pedagogical impact on the public however might be partially measured by how much or how little the public supports military actions of state if those militarized films consistently present a pro-military, nationalist and jingoist perspective to the audience. Support in this case could be seen both in those who hold positive and negative opinions and attitudes about military aggression. Because we measure the consequences of our actions both through what we do and what we don't do that we could do, what we say and what we don't say that we could say, support for military aggression could be active or passive. It could manifest itself through apathy, willingness to look the other way, and cynicism about change, as much as through celebrations of national power and grandeur through participation in military spectacles, flag waving, etc. Militarized films produced in a non-militarized society would offer no threat of mobilizing public support for the use of military means to carry out aggression because the means would not exist. The ideological impact of the film on public consciousness would be shaped not only by the ideology of the film but the lack of materials in the society to turn what might be considered an aggressive ideology into a material reality. This is not to say that the militarized ideology might not manifest itself in other violent or aggressive ways, as it might also do in the society that is militarized. The material reality of film is necessary for the ideological expression of militarism to find its way into public space through cinema. The ideological reality of militarism is necessary for the material expression of militarism through film. One could have a militarized society without film, and one could have a filmic society without militarism, but one could not have a true film public pedagogy of militarism without both, given the crucial relationship between the ideological and the material in pedagogy. The condition of militarism is not the cause of militarism, nor is the ideology of militarism. The material condition of militarism is necessary for the ideology of militarism to take hold, a condition required for military action. The ideological reality of militarism is necessary for the material condition of militarism to persist, a condition required for military action. If we posed the following propositions: (1) the materiality of militarism is responsible for military aggression; or, (2) the ideology of militarism is responsible for military aggression, we would conclude that taken alone both propositions are false, but taken together they are true. The elimination of the idea of militarism without the elimination of the material conditions for militarism still leaves open the possibility of military aggression because of the impact of conditions on shaping values and ideas. The elimination of the material conditions of militarism without the elimination of the idea of militarism closes down the possibility of military action because the *idea* of bombing someone is much different than the *act* of bombing someone. Person X might think about dropping bomb on buildings, but thinking about it, and having access to the bombs to manifest the idea in action are two different things (despite what some post-structuralists may believe). Militarism is a presupposition in what we do, but is itself an abstraction without the materially and ideologically conditioned agents that bring it to life. The abolition of militarism could become a presupposition, as could a socially just peace, but will remain an abstraction without the materially and ideologically conditioned agents to bring it to life. US militarism is a necessary, but not sufficient (until combined with militarization) condition for US aggression to be carried forth.

<sup>542</sup> The Bush Administration "preemptive" foreign policies, except for their public arrogance and brazenness, differ little from those of previous administrations regarding the commitment to aggression and the rule of force. The non-state terror attacks of 9/11 did present the Bush Administration with something previous administrations lacked: an opportunity to create and mobilize desires of nationalism, jingoism, and patriotism rooted in vengeance. In Anatole Lieven's words, "what 9/11 did... was to tremendously boost the harsher aspects of American nationalism, to stir it up, to empower it, and of course to give a tremendous domestic political card to the Bush administration." See Lieven interview online at: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/booktalk/stories/s1285634.htm>. The spate of Hollywood violence and vengeance fests that followed 9/11, and continue, one could argue contribute to this mobilization.

<sup>543</sup> World military spending now exceeds \$1 trillion dollars. Between 2002 and 2003 there was an 11% percent increase in global military expenditures. "The United States now accounts for about half of world military spending, meaning that it is spending nearly as much as the rest of the world combined," says Natalie J Goldring, executive director of the [Program on Global Security and Disarmament at the University of Maryland](#). Frida Berrigan, a senior research associate at the [World Policy Institute's Arms Trade Resource Center](#), said that according to the [announced] 2005 budget, the United States will spend about \$1.15 billion a day, or \$11,000 a second, on defense. She added, "In comparison, we spend half that on public education per year per child in the United States." Rich nations spend about \$50 billion on development aid (and even that "aid" is often "aid to dependent corporations"). A group of UN appointed military experts report, "At a time when global poverty eradication and development goals are not being

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met due to a shortfall of necessary funds, rising global military expenditure is a disturbing [and arguably unconscionable] trend." Anup Shah reveals (see <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/Spending.asp>) that the US, with less than 5% of the world population, accounts for about 50% of global military spending. By some estimates, more than the rest of the world combined.

<sup>544</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004). Harry Truman added, at the Potsdam Conference on August 7, 1945, "Though the United States wants no profit or selfish advantage out of this war, we are going to maintain the military bases necessary for the complete protection of our interests... Bases which our military experts deem to be essential for our protection we will acquire." Quoted in C.T. Sandars, *America's Overseas Garrisons: the Leasehold Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5. Truman's pronouncement was uttered at a time when the US had overwhelming military and economic advantage if for no other reason than all of its potential competitors had been destroyed. In addition to bases, "On any given day before September 11, according to the Defense Department, more than 60,000 military personnel were conducting temporary operations and exercises in about 100 countries." *Los Angeles Times*, (January 6, 2002)

<sup>545</sup> See Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, especially "Terrorism and Justice: Some Useful Truisms," pp. 187-216

<sup>546</sup> Bill Vann reports, "The speech that George Bush delivered on the USS Aircraft Carrier Abraham Lincoln Thursday night constituted a warning to the world that the carnage unleashed in Iraq is *only the beginning of worldwide eruption of US militarism* (my italics)... the US president left no doubt that his administration intends to continue using the American military power to assert US financial, corporate and geopolitical interests around the globe." Online at: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/bush-m02.shtml>. In Bush's speech at the US Naval Academy he noted, "We will never back down. We will never give in. And we will *never accept anything less than complete victory*." Online at: [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051130-2.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051130-2.html)

<sup>547</sup> For example, winner of the prestigious "Palme d'Or" at the Cannes Film Festival, F9/11's opening take of \$25,115 per theatre was in the top five in movie history. It was the biggest movie opening ever for a film opening in less than 1,000 theatres. The film generated more than \$228 million in global ticket sales and has sold more than 3 million DVDs.

<sup>548</sup> Army Major Bret Wilson describes the point of *American's Army*: "let's put the game [in perspective]. What's the market...? Generally, 13-18 year-olds, and that's where the Army wants to send its message to. Because if you wait longer than that, chances are those people have already started to make choices about their preferences in life and their career choices. I guess my point is that's a target demographic." Interviewed by Ed Oswald, *BetaNews*, May 20, 2005, online at: [http://www.betanews.com/article/Is\\_Americas\\_Army\\_a\\_Recruiting\\_Tool/1116640470](http://www.betanews.com/article/Is_Americas_Army_a_Recruiting_Tool/1116640470). *American's Army* is an example of what the advertising industry refers to as "sticky advertising," i.e. the consumer engages the product for periods of time much longer than with traditional commercials. Joan Ryan asks "Is it appropriate to depict war as a game at a time when real men, women and children are being killed in Iraq?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 23, 2004. Army Colonel Casey Wardynski cautions, "only 41 percent of the game is simulated combat." Harvard researcher Susan Linn adds that the Army doesn't have "the right to exploit children's vulnerabilities, and do it dishonestly by glamorizing violence and minimizing or ignoring the other, more complicated facets of war." *America's Army* stats: 5,440, 335 registered players; 39,427 new users in the first 7 days of June, 2005; 3,218,320 completed "basic training," as of June 7, 2005. Online at: <http://www.americasarmy.com/> The \$4 billion figure is for fiscal year 2003. Estimates for 2006 are \$6 billion.

<sup>549</sup> See, for example, "Recruiting at Any Cost: How the Pentagon Keeps the new Recruits Coming," online at: <http://www.commondreams.org/views04/1210-20.htm>.

<sup>550</sup> Tom Englehardt in "Deconstructing Iraq: Year Three Begins," online at: <http://www.antiwar.com/englehardt/?articleid=5265>, notes, referring to the earlier *Lancet Study* from 2004: "The Lancet Study for reasons well explained by Lila Guterman ("Dead Iraqis") in the Columbia Journalism Review (online at: <http://www.cjr.org/issues/2005/2/voices-guterman.asp?printerfriendly=yes>), was barely reported on in the American press, though the figures, approximate as they must be, are nonetheless probably conservative, or so concludes Guterman. Based on this study, it would not, she adds, be unreasonable to assume that in the five months since the paper came out, if "the death rate has stayed the same, roughly 25,000 more Iraqis have died," i.e., an estimated total number of civilians killed is 125,000. For the 2006 study reporting 655,000 Iraqis killed since the 2003 US invasion see, as noted earlier,

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Burnham, Lafta, Doocy and Roberts, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey," *The Lancet*, Vol. 368, Issue 9545, October 21, 2006

<sup>551</sup> Seymour Hersch, "We've Been Taken Over by a Cult," online at:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/hersh01272005.html>

<sup>552</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, p. 214

<sup>553</sup> "In January 2005, U.S. Senate majority leader Bill Frist called for a new Manhattan Project (referring to the WWII-era nuclear weapons bonanza) for biological weapons." See Heather Wokusch, "Courting Armageddon." Online at: <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0414-21.htm> "...the Department of Energy is spending an astonishing \$6.5 billion on nuclear weapons this year, and President Bush is requesting \$6.8 billion more for next year and a total of \$30 billion over the following four years. This does not include his much-cherished missile-defense program... this is simply for the maintenance, modernization, development, and production of nuclear bombs and warheads." See Fred Kaplan, "Our Hidden WMD Program," online at: <http://slate.msn.com/id/2099425/>

<sup>554</sup> See, for example, *Democracy Now*, "New Evidence Points to US Violations of International Law in its Treatment of Iraqi Detainees," online at: <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=03/07/01/1451230>. Or see, *Center for Economic and Social Rights*, "New Report: War in Iraq is 'Unequivocally Illegal.'" Online at: <http://cesr.org/node/view/8>

<sup>555</sup> See *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Study* on "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy." Online at: <http://www.cfr.org/publications/opinion/main.html>

<sup>556</sup> Nina Huntzman reports that in 1999, the Pentagon and Hollywood formed the Institute for Creative Technology (ICT) in California, with the Pentagon giving ICT \$45 million 'to explore the use of commercial entertainment technology and content for military training and education.' So there was a \$45 million contract designed to see what Hollywood could create that would be useful for military training and education." See "Militarism and Video Games," online at:

<http://www.mediaed.org/news/articles/militarism>

<sup>557</sup> John Steinbruner and Nancy Gallagher, "An Alternative Vision of Global Security," *Deadelus*, Summer 2004, p. 99. They discuss the term "transformation" as it applies to military planning, i.e. doctrines, training and conceptions that create more decisive capability as measured against enemies in order to assure greater U.S. security (without considering the security of everyone else). There is a problem, however. Increases in the technological means for violence will result in "competition in intimidation" creating amplified US vulnerability. A cycle of intimidation will ensue. "Transformation as currently practiced carries an appreciable risk of *ultimate doom*."

<sup>558</sup> In "PG-13 rating roils the empire," a concerned mother addresses the climactic *Star Wars* installment and its "intergalactic throw-down with dismemberments, [and] even a beheading," whether it is appropriate for young children and the difficulty of keeping her children from nagging her to see the new film. She says "her kids see it everywhere, from TV to Apple Jacks boxes at Kroger." War sells!

Online at: <http://www.centredaily.com/mld/centredaily/entertainment/weekend/11691349.htm>

<sup>559</sup> See Carl Boggs, "Bush, Kerry and the Politics of Empire," *Logos Journal*, where he notes, "Kerry's inability to carve out an alternative to the Bush disaster must be understood in this historical and geopolitical context. Such a momentous eclipse of political discourse, fateful not only to American society but to the rest of the world, is ultimately located within a more crucial, underlying problem—the decay of American politics in the midst of widening Empire." Online at:

[http://www.logosjournal.com/issue\\_3.4/boggs.htm](http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_3.4/boggs.htm)

<sup>560</sup> Paul Morando, "Military Fashion Comes to the Today Show," *The United States Army: Military District of Washington*, March 20, 2001. Morando writes, "NBC's 'Today Show'...became a battleground of cutting-edge fashion [as host] Katie Couric and style expert Lloyd Boston, looked at a resurgence of military dress in popular culture...with camouflage netting and a Humvee in the background...the show features everything from swimwear to formal business attire all of which bore the influence of military styles and designs." Online at:

[http://www.mdw.army.mil/news/Military\\_fashion\\_comes\\_to\\_the\\_Today\\_Show.html](http://www.mdw.army.mil/news/Military_fashion_comes_to_the_Today_Show.html)

<sup>561</sup> SUVs are referred to as "urban assault vehicles," by Andrew Garnar, and are part of a militaristic "marketing [of] aggressive cars around the dual emotions of personal fear and private protection," in which "fear [and protection are used] as an injunction to consume," in the words of John Hilley in "Neoliberal militarism: Journeys Around the New World Disorder," *Worldwide Democracy Network*, online at:

[http://www.wwdemocracy.nildram.co.uk/democracy\\_today/neoliberal\\_militarism\\_intro.htm](http://www.wwdemocracy.nildram.co.uk/democracy_today/neoliberal_militarism_intro.htm). Garnar adds that the spectacle of the 1991 US assault on Iraq provided "the Hummer...24-hour-a-day unpaid advertising." He also compares the role of the Hummer "an *uber* SUV" in the first US attack on Iraq with the cultural role of the jeep in

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WWII. “The militaristic side of [SUVs] reveals itself,” not only in its origin in the military, but in its portrayal as a vehicle “pitted against the city in advertisements.” See Andrew Garnar, “Portable Civilizations and Urban Assault Vehicles,” *Techné* 5:2, Winter 2000

<sup>562</sup> Any college or university that denies the military “access,” will “run afoul of a law [the Solomon Amendment] that allows the federal government to withhold contracts and grants from universities that don't permit ROTC programs on their campuses.” *New York Sun*, May 19, 2005. The Supreme Court, in October 2005, will rule on the constitutionality of the “Solomon Amendment,” the federal law that requires the cutoff of federal funds to colleges that refuse to give military recruiters equal access to their students. The US government is appealing a 3<sup>rd</sup> District Court Ruling against the Solomon Amendment. The government is arguing that “its power to wage war will be impaired if college campuses—in this case law schools--do not admit recruiters from the armed services, and give them the same aid that other recruiters get.” See “Court to Rule on Solomon Amendment,” *SCOTUSblog*, online at:

[www.scotusblog.com/movabletype/archives/2005/05/court\\_to\\_rule\\_o.html](http://www.scotusblog.com/movabletype/archives/2005/05/court_to_rule_o.html). Air Force Junior ROTC is located in 746 high schools across the United States and at selected schools in Europe, in the Pacific and Puerto Rico. Junior ROTC enrollment includes more than 104,000 cadets. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines JROTC courses are taught as elective courses at more than 3,000 high schools nationwide. See, U.S. Department of Defense, online at: <http://www.defense.gov/faq/comment.html>

<sup>563</sup> Carl Boggs, *Imperial Delusions*, (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005)

<sup>564</sup> See *U.S. Submarine Force Future Capability Vision: Providing Undersea Superiority for Sea Power 21*, January 5, 2005, online at: [www.sublant.navy.mil/FCV.PDF](http://www.sublant.navy.mil/FCV.PDF). A goal of “Sea Power 21” is to “penetrate and operate...where others cannot...to rapidly provide offensive attack options...increase submarine payload [i.e., weapons] volume to expand the...sphere of influence and offensive power...with greater pervasiveness [and] greater lethality...and cause [enemies] to devote assets to defense [i.e. redirect funds away from social programs].” In addition, one should note that the US has 56 attack submarines as part of its arsenal. See online: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/BG1374.cfm>

<sup>565</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), Ch. 1 “Imperialisms, Old and New”

<sup>566</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, (New York: Oxford U. Press, 2005) p. 2. Bacevich notes the belief that US values are “destined to prevail” and, they are proclaimed by US statesmen in terms “bold, ambitious, and confident.” For example, see George W. Bush’s remarks, January 31, 2002, in Georgia, “I can’t tell you how proud I am of our commitment to values. [Our] commitment to values is going to be an integral part of our foreign policy as we move forward. *These aren't American values, these are universal values. Values that speak universal truths.* (my italics). Online at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020131-5.html>. The “values” that “move us forward” in our Providential mission were captured well by Albert Beveridge more than 100 years ago: “We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world.”

<sup>567</sup> For a brief, but revealing, overview of this commitment to “the rule of force” see the debate between Noam Chomsky and former CIA head James Woolsey, online at: <http://www.zmag.org/forums/direc.htm>. Chomsky notes “The US has always relied on the rule of force in international affairs. International law, treaties, the World Court, War Crimes Tribunals, moral judgment, etc., are regularly invoked against enemies, often quite accurately [but the mirror is rarely held up to the US].” Woolsey demonstrates the latter point all too clearly in noting that countries with a “demonstrated capacity for aggression and tyranny,” must be held accountable. Of course, he means “every country must be held accountable, except one, the United States, the one with the most extreme “capacity for aggression and tyranny.”

<sup>568</sup> See Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, (New York: Verso, 1991)

<sup>569</sup> Note the numerous attacks against Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Edward Said, Norman Finkelstein, and others, who suggested that we should attempt to understand the history that led to the attacks of 9/11 in order to prevent future atrocities. For example, see the exchanges online at:

<http://www.zmag.org/replyhitch.htm>. Chomsky implores us to consider “the grievances expressed by people of the Middle East region, rich to poor, secular to Islamist, the course that would be followed by anyone who hopes to reduce the likelihood of further atrocities rather than simply to escalate the cycle of violence, in the familiar dynamics, leading to even greater catastrophes here and elsewhere.”

<sup>570</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*,

<sup>571</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *Another Century of War*, p. 104



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<sup>572</sup> For example, Dick Cheney's comment "We will not hesitate to act alone...to exercise our right of...acting pre-emptively." Quoted in John Lettice, "USAF plans space wars." *The Register*, October 1, 2004, Online at: [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/10/01/usaf\\_plans\\_space\\_wars/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/10/01/usaf_plans_space_wars/)

<sup>573</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, (New York: Oxford U. Press, 2005) pp. 1-2

<sup>574</sup> Gregg Easterbrook, "Out on the Edge: American Power Moves Beyond the Mere Super," *New York Times*, April 27, 2003

<sup>575</sup> C Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (New York, 1956), p. 222

<sup>576</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, p. 2

<sup>577</sup> Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, September 2002, p 724

<sup>578</sup> One should note Negroponte's credentials for the anti-terror "intelligence" position. In the 1980s, while serving under the Reagan Administration's years of increased militarization, he was ambassador to Honduras. There he presided over the world's largest CIA station, not because the US had an overwhelming interest in Honduras but because of Nicaragua and the Sandinista revolution that was attempting to extricate itself from US domination and exploitation. Negroponte supervised camps in which the American-run Contra terror army was armed, trained and supported for the war against Nicaragua...a war that would have killed a relative to population equivalent 2.6 million US citizens. Noam Chomsky points out that "Washington has just appointed to the post of the world's leading anti-terrorism czar a person who qualifies rather well as a condemned international terrorist for his critical role in major atrocities." See Chomsky "What We Know," *Boston Review*, online at:

<http://bostonreview.net/BR30.3/chomsky.html>

<sup>579</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 223

<sup>580</sup> Mills, *The Power Elite*, p.4

<sup>581</sup> Journalist John L. O'Sullivan wrote in 1845 of our nation's "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." O'Sullivan's racist tome was used by proslavery forces to argue for the acquisition of as much of the Southwest as possible to create future slave states to prevent the abolition of their "treasured" institution by their outnumbering by "free" states. In O'Sullivan's view Native Americans were not people but beasts. Hence he could write in 1839 "Our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage...[nor have US people pursued] the wicked ambition to depopulate the land, to spread desolation far and wide..."

<sup>582</sup> Or, as Jefferson stated it, our "ideas should freely spread from one to another over the globe, for the moral and mutual instruction of man, and improvement of his conditions," in *The Founder's Constitution*, online at: [http://presspubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1\\_8\\_8s12.html](http://presspubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_8_8s12.html). Similar sentiments can be heard in George W. Bush,

for example in the preamble to *The National Security Strategy of the U.S.* wherein he suggests that the US provides "a single sustainable model of national success...right and true for every person, in every society."

<sup>583</sup> The Truman Doctrine was set forth in Truman's address before Congress on March 12, 1947. The Truman Doctrine suggested that the US would support "free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." Decoded, the Truman Doctrine continued the US commitment to preventing any form of independent development outside of a US dominated global capitalist system. At the time in Greece left-oriented popular forces who had valiantly fought against the Nazis, were attempting to extricate themselves from neo-Nazi forces. The US intervened not on the side of those fighting to free themselves from a well armed subjugating minority of brutal fascists, but on the side of the fascists, following a standard pattern. The US created a Greek internal security agency, i.e. secret police, who engaged in systematic abuse, torture and murder (part of a long-term pattern of US support and assistance to human rights violators across the world). Truman signed into law an act that sent \$400 million in mostly military aid to repressive forces in Greece and Turkey.

<sup>584</sup> Mary A. Heiss, "The Evolution of the Imperial Idea and US National Identity", *Diplomatic History*, Fall 2002, Vol. 26, Num. 4, p. 520

<sup>585</sup> In *Screening Violence*, Stephen Prince argues that irresponsible portrayals of violence in the movies are on the rise. "Many filmmakers who portray *ultraviolence* are emotionally disengaged from it and show it in a dispassionate manner...for them, it is a special effect and a box-office asset."

<sup>586</sup> All quotes in this paragraph are from Peter McLaren and Janet Morris, "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: the Aesthetics of Phallo-Militaristic Justice, p. 116

<sup>587</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "The Modern Prince," *Prison Notebooks*, p.199. Gramsci adds "Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself..." for better or worse.

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<sup>588</sup> Called “the sacralization of war” in Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), Chapter 10

<sup>589</sup> Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives US Meaning*,” (New York: Anchor, 2003)

<sup>590</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York; Schocken Books, 1968), p. 241

<sup>591</sup> Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*

<sup>592</sup> Michael Geyer, “The Militarization of Europe, 1914-1945. In *The Militarization of the Western World*, John Gilles ed. P. 79. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press). In *A Century of War*, Gabriel Kolko suggests “It would be an error, however, to attribute militarism’s origins to Europe and ignore the United States’ important contributions to it...”

<sup>593</sup> Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (New York: Vintage, 1996)

<sup>594</sup> Will Smith, *Live8 Concert*, Philadelphia, PA, June 2005

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#### **Colombia: Another US-Sponsored Killing Field**

[www.colombiajournal.org/colombia44.htm](http://www.colombiajournal.org/colombia44.htm)

**"WMD" in Cuba** - [www.counterpunch.org/morris06032004.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/morris06032004.html)

### **Research Interests**

1. Critical Pedagogy
2. Films as a form of public pedagogy
3. US culture of militarism and its impact of material and ideological formations

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