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SPENT BULLETS: WORLD WAR I VETERANS IN PRE-CODE FILM

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by
Tiffany I. Weaver

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The dissertation of Tiffany I. Weaver was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Charles Kupfer  
Associate Professor of American Studies and History  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Simon J. Bronner  
Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Folklore

Anthony Buccitelli  
Associate Professor of American Studies and Communications

Robin Redmon Wright  
Associate Professor of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education

John Haddad  
Professor of American Studies and Popular Culture  
Chair of the Graduate Program in American Studies

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

Films depicting World War I and its aftermath began production almost as soon as the war began, although it would be roughly a decade before these films became more prevalent and popular. Many of these films were important in helping the public navigate the aftermath of the conflict and reflected the changing society of the 1920s and early 1930s. Studying these films can help provide a better understanding of the culture in the United States that emerged during the Interwar period and how society reacted to these changes.

Of particular importance are the films depicting the experience of the soldier upon returning home. Following World War I, veterans across the United States and Europe experienced issues with readjustment to civilian life, struggled with shell shock, and faced unemployment. These issues were reflected in the films featuring the life of the veteran. Veterans were used by society to re-write the war. In many of the films released after World War I, and particularly those from the pre-Code era of 1930-1934, the failures of the war were cast onto the body of the veteran, rather than using him to glorify the war effort and present his service in a heroic fashion. These characters became martyrs of a failed cause and lost hope.

This dissertation explores some of the key World War I veteran films of the pre-Code era and how the veteran is used to cope with the changing post-War world. During this period, the United States saw drastic cultural changes including women’s suffrage, modernization of the workplace, and the Great Depression. By examining the roles played by World War I veterans, an understanding can be developed of both how cinema helped to mediate the changing world and how veterans helped with this.
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the Lost Generation of men and women of the Great War and to the stars of pre-Code Hollywood who helped to tell their stories.
Spent Bullets: World War I Veterans in Pre-Code Film

Introduction: “And We Sleep and Eat with Death”

The scene opens with a desolate view of No Man’s Land and smoke rolling across the bare land. An artillery barrage mixes with the mournful sounds of a harmonica. The camera cuts to reveal men bailing water from the trenches. A young man sits at his watch post. He appears sad and weary. As he looks out of the small observation hole, a smile appears on his face. He slowly reaches his hand through the hole. The camera angle shifts, we are now viewing the young man from the other side of the trench and the safety it provides. The view pans down past his arm to reveal the object of his fascination—a butterfly sitting peacefully at the opening of a tin can. The young man attempts to reach the beautiful creature through the observation hole but it is too far away. Slowly he stands up.

The film cuts to the enemy side and a sniper readies his gun against a fallen tree. He has noticed the movement of the young man on the other side. A cut back to the young man shows him standing and slowly moving over the top of the trench. As he extends his hand further the sniper steadies his aim. The scene cuts between a close-up of the young man’s hand reaching carefully towards the butterfly and the sniper aiming his rifle. A shot suddenly rings out and is followed by a deafening silence. The young man’s hand recoils, shakes for a few seconds, and then drops to the ground. The screen fades to an image of the young man marching with a long line of other soldiers transposed over a field of white crosses. As they silently march, each man turns his head and looks at the camera before moving forward. The screen fades to black and the film ends.

The above is a description of the iconic ending to the World War I masterpiece All Quiet on the Western Front, released by Universal Pictures in 1930. These closing shots shut the door
on a film that put a voice to the disillusion and bewilderment caused by the Great War. Based on Erich Marie Remarque’s book of the same name, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, tells the story of Paul Baumer’s wartime experience from a German perspective. The tale begins as the call to arms goes out across the country. Paul is in school and his teacher delivers a passionate speech encouraging his students to join the army. They destroy the classroom and their books as they jovially run to the recruiting office to sign up. The rest of the film follows the unit to which Paul is assigned from training camp to front line. One by one each of the men that Paul connects with dies until he is the only one left. Shortly before the conclusion of the film, Paul is wounded and returns home on leave. As he walks through the village of his childhood, he witnesses the men too old to fight encouraging young boys to join the war. He speaks out against their urging. He has seen the true face of the war and knows what lies ahead for these boys. After he returns to the front, he and Kat, his last friend in the unit, go out in search for food. While on their search an artillery shell lands near them and Kat is hit in the leg. Paul carries him to the medic’s tent only to discover that he has died. Paul has lost his last friend and no longer understands why the war is being fought or for whom. He returns to his post, surrounded by replacements he does not recognize. As he gazes across No Man’s Land from his observation post and sees the butterfly, it is like he is seeing a last bit of beauty in a world with nothing left to offer. His desire for a connection with this creature brings about his own death. Paul loses his innocence, his passion, and ultimately his life.¹

While not the first film to feature World War I combat, it was the most successful to that point and inspired the increased production of films with a pacifist angle. World War I films began production as soon as the war began but it would not be until roughly a decade after the

¹ *All Quiet on the Western Front*, directed by Lewis Milestone (1930; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.
war that these films would become popular. *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), *The Big Parade* (1925), and *What Price Glory?* (1926) were three of the most popular films to be released in the wake of the war. These films questioned the war but did not take a strong pacifist stance. Instead the films retained a romantic view of the war.

Films depicting the war were important in helping the public come to terms with the aftermath and reflected the changing society of the 1920s and early 1930s. As Ray Browne, one of the preeminent scholars of popular culture points out, “the value of popular culture as a window to the human condition is timeless. Perhaps because it is less artful, less altered by the alchemy of the artist, popular culture is often a more truthful picture of what the people were thinking and doing at any given time than artistic creations are.” He goes on to explain that in studying Athenians during the time of Socrates, examining their daily habits and interests may be more revealing than the philosophy of Socrates. From studying the films released in the wake of World War I we are able to better understand the culture that developed.

Alongside the films depicting the experience of the soldier during wartime, films emerged that told the story of his post-War life. Following the war, veterans across the United States and Europe experienced issues with readjustment to civilian life, struggled with shell shock, and faced unemployment. All these issues were reflected in the films depicting the life of the veteran. Ray Browne explains that popular culture is the, “voice and action of the people…Society grows…by rewriting its beliefs and points of view. Each generation must define the past in its own terms, and in so doing each generation re-evaluates the past.” Veterans were used by society to re-write the war. In many of the films released in the decades following World

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3 Ibid., 28-29
War I, and particularly those from the pre-Code era of 1930-1934, the failures of the war was cast onto the body of the veteran, rather than using him to glorify the war effort and present his service in a heroic fashion. They became martyrs of a failed cause and lost hope.¹

Literature examining the wartime films, particularly that of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Big Parade* is prevalent. However, there is little academic work surrounding veterans experience on the big screen. Most of these works discuss the veterans of World War II and Vietnam with World War I films examined mostly in a post-World War II context. Very few works examine the veteran films released in the wake of the war and how they depicted the struggles experienced by these men. Works released in the pre-Code era are particularly important, as will be discussed in more detail later, with little to no scholarship dedicated to the importance of the veteran status of many of the characters.

*Hollywood’s World War I: Motion Picture Images*, edited by Peter Rollins and John E. O’Connor is an anthology of essays all focusing on World War I films. In their introduction to the collection, they explain that the essays explore how filmmakers have used the medium to create their vision of the past. Works included examine films such as *The Big Parade*, *Dawn Patrol* (1930), *Hell’s Angels* (1930), and *Johnny Got His Gun* (1972). Of the fourteen essays included in the book, only one focuses on veterans, James I. Deutsch’s, “Coming Home from the Great War: World War I Veterans in American Film.”

¹ I have chosen to use the masculine pronoun when referring to the World War I veteran as the films selected for this study do not include women as veterans. While women provided crucial support for the war effort at home and in Europe, they are not depicted as experiencing the same kind of struggles upon the end of the war and were not referred to as veterans in any of the films consulted. Only in recent discourse has this been remedied, in works such as the popular British television series *Downton Abbey* which refers to one of the main female characters as a member of the “walking wounded,” and examines the problems that women had after the war attempting to adjust to lives that blended their pre-War roles with the changing roles of women after the war. This will be more fully discussed in the conclusion.
Deutsch’s essay examines films featuring World War I veterans from those released at the end of the war until the publication of the article (1997). He explains that there are five narrative archetypes persistent in all the films despite the shifting perspectives in viewing the war. The first archetype is the visibly wounded veteran who is out cast from society and who must learn to deal with his new condition and find a place in society, while experiencing a dramatic healing in the process. The second is the shell shock victim who experiences trouble readjusting to civilian life but finds a resolution by the end of the film. Third sees the veteran return to find an unfaithful wife and in the process of healing from this blow, he finds true love. In the fourth, the veteran is a victim of a crime he did not commit and must clear his name. In most cases he is unemployed at the time he is arrested. The last archetype, the veteran has no visible or invisible issues from the war except a vague disillusionment which is cured by the end of the film. Deutsch also explains that the early veteran films differ from the works of the Lost Generation authors of the 1920s because of their optimism for the future at their conclusion.

Deutsch’s essay adequately explores the broader themes present in a large swath of films under his review. By using such a large time frame he is able to establish patterns throughout all of the works and the time periods of their release. However, doing this also means that he bypasses some of the more important details within the films. For example, he makes no mention of the 1930 film *The Last Flight*, which is one of the only films to feature the hedonistic ideals of the Lost Generation in Paris. While these archetypes are important in understanding how veterans are characterized in these films, it is also important to examine the time period of the film’s release more closely to understand the function the veteran character serves.

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Andrew Kelly’s *Cinema and the Great War*, examines both wartime and post-War films. He begins by looking at film as a tool for propaganda and then illustrates how the films of the 1920s reflected the increasing questions over why the war was fought. Kelly also explores the rise of anti-war films from *All Quiet on the Western Front* to *Paths of Glory* in the late 1950s. In his discussion of the 1920s through the early 1930s, Kelly points out that the war was often, “tangential to the plot, with coverage of the impact of the conflict sometimes occupying only a small part, the war was held responsible for contemporary economic and social despair.” This point is particularly important because it demonstrates the extreme impact the war had on society. Its shadow cast itself over society and was at the center of the economic, social, and political upheavals of the time.

Kelly spends quite some time looking at the films of the pre-Code era and how they depicted the war. He places these films within the context of the anti-war trend brought on by *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Most of the major veteran films are touched upon, including *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Heroes for Sale* (1934), and *The Last Flight* (1930). However, Kelly presents the films as a reaction against the war itself, rather than a product of the war and its aftermath. In other words, while it is true that the war is at the heart of the problems experienced by the veterans in these films, Kelly argues that they were examples of the anti-war sentiment that developed in the post-*All Quiet* Hollywood. To better understand the place of these films, they must be viewed as a product of the new post-War world and the economic, political, and social conditions of the country at the time of their production and release must be more closely examined.

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Early Emmett’s work *The War Veteran in Film* looks at veterans in films ranging across the entirety of film history and numerous wars. Rather than breaking down the films by war, he takes a collective approach and examines similarities between the veterans of all wars. Similar to Deustsch, he uses broad archetypes to demonstrate the connections between these films. Emmett also shows that veterans tend to be characterized in similar fashions regardless of the war or the time of the film’s release.\(^7\)

Of the wide range of films he covers, very few pertain to World War I and even fewer come from the pre-Code era. Notable are his discussions on *I am A Fugitive from a Chain Gang* and *Heroes for Sale*. Emmett places *Fugitive from a Chain Gang* in the category of restless returning veteran and discusses the main character’s inability to return to his life from before his wartime service. *Heroes for Sale* is placed in the category of wounded veteran returning home. While both of these are accurate assessments of the films, Emmett fails to comment on the many other themes present and does not place them in a broader context of their time period.\(^8\)

One of the most succinct works about veteran films in the wake of the war is Anton Kaes *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*. Post-War cinema in Germany was groundbreaking in many ways. Films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Metropolis* pushed the limits of filmmaking with innovative cinematography and editing techniques. Kaes draws a direct connection between the emerging German Expressionist movement and the horrors experienced by the country during the war.

Kaes explains that, while many of the films only implied the horror of the war rather than expressly articulating it, the references filmmakers used were understood by Weimar audiences. He also explains that shell shock was the source of much of these implications. The physical and

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\(^8\) Ibid., 222-225; 12-14.
psychological trauma experienced both during and after the war appeared on the screen in the
guise of harsh contrast lighting, rigidly angular sets, and dark storylines.\(^9\)

Focusing solely on German cinema, Kaes does not comment on Hollywood produced films.\(^10\) His model, though, is an excellent example of how the aftermath of the war and the
struggles of returning veterans were represented on screen. Kaes explores films with characters
who have a clear veteran status, but he also includes films that use symbols and allusion without
actually mentioning the war to shed light on the problems suffered in the years after the war.

Other works that examine the early World War I veteran films do so mostly in passing.
They may dedicate one or two lines explaining that films were released that illustrated the
suffering of the veteran and some may even include a few pages, but none go into any details
about why this was important. Many of the films featuring a World War I veteran are used as
case studies for different issues. Scholarship about *I am A Fugitive from A chain Gang*, for
example, focuses on the conditions of the chain gang and how the film helped to bring about
changes to that system. *Heroes for Sale* discussions usually center on the election of Franklin
Roosevelt and the New Deal, using Tom as the example of the Forgotten Man that Roosevelt
evoked during his campaign while neglecting his identity as a veteran. The musical *Gold
Diggers of 1933* is the second of the big Warner Bros. musical trio released in the pre-Code era
and is examined in the context of the rise of the backstage musical, its Depression Era themes,
and the lavish musical productions of Busby Berkeley. What connects these three seemingly

\(^{10}\) One of the films that Kaes uses as a case study is *Metropolis* (1927). Filmed and first released in Germany, the
film was, in part, funded by Paramount Pictures when the German production company, UFA, ran out of money. Paramout’s agreement with UFA dictated that the film could be edited in anyway the American company wished upon its released in the United States. Beyond the funding, though, Paramount did not have any say in the actual production of the film in Germany.
unconnected films is the World War I veteran. Each of these films casts the problems of the society and the changing world onto the body of the veteran.

The following chapters explore some of the key World War I veteran films of the pre-Code era and how the veteran is used to cope with the changing post-War world. Writing about the gangster genre, Jonathan Munby in his work, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes*, explains that the decades following World War I saw drastic cultural changes including women’s suffrage, Prohibition, and the first Red Scare. These changes brought with them a variety of reactions that ranged from celebratory acceptance to violent backlash. He also points out that this period was the time when film came of age and Hollywood as we know it today developed. Munby explains, “the mass cinema played a crucial role in the mediation of these cultural changes.”

By examining the roles played by World War I veterans an understanding can be developed of both how cinema helped to mediate the changing world and how veterans helped with this.

Limiting this work to pre-Code films, those released between 1930-1934, has three important motivations. The first is the use of sound. The development of sound revolutionized the film industry and allowed filmmakers to dive deeper into a topic and put a voice to concerns and problems. What could only be previously hinted at in silence or written on a title card, could now be vocalized and explored more in depth. The second is the Great Depression. Hitting the United States in 1929, the period from 1930-1934 covers the beginning of the Depression during the Presidency of Herbert Hoover, the campaign of Franklin Roosevelt, and the beginning of his Presidency and New Deal plan. These historical markers are important in providing context to the films under scrutiny. There is also a shift in the representation of veterans over the course of these events, which demonstrates how the veteran’s role in film changed based on the societal

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climate. The last motivation is the era of pre-Code film itself. Released in the four-year period between the development and adoption of the Production Code in 1930 and its enforcement in 1934, as a whole, pre-Code cinema pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable on screen and tackled tough social and cultural issues head on. After 1934, the ability of a film to take a strong social stance was lessened by the strict guidelines of the Production Code. Film historian Mick LaSalle, explains that pre-Code cinema was an era of soul-searching and questioning American institutions, fortified by the Depression. The films discussed in the following pages do exactly that.

In shaping the following narrative, Brett Walker’s Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Japan played a large role. Focusing primarily on development of industrial disease in Japan as a result of industrial progress and environmental pollution, Walker sets forth a model for his work that he calls, “hybrid causations.” Hybrid causations, he explains, are when, “historical and natural drivers come together...” Walker’s model is meant to be inclusionary of all of the forces at play in the development of industrial disease. By doing this, he points out that, “the hybrid causation model does not shirk focused analyses and careful explanations in favor of descriptions of the big picture, rather it simply acknowledges that environmental history is moved by many forces, and so understanding our past demands that we acknowledge these forces as well.”

When applied to film, the hybrid causation model helps to develop a more intricate picture of the films in this study. Films are not made in a bubble or a vacuum and are impacted by the forces of their environment. In order to fully understand the historical place of a film and

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14 Ibid, xiv
how and what it can teach us, the social, cultural, political, and economic forces at work during its production and release must be understood. This aligns with Ray Browne’s assertion that reading the work of Socrates alone will not provide an understanding of the everyday life of the Athenians. A better example may be what he says of studying Shakespeare, “if…one wants to understand Shakespeare’s plays fully, he studies outside the dreams, in what was going on in London at the time, the attitude of the people towards England’s kings and queens, toward war, housing, poverty, and foreigners, etc.”\textsuperscript{15} It is the aim of this study to create a full picture of the pre-Code World War I veteran films and place in them in their appropriate historical context.

To accomplish this, a general survey of approximately 150 films were taken into consideration. These films ranged from 1924 to the present, with the bulk falling into the pre-Code era. Of that survey, a sample of films which best demonstrated the following conclusions were used as case studies. Each of these films is broken down to discuss the major elements illustrating the use of the veteran to make broader points about current society. In some cases a shot by shot analysis has been undertaken to show how the mise-en-scene, sound, and framing of a scene brings these points to light. From the study of these films, broader points can be developed regarding how the veteran was used to articulate the increase of mechanical technology in the workplace, wartime imagery used to describe the modern industrial city, the place of wounded veterans in society, and the changing perspective of unemployment in the early days of the Great Depression.

Chapter one examines three films featuring a modern industrial society, \textit{Metropolis}, \textit{The Crowd}, and \textit{Modern Times} as case studies to demonstrate how the modern workplace and urban landscape was often depicted as a battlefield and workers were just another cog in the machine.

\footnote{Browne, “Popular Culture: New Notes Towards a Definition,” 24.}
The loss of identity in a modern industrial society, anonymous and easily replaceable workers, workplace induced “shell shock,” and negligent or uncaring management practices are the core arguments presented. This chapter will be drawn from in later chapters to develop broader conclusions regarding depictions of the workplace and World War I.

The second chapter uses four films *Dawn Patrol, Ace of Aces, The Man Who Reclaimed His Head,* and *Surrender* that take place primarily during World War I. Similar to chapter one, these films include themes of easily replaceable and young forces, blind leadership, munitions conspiracies driving the war, and the mental and physical impact of the war on the soldier. These themes and their depiction in the selected films are then directly related back to the previous chapter and the modern industrial world. These two chapters set the stage to further the connections between the depiction of industrial workers and World War I veterans.

*Grand Hotel, The Man from Yesterday, The Black Cat* and *The Last Flight* are the films selected for chapter three. These films all exhibit veterans with physical and/or mental wounds and demonstrates how wounded veterans were depicted in pre-Code films. With each film there is an exploration of how the war has forever changed the character, the type of wound the character has received, how the veteran has been relegated to the shadows of society, and how each character has come to feel like a burden to loved ones. Direct connections are also drawn between the wounded veterans and the workers of the modern industrial world.

Chapter four looks at *I am A Fugitive from A Chain Gang, Heroes for Sale,* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* to cast the veteran as the Forgotten Man. Originally defined by William Graham Sumner in the 1880s, the Forgotten Man was redefined by Franklin Roosevelt during his 1932 Presidential campaign. In film, this translated to a healthy World War I veteran back from Europe and ready to begin a new life only the find a world that has moved on without him.
The conclusion of this study will briefly examine the films made after the pre-Code era through the conclusion of the 1930s and into the beginning of World War II. Films analyzed in the conclusion include *The Roaring Twenties*, *The Fighting 69th*, and *Sergeant York*. Attention will also be paid to modern film representations of veterans including *Downtown Abbey* and *Fantastic Beats and Where to Find Them*. The purpose of this is to demonstrate how the character of the veterans shifts over time to reflect the changes taking place contemporary to a film’s release.
Chapter 1: “A Cost Assessed in Flesh:” Mechanized Workers on the Industrial Battlefield\textsuperscript{16}

“As deep lay the workers’ city below the earth, so high above it towered the complex named the ‘Club of the Sons,’ with its lecture halls and libraries, its theaters and stadiums,” reads a scrolling title card. Cut to a scene of men, wearing all white, playing track and field games while high above them tower the walls of a stadium topped with large statues of athletes. Another cut brings a title card reading, “Fathers for whom every revolution of a machine wheel meant gold had created for their sons the miracle of the Eternal Gardens.” The next shot is a fantastical garden with women mingling in lavish costumes. A young man chases the women around the garden. The scene is interrupted as a set of doors open and a young woman leading a group of children enter the garden. They stand in stark contrast to their surroundings as they are all in ragged and dirty clothing. As the children cling to the young woman, she waves her hand over the scene and exclaims, “Look! These are your brothers!” Those in the garden are stricken by the appearance of the interlopers. Freder, the young man who had been chasing the women, looks on with a mix of horror and sympathy. Guards approach the woman and the children to usher them away. As they leave, Freder asks about the woman. Upon hearing that she is a member of the undercity, he quickly follows her through the doors and ends up in the factory.\textsuperscript{17}

The above scene comes from the 1927 German production \textit{Metropolis}, released by Paramount Pictures in the United States the same year. The classic film follows the journey of Freder as he searches for the young woman who came to the garden. On his journey, he discovers the horrible living and working conditions of the workers under the city—those

\textsuperscript{16} Title comes from a quote found in Edward Slavishak’s \textit{Bodies of Work}. The quote refers to the historian Randolph Bergstrom’s assessment of the machine age as progress, “only at a cost assessed in flesh,” found in his work \textit{Courting Danger}. Edward Slavishak, \textit{Bodies of Work} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 14.

\textsuperscript{17} “The Club of Sons,” and “Eternal Gardens,” \textit{Metropolis}, directed by Fritz Lang (1927; New York: Kino Classics, 2010), DVD.
working and dying to give him, and others like him, a life of wealth and pleasure. *Metropolis*, discussed in more detail below, is an example of the *zeitgeist* in the early twentieth century concerning industrial production and the life of the modern worker as a small cog in the imposing industrial machine.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, better mechanical technology allowed for more efficient production and increased industrial output. For workers, this meant a faster pace and in some cases the loss of jobs as machines replaced workers. Harry Braverman points out in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* that workers were at the mercy of the management as machines multiplied the productivity of labor and provided great control over the labor force. This brought with it a fear of both replacement by machines and job loss from not producing at the level dictated by management. Industrial theorist Charles Babbage believed that, “one great advantage which we may derive from machinery…is from the check which it affords against the inattention, the idleness of the dishonesty of human agents.” In essence, for workers, increased mechanical power meant a loss of control over a large portion of their daily lives and a change in the way work was completed.

Cultural historian Edward Slavishak discusses this transition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in his book *Bodies of Work: Civic Display and Labor in Industrial Pittsburgh*. Slavishak examines the ways in which the male working body was used to promote narratives both in favor and against the changing industrial landscape. During the roughly, 40-year time span that Slavishak covers, steel production was transformed from a highly skilled task to one for which little skill was necessary. Slavishak writes, “As production shifted from batch processes that relied upon individual strength and judgement to continuous flow processes that

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19 Ibid., 195.
employed machinery to remove much of the strength and judgement required to do a job, critics of capital warned that the majesty of the body at work had become a grim joke.” He goes on to explain that these changes also brought about concerns over monotony, pace, and physical hazards.20

In *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*, environmental historian Brett L. Walker, looks at the link between industrial disease and pain in the growth of industry in modern Japan. He argues that, “…my point is that all modern nations, including the Japanese one, require pain and acceptance of that pain from their subjects and citizenry, particularly at key historical moments.”21 In doing so, Walker examines various instances of industrial diseases and the reaction by the affected populations and the government—all in the name of industrial and national progress. A similar argument can be made regarding industrial growth in the early twentieth century as American businesses shifted to machinery and industrial accidents increased. Pain of the worker, and its acceptance, was necessary to bring about success and progress.22

Walker’s work also highlights how the industrial workplace and economic expansion was often compared to a battlefield or war zone. He often discusses the link between war, industrial development, and the extraction of resources. He remarks that these connections are not a “whimsical one.” German economists, such as Werner Sombart and his work *Krieg und

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Monotony, pace, and physical hazards are also three of the central characteristics of the workplace in *Metropolis, The Crowd*, and *Modern Times*, discussed in this chapter.
22 While statistics are difficult to find regarding exact numbers of workplace related industries and deaths in the early twentieth century, Slavishak correlates the rise of machinery with an increase in workplace accidents. The CDC reports a large number of workplace related injuries in the beginning of the century with a vast decrease by the 1990s due to safer working conditions. The report does not posit a reason for the number injuries in the early century, but the numbers do back up the claims made by Slavishak.
Kapitalismus, wrote about the relationship between war and capitalist expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Walker explains that Japanese politicians read these works and used them as the basis of industrial expansion and military endeavors.\(^{23}\) Furthering the link between war and industrial development, Walker explains, “War demands calories, as well as the blood of the young and the treasure of the nation. In their own ways, both war and coal fueled industrial expansion: consider expansion the economic footprint of war.”\(^{24}\)

Slavishak’s use of battlefields or war zones focus largely on those wounded in the workplace and how they are depicted in a fashion similar to those of wounded veterans. He uses examples from the Pittsburgh Survey to demonstrate this. The Pittsburgh Survey was a study conducted between 1907 and 1908 with results published a few years later. Throughout, the survey often used war metaphors when describing working conditions and made workers and machine combatants. The survey’s authors presented the wounded worker’s body as cast aside in the city and alone or as dependent on the family for support. Slavishak explains that this was done to call attention to the links between the wounded worker and the wounded veteran.\(^{25}\) The Homestead Strike of 1892 also provides an excellent example. As Slavishak notes, coverage of the worker struggle used wartime/militant language to illustrate the events.

While Walker’s work focuses more on the environment’s role in the development of pain to the Japanese working class in the name of economic expansion, he also includes many instances where, similar to Slavishak, the pain and wounding of the working body point to the worker as navigating an industrial battlefield. One point he makes is that in many cases workers

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\(^{24}\) Ibid., 181.

\(^{25}\) It is important to note here, that Slavishak is not referring to the depiction of World War I veterans in his discussion of the Pittsburgh Survey. Rather he is using examples of veterans from wars between the Civil War and when the survey was completed in 1908. However, according to authors such as Beth Linker in *War’s Waste*, World War I veterans will be photographed in a similar fashion. A deeper analysis of this topic will appear in chapter three. Slavishak, *Bodies of Work*, 149-191.
were fully aware that their employment caused the horrific suffering of both themselves and their loved ones, but that this was a necessity in order to make a living. In one example, he describes Minamata disease and the possible shutting of the Chisso factory that was polluting the water supply causing the illness. He states that, “such efforts threatened the livelihoods of many workers who themselves had families to feed. Shutting down the factory was ‘world destroying,’…even if the intended effector was to ameliorate pain.”26 The employees of the Chisso factory were cogs in a system they had no control against. In another particularly important anecdote, Walker discusses the story of Ishimoto Shidzue, a female worker in the coalfields of Kyushu. As she describes her time working in the coal industry, she explains there, “…was no holiday on this industrial battlefield....miners had to work as long as engines were active.”27 Her use of the word “engines” can be read as the mechanized engines of the machinery or the physical engine of the body. Workers were expected to keep going until the machines stopped or they collapsed. The use of military language and imagery is also found in the many of the films depicting a modern industrial society in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Using Metropolis, The Crowd, and Modern Times as the major filmic examples and the works by Slavishak and Walker to provide a general framework, this chapter interprets the way that popular culture depicted workers as cogs in a machine; focusing specifically on the loss of identity in a modern industrial society, anonymous and quickly replaceable workers, workplace induced “shell shock,” and negligent or uncaring management practices. This will serve to illustrate the similarities between depictions of the workplace and World War I in the following chapters.

Metropolis

27 Ibid., 182-183.
Metropolis was released in Germany by Universum Film AG (UFA) in 1927. Directed by Fritz Lang, the production embodies the characteristics of the German expressionist movement of film making, utilizing straight lines, angles, and shadows in its mise-en-scene to comment on broader issues facing German society (such as the terrible losses incurred by World War I). The production of the film was a massive undertaking, costing the studio millions of Reichmarks. Paramount helped to fund some of the cost with the agreement that the studio could edit the film in any way they saw fit upon US release. In March of 1927, Paramount did just that, releasing the film to US audiences with over a quarter of the original material on the cutting room floor, changing the intertitles and the character names, and eliminating much of the content relating to Hel (the mother of the main character). The scenes relating to machines and mechanical progress were left intact. It is this version of the film, that which American audiences would have seen, that will be analyzed below.

The film begins with the cogs of a machine and the changing of shifts. Workers, all identically dressed, march head down, demoralized, and down trodden out of the factory, while an identical group marches beside them into the building. Cut to the Eternal Garden, where Freder, the son of a wealthy industrialist, spends most of his time. Maria, a poor school teacher, brings a class of children to see the garden and is ushered away. Fascinated by her, Freder goes to the machine rooms in search of her. Once there, he witnesses the explosion of one of the machines which kills some of the workers. Realizing the horrible conditions to which the workers are subjected, Freder goes to tell his father Frederson. But his father does not care and reacts with cold indifference. Grot, foreman of the machine room, brings Frederson maps found on the bodies of the dead workers.
Frederson asks the inventor Rotwang what the maps mean. While in his lab, Rotwang unveils his latest invention—a humanlike robot. Afterward, they follow the directions to a network of catacombs where Maria is addressing a large gathering of workers—including Freder. Maria tells the workers that a mediator is coming who can bring the working and ruling classes together. Freder declares that he can be the mediator. After watching this exchange, Frederson orders Rotwang to give the robot the appearance of Maria in an attempt to undermine her reputation. The robot-Maria unleashes chaos throughout the city on both classes.

Freder finds Maria calling for the workers to destroy the machines. Realizing she is not actually Maria he tries to get the workers to listen to reason. They follow robot-Maria and begin to destroy the Heart Machine. Unbeknownst to them, the destruction of the Heart Machine has caused the worker’s city to flood, trapping their children. Freder and the real Maria help the children escape. Meanwhile, Grot tells the violent workers of the flood. Believing their children to be dead, they burn the robot-Maria at the stake. Freder, who has lost Maria after rescuing the children, watches in horror until he sees the robot form in the flames. Meanwhile, Rotwang chases Maria to the roof a cathedral. Freder chases after them and causes Rotwang to fall to his death. The film ends with Freder acting as mediator and bringing together the hands of Grot and his father.28

Three specific scenes in the film deserve further analysis in their depiction of worker and machine—the opening, Freder’s first encounter with the machine world, and Freder’s work running a machine. While much of the film is worthy of further discussion, these three in particular serve to illustrate the points of loss of identity and the creation of an expendable workforce while also demonstrating the impact the war has had on cinema as a whole.

28 Metropolis, directed by Fritz Lang (1927; New York: Kino Classics, 2010), DVD.
Metropolis opens with a fade into a view of the city. The high-rise buildings are angular and point to the sky. These shapes transition into the pistons of a machine jotting up and down, followed by shots of machine parts such as gears, wheels, and more pistons. The imagery here points to a city built on the success of the industrial economy. Next we see a clock with a ticking second hand, cut to a machine, back to the clock, and finally cut to steam whistles blowing. An intertitle announces the whistle signals a shift change. The clock signaling the change of shift will also be seen in The Crowd, discussed later, but is an important recurring image that depicts both the regimented life of the workers and the perceived freedom from work. In Metropolis, it is notable that there is no difference in the appearance of the workers leaving and coming to the factory. In the The Crowd, those leaving for the day hurry from the building for evenings of fun and excitement.

According to film critic Anton Kaes, the opening images of the moving machine parts and the city, “fetishizes both machines and dynamic motion. No human agency is visible and there is no indication of what the machines do or what they produce; we see only mechanical components moving by themselves.” It is never revealed what exactly the machines produce. Constantly the machines and the workers are shown working furiously, but none of the products are visible. The transition from the cityscape to the machine parts also implies that the machines and their success have built the city but how remains unclear. When the workers interact with the machines, they repeat the same motion over and over to ensure its smooth running. There is no thought or creativity involved, just constant and repetitive motion.

Workers line up at the factory gates. All are dressed in identical uniforms, heads down. The gates slowly lift and the workers begin to march in a shuffling pattern, barely moving their

feet, almost as if they are part of a chain gang. Coming from opposite directions, both sets of workers are identical. It is impossible to tell which are going to work and which are leaving. With heads still down, one group shuffles into an elevator and begins their long descent down. As they emerge from the elevator, the viewer realizes that this is the worker’s city. We last glimpse them shuffling, downtrodden, to their respective buildings, all of which are tall and plain.

This scene introduces the workers and their city. All workers are identical. This denies them a personality and takes away their individuality. Throughout, we only learn the name of Grot, the foreman of the factory. Everyone else in the factory is nameless. The scene also has clear overtones of the factory and the home as a prison illustrated by the gates at the entrance of the factory, the uniforms of the workers, their shuffling chain gang-like march, and the prison-like appearance of their homes. Anton Kaes also compares the workers to anonymous soldiers and explains that the production taking place in the factory is just a continuation of the war itself.\textsuperscript{30} These images are also close to what Walker describes when discussing the Meiji state’s drive to modernize. The workers were placed at serious risk and in some cases their families were poisoned by the by-products of the factories and mines, all to, “patronize the industrialists who owned it.”\textsuperscript{31} The last notable aspect of this scene is the way in which the workers march with their heads down, no expression on their faces. It is impossible to tell which group of men was on their way home and which was on their way to work. There was no joy among the leaving workers, only morose and misery. The importance of this scene establishes the lack of individual identities among the working class and introduces the idea of an expendable workforce. This last idea is crucial in the second and third scenes.

\textsuperscript{31} Walker, \textit{Toxic Archipelago}, 206.
The second important scene in *Metropolis* is Freder’s first encounter with the factory. After meeting Maria in the Pleasure Garden, Freder set off to the workers’ city to find her. When he enters the factory, Freder stands in stark contrast to his surroundings. He and the workers are dwarfed by the towering machines that surround him and rise high into the air.

The workers are all wearing the dark uniforms shown in the opening sequence, while Freder is wearing a white shirt, beige riding pants, light colored tie. This combination causes him to stand out against the dark-clothed workers and the shadowy world of the machines. Upon seeing the world of machines, he looks around awestruck, then begins walking forward. He is stopped in his tracks by the M-Machine. The largest of the machines and the center of activity, the M-Machine is divided in half by a long set of steps leading to person sized alcoves for the workers. On either side of the steps are large, paw-like valves. Steam pours from many vents along the machine and at the very top are two round circles resembling eyes. The workers move in a well-choreographed dance, repeating the same motions over and over.

To one side, a man is in charge of a larger wall of valves and levers. He struggles to keep up with the pace necessary to ensure the machine runs efficiently. As he struggles, he watches in horror as a thermometer rises. As the mercury reaches the top, he tries in vain to reach one last valve, but his hand slips. The film cuts between the rising thermometer and the machine until finally the temperature reaches the top. The next cut to the machine shows steam pouring into the alcoves onto the workers. Freder watches aghast as the men are consumed by the steam, thrown off the machine, and are hurled down the steep steps. As he watches the workers writhe in pain, he imagines the machine transforms into a monster with a large, gapping mouth. An intertitle explains this is “Moloch.” During his hallucination, Freder watches as shackled and shirtless men are pulled forcefully up the steps and thrown into Moloch’s gapping mouth. Two men stand
on either side of the mouth dressed in ancient costumes with grotesque masks. Smoke pours from Moloch’s mouth and through the smoke, gears can be seen spinning. The slaves struggle against their fate, but to no avail. As they are thrown into Moloch’s mouth, groups of uniformed workers march up the steps and throw themselves, willingly, into the fire. Cut back to Freder, who reaches a hand out to the workers, a look of horror on his face. When we next see the M-Machine, it has returned to normal. Workers are helping the wounded down from the machine, men are taken away on stretchers, and work resumes with a new set of workers quickly replacing the casualties.

The Moloch scene illustrates three main points. The first is Freder’s initial entrance into the factory. Freder and the workers are dwarfed by the towering machines. This demonstrates the power and superiority of the machinery versus the smaller and inferior humans. Slavishak explains that “technological gigantism” was a technique used to, “represent the position of the workingman in the midst of immense machinery. The technique played upon the fear and attraction that machines evoked in the American culture throughout the nineteenth century.” He further explains that technological gigantism emphasized the vulnerability of the worker and drives home the point that workers’ lives were dominated by machines.32

Freder is also wearing bright clothing, creating a stark contrast between himself and the men running the machines. Aside from the coloring, Freder wears a buttoned-down long-sleeve shirt, riding pants, and tie. His clothing signals wealth and class. The workers, in contrast, all wear the same, dark, one-piece uniform. Kaes also points out the similarities between Freder’s hallucination and the experience of shell shock. Freder, fresh and new in the factory and physically and mentally unprepared for what he will see, becomes, “paralyzed by his near-death

32 Slavishak, Bodies of Work, 184-186.
encounter…experiences a mind-altering vision similar to those reported by shell-shock victims.” This furthers the point of the connection between the depiction of the war and that of industrial workplaces.33

The men working at the machines all repeat the same motion over and over again. Their movements seem almost like a choreographed dance. The first chapter of Slavishak’s Bodies of Work discusses immigration and mechanization of manufacturing with one of his central points being the image of the worker, “passively guiding machines,” and the message this sent about the impact of industrial technology.34 Historian of technology, James R. Bright, explains, “‘the attempt has been to create timed, predictable, consistent production action on the part of the human beings. Yet, such an approach inevitably must be short of perfection. As links or ‘resistant bodies’ in the super machine, human beings are not mechanically reliable. They do not consistently ‘respond in the desired manner,’ nor can they be constrained to do so…”35 Bright’s discussion of resistant bodies inability to respond in a desired manner is exactly what is seen when one of the workers fails to complete his task and the M-Machine explodes.

The second is the symbolism of Moloch. The M-Machine is mammoth and the powerhouse of the factory. Before Freder’s hallucination, the machine has the appearance of a large crouching animal with gaping mouth. As Freder recovers from the explosion, he imagines the machine as Moloch. Clemens Heni explains in his article, German Ideology: Understanding Ahasver, Mammon, and Moloch, that machines, “were often called ‘Moloch’ in a derogatory way, Moloch was cast pejoratively as a symbol of an anonymous, devouring power.”36 The

34 Slavishak, Bodies of Work, 12–13
35 Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital, 181.
machine literally devours the workers, as they fall willingly into its mouth after the slaves are forced into the fire.\(^{37}\) Their bodies fuel industrial progress and the excesses of the upper world in a similar fashion to the bodies of steel workers discussed in Slavishak’s work above. Kaes calls the use of Moloch a, “comment on the way in which humans are sacrificed to the gods of technology and war.”\(^{38}\)

In 1918, Otto Spengler wrote *The Decline of the West* which focused on explaining a machine-dominated world. He argues that World War I was the outcome of a world ruled by machines and the emergence of the masses. *Metropolis* attempts to explain the conditions that led to the first technological war (lack of understanding between the classes, machine ruled world). Spengler notes that the triumphs of the early century came at a price and that eventually humans became, “a slave of his creation…all tradition has been subordinated to progress, and the entrepreneur no less than the factory worker is forced into obedience.”\(^{39}\) Ernst Jünger also alluded to the domination of the machine and compared the conditions of workers to those of slaves, commenting that those who worked faster and more ruthlessly got ahead.\(^{40}\) The Moloch scene shows workers as slaves and throwing themselves into the mouth of the monster as fuel.

The last element of the Moloch scene is the aftermath of the explosion. When Freder’s hallucination ends, he sees the reality of the disaster. Men scramble to help the wounded down the stairs, others carry men away on stretchers. But most importantly, new men have replaced the wounded in the alcoves to run the machine and their repetitive dance continues. In what can be

\(^{37}\) Heni article discusses the anti-Semitic legends surrounding Moloch. Another perspective with which to view the use of Moloch in *Metropolis* would be through an anti-Semitic lens. Heni describes Moloch in relation to child sacrifice. Fritz Lang’s wife, Thea von Harbou, authored the novel the film is based on, for the sole purpose of creating the film. In 1933, Lang and Harbou divorced, in part because of Harbou’s extreme allegiance to the Nazi party. In this context, the Moloch could be read as a link between Jews and the capitalist system of *Metropolis* that sacrifices the innocent workers of the German citizenry.


\(^{39}\) Ibid., 169-170

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 174
inferred to be a matter of minutes, a crew of reinforcements have arrived to keep the machine running. The new worker completes the job in the same way and at the same pace as the previous crew—driving home the point of the repetitive nature of the job and the unskilled labor used to complete the task. These workers are expendable and there will always be more, ready to take their place at a moment’s notice. This idea is similar to what will be seen a bit later on in the discussion of wartime films.

The last of the scenes in *Metropolis* for consideration in the worker and machine theme centers around Freder taking over for one of the workers. After Freder witnesses the explosion at the M-Machine, he tells his father of what happened and implores him to better the conditions of the workers. When his father turns him away, Freder goes back to the factory. He enters into a steamy room, men shuffle back and forth pushing large carts and moving from one machine to the next. In the center of the room is a large, person-sized gauge. Around the edge are lights, a man frantically moves the hands of the gauge to each light as they illuminate. Freder watches as the man struggles, ready to pass out. As he approaches the man, Freder calls to him, “Brother!” Reaching out, the man collapses in his arms. The hands of the gauge go limp. Seconds later the man comes to and realizes no one is working the machine. He struggles against Freder to go back to his job. Freder tells him that he will take over for the man, he wants to trade lives with him. They trade clothing and Freder dons the worker’s cap, with “Georgy 11811,” on it.

Freder’s replacement of the worker serves to underscore one of the main points addressed above. The first is the ease with which a worker can be replaced. Freder receives no training other than the few moments he spends watching the man frantically complete his task. The job is made up of a simplistic and repetitive process—move the hands of the gauge to the illuminated bulb around the edge. While the bulbs change their placement quickly, this hardly requires more
than a keen sense of attention and quick reflexes for Freder to master. As in the M-Machine explosion, a worker can be replaced quickly with little training. The worker is an expendable, cheap cog.

Later in this dissertation’s discussion of the war films, there arises a similar theme. The men who replace the fliers lost in combat or those replaced in the trenches, have little training. It is pointed out that the fliers have had only a few hours of air training, compared to the intense training pilots received when the war began. The same is seen in the trench war films when new recruits are extremely young and still school age. The training does not matter, as long as there is a body in place.

The three scenes discussed above, depict an environment that pits man against industry. The machine world of Metropolis is anonymous and dangerous. Workers are fuel in the machine of progress. If they have fulfilled their purpose they are cast aside. If they slow down, the consequences can be deadly. Kaes compares this world to Karl Marx’s “industrial battle,” of the alienated factory workers. “Every sense organ is injured by the artificially high temperatures, by the dust-laden atmosphere, by the deafening noise, not to mention the danger to life and limb among machines which are so closely crowded together, a danger which with the regularity of the seasons produces its list of those killed and wounded in the industrial battle.”\textsuperscript{41} All of these characteristics apply to the images in the scenes discussed above and to written descriptions of and film versions of World War I combat and the aftermath. Further, is the indistinguishable difference between machine and human. Rotwang creates a robot which passes for a human woman. He also wears a mechanical hand that functions the same as a flesh and bone. As Kaes describes, “the boundaries between the mechanical and the human had broken down, not just in

\textsuperscript{41} Kaes, \textit{Shell Shock Cinema}, 178.
this science fiction movie, but in the daily reality...as well.”42 He also comments on the machine
gun as an extension of the person during the war, something also brought up by Gabriel Koureas
in Memory, Masculinity, and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930 and
discussed in a later chapter. Metropolis is a film depicting what seems to be a futuristic utopia
but also rooted in the very real contemporary problems in the post-War world of the 1920s. The
issues of an expendable and anonymous workforce, the daily monotony of modern work, and the
impact of the war in industrial non-war films can also be seen in the 1928 film The Crowd.

The Crowd

Released in 1928 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, The Crowd follows the life of John and
Mary. John is born on July 4, 1900. Growing up, he receives a good education and develops big
dreams for adulthood. When he turns 21, he sets off to New York to find his fortune. John finds
employment processing data along with hundreds of other men—all doing the same monotonous
task all day, every day. Eventually he meets Mary on a trip to Coney Island. As they ride to the
amusement park, they see a clown on the street promoting shoes. They point and laugh at him
with John exclaiming, “The poor sap! And I bet his father thought he would be President!”

Shortly thereafter, John and Mary wed and rent a small apartment. They are content for
some time, but soon cracks begin to form in their relationship as the size of the apartment and
constant repairs begin to wear on them. They begin fighting about everything from a broken
cabinet to the style of Mary’s hair. Once Mary realizes she is pregnant, their worries are pushed
to the side and John promises to work harder in the future. Five years pass, the couple have two
children and John has gotten an $8 per hour raise.

42 Kaes, Shell Shock Cinema, 200.
Again, cracks begin to form in their relationship and John promises a better life. His luck seems to turn when he wins $500 in an advertising contest. With the money, he buys Mary a new dress and toys for the children. From the window of their apartment, John and Mary call the children in from playing across the street to get their presents. As the children run home, their daughter is hit by a truck. The child dies, and John descends into a deep depression. Months pass and while he has returned to work, he cannot concentrate. He quits in a fit of rage after a reprimand for inadequate work.

What follows is John’s struggle to find a new job. Going through four in one week, he quits each because he tires of the monotony. Mary is forced to find work as a dressmaker and they move to a rundown area of the city. The last straw for Mary comes when John turns down a job offer from her brothers and she kicks him out. John leaves, planning to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge, but their son runs after him. He has a change of heart and he and Junior set off to find a job. A factory advertises positions for one hundred workers and John struggles to become part of a line of thousands surging forward to the gate. He explains to one of the men in line that, “I’ve got to get a job! I have a wife and kid!” To which the man replies, “So have lots of us!” The job is quickly filled, and John is left outside the gates. He then notices a grill shop across the street calling for someone who can juggle. John hurries to the front and demonstrates his skill. He gets the job and works through the afternoon as a clown. When he and Junior return home, Mary decides to stay with John. The film ends with the family part of the audience in a large and crowded theater, all watching and laughing at the same show. The central themes to focus on in The Crowd are the loss of individuality and ambition and John’s developing post-traumatic stress disorder after the death of his daughter.43

43 The Crowd, directed by King Vidor (1928; Culver City: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer).
When John turns 21, he moves to New York City to find success. The scene opens with an intertitle stating, “When John was 21 he became one of the seven million that believe New York depends on them.” This is followed by a view of the harbor and the shipping vessels. This fades into a shot of the crowded street with thousands of people pushing back and forth and bumper to bumper traffic. Everyone moves very quickly as they go about their daily business. This cuts back to long shots of skyscrapers, the harbor, and trains. Finally, the camera closes in on a skyscraper and begins to slowly climb up the side of the building. As the camera pans higher and higher, it begins to close in on the windows until that is all that fills the screen. Zooming in, the camera goes through the window into a vast room filled with rows and rows of desks with seated workers. The zooming continues until we find ourselves gazing at one man seated at his desk furiously copying data by hand. A close up of his name tag reveals that this is John Sims and he is number 137. It then becomes apparent that what we had thought was John’s furious data copying, is actually a list of advertising slogans he has been developing. He glances at the clock, notices that it is almost time to leave and packs his things away. When the shift is up, John along with the hundreds of other workers, jump from their desks and hurry to get home.

Coming after John’s initial introduction as a young man and the big ideas he has for his future, the introduction of New York City and his employment come as a shock. John seems to have become just another part of the crowd adding to the seeming chaos of the city. He has not yet lost his ambition, as demonstrated by his brainstorming slogans during his work day and his initial desire to go home and study rather than go out on the town with Bert and two women he has found for them. Before leaving for the big city, John is told that to beat the crowd he has to be good. The meaning of this is ambiguous. What exactly does it mean to be “good” in the big city? Does he need to stick to the routine of the city, go to work each day, diligently do his job,
and rise through the ranks when it is his turn? Or does “good” mean he should always be striving for more, taking risks on the next big thing, and gambling on his chances of success?

By the end of the film, it appears that John should have taken the first course of action. One of the many hundreds of workers behind a desk with John is Bert. After their shift, it is Bert that suggests they go to Coney Island where John meets Mary, who will become his wife. Throughout the film, while John struggles to make it big in advertising, Bert quickly rises up the ladder of the company. When his daughter dies and John finally goes back to work, Bert is the boss who John’s supervisors goes to when lodging a complaint against his behavior. Bert has been “good,” and has been rewarded. John’s ambition has led to dangerous consequences.

This view of the city is similar to Metropolis and to the writing of John Dos Passos. With Metropolis, it is the monotony and lack of fulfilling work which stands out. The workers in the factory of Metropolis complete the same task and the same motions every day for hours in order to keep the world of the rich running. Their work produces no tangible products, rather it is a system of pulling levers, pushing buttons, and moving dials around. The machines make the products and each worker participates in a small portion of the larger whole. In the case of Metropolis the workers do not even benefit from their own production as they are forced to live in the prison-like under city below the factory—denied the fruits of their labor. In The Crowd, the worker experiences a similar life, except in a white collar environment. As B. G. Braver-Mann points out in his 1931 article, “Vidor and Evasion,” the film is about, “the experience of a white collar robot in an American metropolis.”  

44 John is a small cog in the machine of New York, toiling his day away in a hope of one day making it big. The work he does is the same

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44 B. G. Braver-Mann, “Vidor and Evasion,” Experimental Cinema 1, no. 3 (1931).
every day, copying the figures for a large and anonymous company, one small component in a much larger picture.

A similar theme can be found in the writings of John Dos Passos. In his most famous work, the USA trilogy, Dos Passos explores the lives of a handful of average Americans from the time of their birth around the turn of the century until the late 1920s with the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The trilogy is notable for many reasons, but for the purposes of The Crowd, the lack of individuality in American society is the most important factor. John William Ward points out that, “there are no people in the book, only automata walking stiffly to the beat of Dos Passos’ despair. But the point of the novel, as we like to say, is that there are no individuals in American society…In Dos Passos’ vision, society has become depersonalized and abstract and there no human beings, no human relations, in it.” The Crowd, which is released roughly five years before The 42nd Parallel, the first book in the trilogy, illustrates a similar vision. John is a human being with hope and dreams for the future and the death of his daughter nearly destroys him. It is John’s ability to feel and dream that brings his heartache. Bert is content to be part of the white-collar machine and is rewarded with promotions. John’s big dreams bring him nothing but punishment, until at the end he is literally turned into a joke when he is forced to work as a clown. All of this points to the loss of individuality and ambition which John experiences in New York City, beginning with his monotonous desk job and numerical designation and ending with his job as a clown—he has become the poor sap.

Another central issue in The Crowd is what appears to be John’s developing post-traumatic stress disorder after the death of his daughter. At the time of the film’s release, PTSD had not yet become a diagnosable disorder and at the time of World War I, it was referred to as

shell shock. In the early days of World War I, the term *shell shock* became the norm for soldiers with no discernable physical impairments. First used in Europe, by the time the United States had entered the war, thousands of men had been diagnosed with shell shock. United States doctors believed shell shock to be a curable illness and developed a four-month treatment plan for soldiers sent away from the front. In some cases this worked, but doctors quickly discovered that not only was four months not an appropriate length of time to rehabilitate them, but that as a whole, shell shock was not a curable disorder and could develop months or years after initial exposure to combat. This discovery caused a change in the way cases were treated and instead, doctors began to suspect that a pre-existing mental disorder was the underlying cause of shell shock. In this way, the government could avoid costly pension payments and rehabilitation costs for lengthy hospital stays. Shell Shock, though, became part of the popular lexicon in the war’s aftermath.

In *Metropolis*, the Moloch hallucination that Freder experiences is comparable to stories by shell shocked veterans after the war. With *The Crowd*, the similarities to shell shock lie more in the behavior of John after the death of his daughter. The National Institute of Mental Health defines cognition and mood symptoms of PTSD as trouble remembering parts of the event, negative thoughts about the self or the world, feelings of guilt or blame, and the loss the interest in previously enjoyable activities.\(^{46}\) John exhibits the loss of interest symptom as he jumps from job to job. He has lost interest in trying to make it in the advertising world and he becomes bored with each new job he attains. While it is never stated, it would not be a stretch to assume that John also blames himself for the accident and experiences negative thoughts about himself and the world. Directly after the accident, John runs through the crowd of people calling for a doctor.

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\(^{46}\) “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” National Institute of Mental Health, access February 2, 2018
He seems to be ignored as he runs from one person to the next and they continue to push forward to see what has caused the commotion. Later, it is weeks before he returns to work and when he does, his output suffers, and he is fired.

This portrayal of John as shell shocked after his daughter’s death illustrates the deep impact that the war had on the national psyche. Along with the loss of identity in the modern city, the largely unskilled, easily replaceable, and anonymous workforce, the depiction of shell shock also shows the resemblance of many industrial based films to the modern warfare depicted in combat and veteran films of the war. Annessa Stagner, in her article “Healing the Soldier, Restoring the Nation,” examines how the United States regarded shell shock over the course of the war and into the 1920s. She states at one point that US doctors believed shell shock to be a product of the warfare and warfare alone.47 By portraying three non-soldiers (Freder, John, and as will be seen later, the Tramp in Modern Times) as having symptoms of shell shock within the realm of a work place or in a modern urban landscape, it furthers the idea of modern industrial life as akin to war. The last industrial film to be closely examined is Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times which further comments on the industrial battlefield-like appearance of mechanized work.

Modern Times

Known for his portrayal of the Little Tramp in the silent era, Charlie Chaplin made only two films in the 1930s. Modern Times, released in 1936 was the second and one of the most anticipated films of the decade. The anticipation of the film centered on the idea of finally hearing Chaplin’s famous character speak. Unfortunately, audiences went away disappointed when they discovered that not only was the film mostly silent, but when they did finally hear the Little Tramp, he was mostly singing gibberish. The lackluster reception of Modern Times does

not detract from its importance in the discussion of machinery in films as it provides some of the most explicit comments of the industrial age.

The film follows “A factory worker,” another incarnation of Chaplin’s Little Tramp character. It begins with the Tramp working in a factory, the pace is quick and he has trouble keeping up. Eventually he goes crazy and is admitted to the hospital for a nervous breakdown. Once released, he finds himself in jail for accidentally inciting a communist riot when a red flag falls off a truck and he runs down the street trying to return it. While in jail he helps to stop a prison break and is released early. He attempts to find work at a shipyard but instead launches a half-built ship. While he struggles to find work, he meets the Gamin, an orphaned girl hiding from the child protection services. She’s arrested for stealing a loaf of bread and the Tramp gets himself arrested to join her in the paddy wagon. It crashes, they escape, and decide to survive together. He gets a job as a night watchman but is fired and sent to jail for stealing company property. When released, he finds work as a mechanic and is arrested once again when the workers go on strike. While the Tramp is in jail, the Gamin gets a job as a dancer at a local café and secures a position for him as a waiter. It looks as if things have finally turned for the pair, until one evening during the Gamin’s performance when juvenile officers come for her arrest. The Tramp and Gamin make a run for it and the film ends the next morning as they walk down the road into the distance.48

Throughout the film, there are many instances where Chaplin comments on the economic and political climate of the country. During the jail break, an intertitle announces that, “While outside there is trouble with the unemployed,” followed by a scene of men rioting and gunshots. It is during this time, that the Gamin’s father is killed and she and her siblings become orphans.

48 Modern Times, directed by Charlie Chaplin (1936; New York: Criterion Collection, 2010), DVD.
Later, the Tramp reads of the riot in the paper with a headline exclaiming, “Strikes and riots! Breadlines Broken by unruly mob!” Later, once he is released and he and Gamin are living in an old shack, he reads a headline that blares, “Prosperity has turned the corner! Factories Reopen! Men to be put to work at the Jets on Mills This morning!” He leaves immediately to find work at the plant and is met with thousands also lining up for a job. The Tramp runs to the front of the crowd and gets a job as a mechanic.\textsuperscript{50} It is the first twenty minutes of the film, though, that are most relevant to this discussion as they depict the fast pace of the factory and the breakdown of the Tramp’s psyche in a comedic fashion.

The first shot of the film is a ticking clock, after the credits, with a preface reads that, “‘Modern Times.’ A story of industry, of individual enterprise—humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness.” This is immediately followed by a shot of cattle fading into people exiting a subway. Inside a factory, men get ready to begin their shift with large machines looming over them. This opening shot is similar to the opening of \textit{Metropolis} with the ticking clock followed by the beginning of a work shift and John’s introduction to New York with the busy street scene and people hurrying to get to their destination. The addition of cattle provides a humorous yet pertinent allusion to the American people’s mass acceptance of this way of life. Elizabeth Wilson, editor of \textit{Silver Screen}, points out in her review of the film in April 1936, that, “It is based on Truth, with little searching of facts for dramatic effect. First, a flock of sheep, that’s you, going to work!”\textsuperscript{51} The article goes on to point out other instances of the film commenting on everyday life in America.

\textsuperscript{49} This is reminiscent of the \textit{The Crowd} when thousands line up for a factory only requiring 100 men.\textsuperscript{50} A far less comedic version of this scene is also found in \textit{The Crowd} when John attempts to find work at a factory before getting a job as a clown.\textsuperscript{51} Elizabeth Wilson, “The Final Fling,” \textit{Silverscreen}, April, 1936, 82.
Next, we see the president of the company’s office door; inside he works on a jigsaw puzzle and reads the comics section of a paper, he then turns on a monitor behind him and a live feed of the factory appears. He presses another button and his face comes on a screen in the factory, he tells a shirtless worker to speed up. The man begins making adjustments and the film cuts to a worker quickly tightening bolts along an assembly line. The Tramp is one of the workers, he pauses briefly to scratch his arm and begins to miss the bolts whizzing by, causing him to back up the entire line. He gets back into a routine but struggles again when a fly buzzes around his face. Finally, the line is forced to a halt when the man next to him accidently hits the Tramp’s hand. The man is reprimanded and the work resumes. Back at the control panel, the president orders another speed up. The Tramp is excused from the line to take a bathroom break but in reality he sneaks off for a smoke. While in the bathroom, the president comes on a large monitor and tells him to get back to work. He goes back to the line and waits for his chance to jump back in to work.

These events illustrate the nature of factory work in the 1930s and the speeding up of industry. As discussed in *Bodies of Work*, the introduction of mechanical technology in the steel industry resulted in quicker production and increased output. The Tramp is working in steel production, so this same principle would have been particularly true in the film. Harry Braverman also points out that machines provided greater control over the labor force and allowed management to control the speed of work. This is directly demonstrated in *Modern Times* when the president orders the acceleration of the assembly line and installation of cameras around the factory to monitor the behavior of the workforce. Braverman states that across all industry is the, “progressive elimination of the control function of the worker, insofar as

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Possible, and their transfer to a device which is controlled, again insofar as possible, by the management from outside the direct process.\textsuperscript{53} The president monitors the output from his office, he then contacts the laborer at the control panel to order a speed up of a specific sector, this laborer then pulls the corresponding lever to speed up a line in another area of the factory.

The management is twice removed from the actual floor of the factory when controlling the pace of the employees. The James R. Bright quote referenced above in the discussion of \textit{Metropolis}, applies here as well. When the quicker pace on the assembly line is ordered, the Tramp cannot keep up with the pace of the machine. Bright states the desire to create a timed, predictable, and consistent production, which the Tramp fails to be part of. Slavishak points out that in images depicting the mechanized steel industry, many believed the machines were doing the work.\textsuperscript{54} Going further, he explains that, “A gulf had formed between workers’ bodies and the routines, tasks, and motions that they had once performed.”\textsuperscript{55} In doing this, the worker loses their agency in the creation of the product. They passively guide the machinery, while the machine actively produces the product. Further along in his work, as Slavishak discusses the maturation of Pittsburgh mechanization, he explains that the image of the injured worker became more common place in images of the working body produced by critics of industry. He describes,

Newspaper reports of accidents accompanied numerous warnings about the fate of the body in mechanized industry. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, intellectuals wondered whether crowding workers and machines together would result in physical/mechanical hybrids, men who had little control over their own movements and had surrendered to a machine-prescribed repertoire of simple tasks. As machinery became the ‘embodied action’ of mechanized workplaces, some writers feared that workers’ bodies lost all sense of agency…Reformers and journalists claimed that work became less safe owing to uncontrollable machinery and negligent management.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 212.
\textsuperscript{54} He even notes that Mahlon Garland, the president of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, described the machinery doing the work, rather than the worker while testifying before Congress.
\textsuperscript{55} Slavishak, \textit{Bodies of Work}, 37.
\textsuperscript{56} Slavishak, \textit{Bodies of Work}, 150.
Both Slavishak and Bright describe an atmosphere wherein the worker adjusts their routine to match that of the machine they guide, almost becoming one with the machine, and those that fail at this are left behind. The next few scenes further illustrate this failure and the management’s attempt to maximize output.

As the Tramp struggles to keep up with the increasing pace of the assembly line, in the president’s office, a group of inventors bring him a new machine that is meant to eliminate the need for lunch breaks by feeding workers while they continue working. The machine is described by a mechanical salesman speaking from a gramophone and touted as a must to keep up with competitors. At lunch, the Tramp leaves the line, his arms still making the jerking motions of tightening the bolts. As the workers sit down to eat, the president and the inventors roll the lunch machine onto the factory floor. The Tramp is chosen to demonstrate the machine. It successfully begins to feed him until the machine starts to malfunction and speed up, trapping him between the head rest and the ear of corn beating him in the face. The inventors attempt the machine again, this time spilling soup down the front of the Tramp’s shirt. Things continue to breakdown as he is fed bolts from the machine, covered in pie and whipped cream, and beaten with the mouth wiping apparatus. The president rejects the lunch machine as inefficient and then leaves the factory floor.

The first important factor from this exchange is the use of the gramophone. For the most part the film has been silent. A musical soundtrack and intertitles reminiscent of the silent era accompany the action of the film with a few instances of dialogue. The first three of these occurs during the factory scenes before the Tramp’s breakdown. The most notable instance of sound

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57 In discussions of new weapons technology of World War I, the machine gun is often described as being one with the gunner and the gunner becoming an extension of the machine (rather than the machine as an extension of the gunner). In doing so, the agency is given to the machine gun, not the gunner.
takes place at the end, when the Tramp makes his debut as a singing waiter. Forgetting his words, he sings in a mostly gibberish language with a vaguely Italian accent. Not only is this Chaplin’s sound debut, it is also the only time the audience hears a human voice that is not transmitted via technology. Keith Booker points out in *From Box Office to Ballot Box*, “Throughout the film, mechanically reproduced human voices are associated with oppressive authority, while the Tramp continues speechless…further establishing his alienation within modern society.”58 In the three instances of human voices in the factory, the oppressive authority comes from the president ordering a faster pace along the assembly line and the salesman attempting to sell a product that will further restrict the worker. The second important factor from the feeding machine scene is the way in which the Tramp becomes part of the machine in its demonstration. But first, it is necessary to discuss the aftermath of the lunch incident and take both scenes into consideration.

An intertitle announces that it is now afternoon. The president tells the worker at the control panel to send sector five to the limit. As the line speeds up, the Tramp again struggles to keep the pace, eventually crawling on top of the line. The worker next to him grabs hold of his leg to keep him from falling into the machine. As he frantically tightens the bolts that come past him, the man holding his leg calls for him, accidently letting him go. The Tramp falls head first into the machine and the camera cuts to him traveling through the inner workings of the mechanism. He has literally been eaten by the machine and becomes one of the cogs that makes it run.59 On the outside the machine is stopped and reversed, the Tramp is spit back out and when

58 Keith Booker, *From Box Office to Ballot Box* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007) 138.
59 Note here the similarities with the Moloch scene in *Metropolis*. The workers are forcibly fed to the machine and become fodder for the industry. While the Tramp is eventually released from the clutches of the machine, the symbolism is the same. He is consumed by the machine because he cannot keep up with the pace of the work.
he emerges he continues attempting to tighten bolts—except the bolts do not exist and he is actually twisting the body parts of his fellow workers.

The president’s secretary comes onto the factory floor and he chases her on the street and begins attempting to tighten bolts on a fire hydrant. He is only stopped when he chases a woman with bolt-shaped buttons on her chest and a policeman chases him back into the factory. The tramp then begins to pull levers and cause havoc in the main control room before running through the factory. Finally, he is reined in, carried from the building, and, while squirting everyone with a can of oil, placed in an ambulance. An intertitle informs us he has been, “Cured of a nervous breakdown but without a job, he leaves the hospital to start life anew.”

This last scene brings the film to the Tramp’s nervous breakdown and to his hospital stay. Coupled with the feeding machine incident from earlier, these scenes depict the negative consequences of machine technology for the worker and a literal consuming of the body by the machine. However, it is not the machine that is indicted for the Tramp’s breakdown, but rather the management. The president’s constant order to speed the machine, the Tramp’s time spent in the feeding machine, and the use of surveillance to monitor the behavior of the workers all play a part in the Tramp’s demise. The *Motion Picture Herald* called Chaplin’s character a, “victim of the assembly line speed-up method of today’s industry…”60 *Modern Screen* referred to the film as, “the story of the clash between an individual and a system....”61 *World Film News and Television Progress* featured an interesting pair of articles by John Grierson and Ivor Montagu arguing over the effectiveness of the film. Grierson argues that the film centers on the theme that, “there is no place for a free and lively spirit in the world of machinery, big business and the police.” In focusing on this, the film loses its comedy and becomes depressing. He also explains

that Chaplin’s film is out of date and does not compete with modern film making. Montagu disagrees and claims the film is significant in its message. He explains that the film does not protest the machine, citing the fact that the machine itself never hurts the Tramp. Rather, he explains that the film, “is against the machine in the hands of the boss: against mass production—when speeded up, against television—used to bullying, against the new feeder—fastened to the worker by command…Charlie’s horror is of being constricted. He hates war, he hates capitalism…because he himself has felt the pressure of poverty and the pressure of conscription.”62 These articles demonstrate that the leadership is at fault for the conditions of the factory and in doing so, they pit worker against machine and make the machinery the scapegoat for their actions. This is also seen in Metropolis when robot-Maria encourages the workers to destroy the Heart Machine, rather than taking on the leadership.

The films discussed above all include the themes of workers taken advantage of by negligent management, workplace induced shell shock, loss of identity in a modern industrial society and anonymous workers, and workers as small cogs in a larger and impersonal machine. These characteristics point to a growing mass society at the expense of individuality and the safety of those on the frontlines of industrial growth. Each of the films share a pattern of portraying the world as an industrial battlefield. Those in the factories and in urban centers are at war with the leadership and society while trying to survive. As with the Japanese workers discussed by Brett Walker, these workers mostly seem to accept the pain they experience as the price paid for prosperity and growth of the nation. The exception is Metropolis which sees the workers rise up in revolt and attempt a future of reconciliation when Frederson and Grot join hands.

These battlefield and wartime themes found in the modern industrial films, are similar to the those found in the World War I films released in the same era. Films such as *Dawn Patrol* (1931), *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* (1934), *Ace of Aces* (1933) and *Surrender* (1932) depict the leadership of the military far removed and at odds with those on the front line, young and anonymous reserves replacing those killed in action, and shell shock.
Chapter 2: “The Game of Killing:” Filming Mechanized Warfare

The scene opens on a young couple sitting under a tree. They are discussing their future; he is a World War I pilot recently returned to civilian life, and she is wartime a nurse. Before the war he was an artist, a sculptor. She expresses concern that he does not practice his art anymore, that he has lost his creativity. He replies, “They told me to destroy, Nancy, to kill. The little things of the old days they took them from me.” He is referring to his experience in World War I and the impact that it has had on his psyche. She offers to help him forget what has happened and he agrees to marry her and have children. The screen fades to black and the film ends.63

The above description takes place during the closing moments of the 1933 RKO film, Ace of Aces. The film follows the World War I experience of flying ace Rocky Thorne as he transitions from a mild-mannered and sensitive sculptor before the war into a blood thirsty and ruthless pilot during the war. With an estimated 8.5 million military causalities and 13-15 million civilian causalities, World War I was by far the deadliest conflict the world had seen. New technologies brought about a kind of mechanized warfare that dictated a change in the way wars were fought. Air planes, machine guns, poison gas, and other weapons capable of bringing about mass death took a central role in the fighting. The old way of combat—long lines of men marching towards each other with guns raised and shooting within sight of each other—was replaced with a new and terrifying method where the enemy was almost entirely invisible. Aerial combat made a killing zone out of a formerly peaceful dimension. Long distance artillery allowed armies to reign fire and gas down upon men huddled close together in an intricately designed network of trenches. Disease spread rapidly among the armies bringing about even

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63 Ace of Aces, directed by J. Walter Ruben (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
more casualties. Submarines lurked below at sea, targeting any ship they pleased. The world was full of mechanized death.

The machine gun was a particularly deadly new weapon. While versions of a rapidly firing gun had been around for centuries it was not until 1884 and Henry Maxim’s Maxim gun that the modern machine gun as we know it came into existence. It evolved from the Gatling Gun and had been used to some success in wars between then and 1914, but its true test of power came with The Great War. The machine gun changed how the soldier was viewed and how he killed. He was no longer, as Gabriel Koureas put it, “master of the battlefield, but servant to the machine.” There was no longer a call for marksmanship when a machine gun fired against attacking soldiers. Koureas goes on to say that, “Despite being a prosthesis... it is clear that it is the gun and not the soldier who is in control, the soldier is the one who ultimately is being manipulated through the perceived efficiency of the machine gun.”⁶⁴ In other words, the perception of the weapon as an extension or tool of the soldier shifted to that of the soldier as a tool of the weapon.

John Ellis discusses the impact of the machine gun on society throughout history in his Social History of the Machine Gun. Of World War I, he exerts that man learned he was no longer master of the battlefield. “The individual counted for nothing, all that mattered now was the machinery of war.” The machine gun changed the nature of killing and hardened these men to mass death. Ellis goes on to explain that some men turned to poetry to make sense of the changing nature of the fight. One critic of this poetry noted that these authors, “made it clear that man could no longer depend on his personal courage or strength for victory or even survival; mechanisation, the increased size of armies, the intensification of operations, and the scientific

efficiency of long-distance weapons destroyed the very elements of human individuality:
courage, hope, enterprise, and a sense of the heroic possibilities in moral and physical conflict."\textsuperscript{65}
The same could be said—the destruction of courage, hope, and enterprise—of the modern
industrial society films considered in the previous chapter.

When war broke out in 1914, the world was totally unprepared for the devastation that
the next four years would bring. Imperial leaders hoped that war would reinvigorate their
empires, but instead it wound up destroying the old international political order. The end of the
war in many traumatized countries brought little solace. The 1920s brought with it political,
economic, social, and cultural changes. Thrones fell and were replaced by new forms of new
governments, inflation caused prices in some countries to skyrocket, and traditional ways of life
that had been in place before the war had no place in the post-War environment. Even the map
changed dramatically as formerly subject peoples emerged into independence.

The United States’ late entry into the war and the home front’s long distance from the
battlefields of Europe meant that it saw the fewest causalities among major belligerents and
domestic rebuilding was largely unnecessary. This did not mean that the U.S. bounced back in
the post-War era. Servicemen, while not in the field as long as their European comrades,
experienced the same types of combat and wounds. Upon return to their homes these men had to
go through a tough period of readjustment in a society that had moved on from the war. Veterans
also found themselves at odds with unemployment and a society that had little time for those
who did not work. With the vast majority of Americans unaffected by the war in the same way as
Europeans were, the issues faced by veterans were swept under the rug and glossed over by the
broader view of the 1920s as a time of economic growth and technology progress.

\textsuperscript{65} John Ellis, \textit{The Social History of the Machine Gun} (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 142-145.
Despite the lesser impact the war had on the American public, many citizens became embittered about the War and felt that little changed for the better. The idealistic reasons for going to war and the patriotic feeling that sent countless to the front was forgotten as the belief spread that the war was fought for nothing and that old, rich men, shielded from the suffering had orchestrated the conflict. The promises made by Woodrow Wilson to “make the world safe for democracy” and to change the rules of international relations with the 14 Points fell short as the U.S. failed to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations. Germany struggled to rebuild its nation while paying reparations. European powers also tried to come to terms with the loss of, close to, an entire generation of young men. Popular literature of the time was filled with the disillusioned mindset of the post-War era. Expanded upon in a following chapter, authors capitalized on the feeling of international malaise that persisted through the 1920s. It did not take long for the film industry to begin using these themes on the silver screen. By the end of the decade, movies began to take on an anti-war and pacifist tone. In the American context, the realization that the idealistic promises and expectations which drew the country into a war it initially shunned led to a widespread suspicion that the nation had been bamboozled.

This shift aligns with Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor’s discussion of World War I in motion pictures. They lay out two contrasting ways the film industry presented the War. The first celebrates the men who fought and the heroism of service. Films in this category include The Big Parade (1925), What Price Glory (1926), and Wings (1927). The second way they describe emphasizes the sacrificing and wasting of a generation and the meaningless slaughter of the war. Films in this category include All Quiet on the Western Front (1930), Paths of Glory
(1957), and *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971). From roughly 1930 (with the release of *All Quiet on the Western Front*) until the eve of World War II, the latter vision of the war predominated in film.\(^6\)

When the Great Depression hit in 1929, Americans were unprepared for such an economic catastrophe. The World War I veteran provided a body through which the mistakes of the past decades could be explored. In the analysis of the wartime films that follow many of the ideas brought forth in the previous chapter on industrial films are explored. Broadly the films embody a sense of easily replaceable (and disposable) troops who are young and have little training, leadership that is multiple degrees removed from the front and blindly sending these troops to their death, a larger conspiracy theory that world munitions powers are prolonging the war and orchestrating it, and the deep affect that war had on the psyche of the soldier. When taken into consideration with the industrial films of the previous chapter and the war-esque framing used by those filmmakers, we can develop a better understanding of how wounded veterans are portrayed in the following chapter.

**Dawn Patrol**

“The late Fall of 1915 in France, when a great country was forced to entrust its salvation to youth—pitifully young, inexperienced, bewildered—but gloriously reckless with patriotism—proud and eager to rush hopelessly into combat against the veteran warrior of the enemy.” So states the prologue of the 1931 film *Dawn Patrol* released by First National Pictures. *Dawn Patrol* (and the following film *Ace of Aces*) is part of a subgenre of World War I combat films which focus on air combat. These films got their start with *Wings* in 1927 and portrayed the war in the air as romantic and heroic. The real draw for these films were the dangerous aerial stunts

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with the plot taking a backseat. The most notable example of this is *Hell’s Angels* released in 1930. *Dawn Patrol* signified a shift in the air combat film and began to explore the psychological pressure and mental toll that pilots endured.67

The action of the film takes place during World War I and is based on an air combat unit with the Royal Air Force. It opens with the pilots eagerly awaiting the return of a recent patrol. Of the seven planes to go out, only five come back. Major Brand, in charge of the unit, drinks while waiting for the men to return and comments on the lack of understanding by headquarters. As the pilots appear, we learn that one of the men killed was Ralph Hollister’s best friend and was only seventeen. He is severely shaken and given alcohol to quell the emotional pain.

Major Brand questions one of the pilots, Dick Courtney, on his leadership during the mission. Brand is desperately trying to lay blame on someone for the death of the two men, as he feels like an executioner always sending fliers to their death. Headquarters sees things differently and congratulates Brand on the loss of “only” two men. Outside his office, the rest of the squadron drink and sing as they attempt to forget the events of the evening.

The film jumps to a new mission readying to set out. Five experienced pilots will take to the air and two novices will accompany them. An emphasis is put on the age of the pilots and their lack of air time. They take off, and again the men listen for the sound of engines to return. Only four come back. Among those gone is Douglas Scott, Courtney’s best friend. Hollister blames the loss on himself. Later Courtney brings in a German pilot he captured. They have a drink and soon the German has taught them a drinking song. Hollister watches in disgust and then tells them they are all ridiculous. Courtney attacks Hollister and at that moment, Scott

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comes in with an armful of alcohol. He tells them all that he had gone down in a trench and had been making his way back to the squadron. They all celebrate his return.

An intertitle reveals the return to reality and more death shortly after Scott’s return. Hollister goes on a mission and dies. Von Richter, a famous German fighter flies over the squadron and drops a pair of boots onto the airfield. Courtney and Scott defy Brand’s orders and seek revenge on Von Richter. Courtney loses his plane, but they both come back alive. Brand prepares to court martiał Courtney for disobeying his orders, when he receives a call from Headquarters. He has been promoted and Courtney will take his place.

Another intertitle explains, “The war goes on—cruel whine of Bullets—gas—numbing shock of explosions—tramp of marching feet—screams—vicious thrusts of bayonets—men killing men—the war goes on,” followed by a montage of frontline fighting. The film then cuts to Courtney on the phone fighting with headquarters over the age of replacement pilots. They want him to send four patrols a day against von Richter. His drinking has increased. Scott’s younger brother, Donnie, arrives as a member of a group of new recruits. Courtney and Scott argue about sending Donnie against von Richter in the morning. The patrol goes out, Donnie’s plane is hit and goes down while Scott watches. When they return, Scott blames Courtney for his brother’s death.

Later Brand comes back to the squadron with a special mission. It has been discovered that the German’s are planning a massive push and the squadron must destroy a rail road hub that is 60km behind the enemy lines. It is a suicide mission. Scott volunteers. Courtney takes him a drink and they begin to go over the maps for the mission. Scott, with a history of alcohol intolerance, soon passes out from the drinks given to him by Courtney. Courtney takes Scott’s

68 Von Richter’s name closely resembles “Von Richthofen,” the surname of the famous Red Baron.
place on the flight without telling anyone. He makes it to the rail hub and drops his bombs before von Richter catches up with him. Courtney kills von Richter but is then hit by two enemy planes. Meanwhile back at the squadron, Scott and Phips worry about the how long the mission is taking. They hear a plane—a German with a note of Courtney’s death. Scott is promoted as squadron commander and the film ends. The film focuses on two themes relevant to the previous discussions, the leadership’s blindly ordering the deaths of young men and the mental toll the war has on the men serving.69

Throughout the film, those in charge are constantly critiqued. The pilots flying the mission regularly criticize Brand and Courtney for ordering the mission and, in turn, Brand and Courtney are observed arguing with headquarters. There is a lack of understanding on both sides. The pilots do not understand that Brand and Courtney are at the mercy of those above them and headquarters does not understand the extreme danger and psychological toll of sending young and inexperienced recruits into the air. This theme of leadership blame is seen in films such as *Journey’s End* (1930) which is the trench version of *Dawn Patrol, All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *The Eagle and the Hawk* (1933), and other pacifist war films of the period. The blame was placed either on the military leadership sending orders from far behind the front or on the government itself.70 This theme mirrors the widespread concern that the public felt about the stirring themes government used to drum up war support, and the consequent letdown after the peace failed to make those promises come to pass.

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69 *Dawn Patrol*, directed by Howard Hawks (1930; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

70 Of interest regarding the title of the film is a change made during the pre-production. Filming began in February of 1930, but prior to this, during the development of the production team, the working title of the film was *Flight Commander*. According to *Variety*, in December of 1929, the film became *Dawn Patrol*, named after the missions flown by the pilots in the early morning hours. The working title of *Flight Commander* would signify a film that focuses more on the leadership of the squadron, and while this holds true for the film, using *Dawn Patrol* shifts the focus to the entire squadron and the impact of aerial combat on its morale.

As mentioned in the introduction, films representing the war did not begin to appear with frequency until the mid-1920s. Prior to this, the majority of popular culture discourse regarding the war took the form of plays and books. Notable of these are works such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *What Price Glory?* (1926). Laurence Stalling’s book *Plumes*, published in 1923, takes place largely after the war and throughout the main characters question why the US got involved in the conflict. The book ends with the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery and the overall feeling that the war brought nothing but the meaningless slaughter of a generation of young men. Similar to *Dawn Patrol* and its infantry-based counterpart, *Journey’s End* is the play “Tunnel Trench, released in 1924 and written by Hubert Griffith. The play takes place on the Western Front and heavily criticizes the lack of leadership on the line. It centers on the attempted missions to take the tunnel trench position from the Germans and the company’s ultimate failure to succeed. It ends with a message from headquarters about the setback caused by the company’s failure. Two central messages of these pieces is the leadership’s failure to recognize the futility of the war and the order of mass slaughter of millions of young men.71

The plays and films above, align with the aforementioned discussion by Peter Rollins and John O’Connor of the contrasting ways of remembering the war in popular culture. The first perspective views the war as heroic and celebrates the men who fought. While the men in the plays are not disparaged for fighting, their actions are not celebrated as heroic, rather, they are

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portrayed as a necessity of survival. The second perspective embodies the, “sacrificial, wasting of a generation of young men, meaningless slaughter,” and coincides with the above works.\textsuperscript{72}

Another element highlighted in \textit{Dawn Patrol} and emphasized also in \textit{The Man Who Reclaimed His Head}, is the mental toll the war had on those who fought. In \textit{The Man Who Reclaimed His Head}, Paul’s mental status deteriorates throughout the film as he feels as if he sacrificed his beliefs by ghost writing for Dumont; then he is forced into the infantry, denied leave, and has his family almost stolen by a boss he once trusted—all because of the war. Paul responds violently to all of this when he kills Dumont after going AWOL.\textsuperscript{73}

In \textit{Dawn Patrol}, all the men, under constant threat of death, drink copious amounts of alcohol, with the squadron leader drinking the most. Brand goes through countless bottles when in charge and once Courtney takes over his drinking dramatically increases. When Scott returns from the front after he is believed to be dead, he comes back with dozens of bottles of champagne and rum. The men spend the evening getting sufficiently drunk and Courtney and Scott almost crash a military vehicle while on a drunken joy ride. In the beginning of the film when Hollister comes back without his friend, Machan, he is given alcohol to calm him down. Machan’s death also reminds Scott of his young brother, which leads him to drink until he passes out. It is apparent that the men turn to alcohol to numb the pain of the war and violent deaths of their comrades. A similar turn to drink is also found in \textit{The Eagle and the Hawk} and \textit{Journey’s End}.

Many of the men killed are young and inexperienced. Throughout the film this fact is


\textsuperscript{73} This film will be discussed more fully later, but this short description will suffice for the time being.
commented on many times.\footnote{In *The Eagle and the Hawk*, Frederic March’s character comments on one of his medals, “I won this medal for killing kids.” Later in the film, the extreme emotional turmoil brought on by the war drives him to suicide. *The Eagle and the Hawk*, directed by Stuart Armstrong Walker (1933; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.} In one instance a replacement has as little as seven and half hours of flight experience before entering combat. Not only is this extreme level of inexperience dangerous for the young men themselves, but it puts the rest of the squadron in danger during missions as the pilots do not know how to adequately protect themselves and those around them. This also furthers the argument of the leadership’s blindly ordering men to their death by making it appear as if they care little for the safety of the men in the air and care only that a warm body is in place to carry out the mission no matter the price. This leads to the violent deaths of the men and the extreme number of causalities.

Similar to *Dawn Patrol*, the film *Ace of Aces* features the exploits of pilots during the Great War. From the time he joins the army through his shooting down a young German pilot to his own discharge from the service, Rocky Thorne’s mental status is shown to deteriorate. The physical and mental wounds men experienced during the war feature prominently in the remaining films of this chapter and the films of the next. These films illustrate the idea that soldiers were no different than other non-human objects of war and after the war was over their purpose had been served—leaving them nothing more than spent bullets.

*Ace of Aces*

Released by RKO in 1933 and starring Richard Dix and Elizabeth Allan, *Ace of Aces* mostly takes place during the war, with noteworthy events presented both before U.S. entry and after the main character’s release from service. The film opens on the day the U.S. enters the war. Rex “Rocky” Thorne is a sculptor and engaged to Nancy. They are sitting in a clearing and discussing their future. Shortly after they return to Nancy’s house where they learn that the war
has begun. All of the guests are excited for the beginning of the war except for Rocky. He does not plan to enlist. Later, as Rocky is working in his studio, Nancy comes in wearing a volunteer uniform and eager to watch the parade of recently enlisted men passing beneath the studio window. As they watch, Rocky compares the men to lemmings and Nancy is appalled to discover his lack of patriotism. She called him a coward and storms out of the studio.

We next see Rocky as he arrives at his squadron—a new pilot. At first, he is hesitant to kill, but quickly learns, “to kill or be killed,” and comes to enjoy the hunt and consequent notoriety. The rest of his squadron are broken and despaired. Many turn to drink in order to cope with the constant death and one commits suicide after the death of his twin brother. As The New Movie Magazine puts it, “All around him die; kids with songs on their lips and only partial understanding in their heart. . .” Rocky is quiet and does his job well, but he also comes to have a reputation for being arrogant and challenging to authority. He quickly becomes the most successful pilot for the U.S.

While on leave in Paris, after receiving decoration for his performance, he meets Nancy. She was unaware that he had signed up and explains that the horrors of war have changed her views. Rocky does not want to discuss the past and only wants to have a fun time while on his leave. They spend the night together. Later, Rocky shoots down a young German cadet who had been sent to deliver a message that one of the squadron’s men was alive behind enemy lines. Upon discovering that the cadet had come on a peace mission, Rocky collapses, wounded. He ends up in the hospital next to the boy and after listening to his endless suffering, helps him to die.

76 After his first kill, he demands another plane because his is outdated. He is turned down. On a later patrol, his gun malfunctions because the bullets were not properly loaded. After landing he punches one of the mechanical crewman and afterwards will allow no one but himself to load his gun.
Upon release from the hospital, he accepts a transfer as an instructor. When he goes to the squadron to retrieve his personal items, he goes up one last time. Finding a German plane he attempts to shoot it down, only discovering that he cannot—in place of the pilot’s face is the young cadet. His hesitation allows another plane to come up from behind and shoot him down. He barely survives and is sent home. The film ends with Nancy and Rocky in the same position as the beginning of the film, discussing their future.\footnote{Ace of Aces, directed by J. Walter Ruben (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.}

There are two pairs of significant scenes during the film that reference the themes discussed above. The parade scene coupled with the leave scene in Paris emphasizes the blind patriotism and following of leadership in the name of the war. Along with the juxtaposition of the opening and the closing scenes demonstrate the impact the war has had on Rocky’s psyche and the lives of those who experienced the war. It is worth noting that the immediate postwar years, when this film was made, marked the dawn of the popularity of Sigmund Freud’s theories in American discourse, and a rise in awareness of what we might today consider basic psychological principles.

The first pair of scenes take place immediately following the U.S. entry into the war and during Rocky’s leave in Paris. As Rocky works on his latest sculpture the sounds from a parade of enlisted men marching off to war can be heard from below. Nancy comes in wearing a uniform signifying her involvement as a volunteer for the war effort. She is excited and explains that his view from the studio is best to watch the parade. They walk to the window to watch and Rocky compares the men to lemmings. When she questions him, he explains, “A lemmings is a Norwegian mouse, about five inches long, with a short tail and furry feet. Prolific, Mrs. Lemmings is constantly having five little lemmings...Probably just as well. Anyway, they live in
the mountains of Norway and every so often for some reason or another they all leave their homes and start marching towards the sea. Millions and millions of lemmings…They reach the sea and they all plunge in and swim until they’re exhausted. And they drown,” he goes on to say that no one understands this behavior, they just do it. They follow their ancestors and search for a goal that does not exist. It is clear that the enlisted men marching below are blind followers, marching off to their death with no real idea of the cause of for which they are fighting.

Rocky goes on to criticize Nancy for her blind patriotism and allegiance to the war effort—calling her a “propaganda spouter.” He does not understand those who choose to go to war and claim they are looking for an excuse to get away from their lives. In his eyes, war is only needless destruction and there is no real cause for which to fight. Nancy is shocked and angered by Rocky’s point of view. She tells him she is ashamed of him and that he is selfish. Nancy then calls him a coward and leaves the studio.

The next time that Nancy and Rocky meet is in Paris. Rocky has joined the war as a pilot and has the most kills, becoming a famous ace. He is noticeably different from his pre-war self. He has lost his sensitive and carefree attitude and become hardened. He and Nancy go for drinks and then back to his hotel. It is then that she tells him how much she regrets the harsh words she spoke at their last meeting. She explains, “I spoke of the glory of war, I know now. The mud, the filth, the suffering, the agony, those poor helpless dying boys.” Rocky responds by mocking his own words and his “ideals for humanity.” He is removed from the mud of the trenches and can control life and a death in a way that is impossible with his art. Rocky tells Nancy that she has done him a favor by calling him a coward, “why I might still be back there slaving. Trying to express myself on some remote conception of art.” Everything he has once held dear has become null and void. He then tells her that he plans to spend his leave getting drunk and wants more
than, “holding hands under the table.” Nancy is taken aback and refuses him. He then turns her words from their last meeting against her saying, “This is no time for scruples, moral scruples. Everyone must make his sacrifice now. What are you in the face of the suffering of the world? How can you refuse whatever you have to give?” Seeing the pain behind his words, she gives in and they spend the night together. The war has crushed his sense of morality and he seeks pleasure in an attempt to take away the horrors he has witnessed.

These exchanges between Rocky and Nancy demonstrate the deep changes the war has caused in their emotional and psychological makeup. Nancy began the war as a patriotic volunteer ready to offer her services in whatever capacity she could. Months later she finds herself as a nurse and witnesses the horrible conditions the men have to endure at the front and the wounds they receive. Her mind has been changed and she is no longer a patriotic war supporter. Rocky sees the futility of the war and absurdity of fighting just because those in power tell them it is the proper thing to be done. After he enters the service and becomes a flying ace his view changes. However, it is not because of a sense of patriotic duty that he fights, rather, he fights for the feeling of control that it brings him. After Nancy had expressed her change of view due to seeing the suffering and agony of the men she nurses, he explains to her that he is able to control life and death in a way that impossible with art. For him the war is about the art or the game of killing—and staying alive. When he first comes to the squadron he questions his bunkmate, Kelley, on the best ways to stay safe. The best advice he gets is to kill or be killed and that hesitating with a shot will lead to your own death. Rocky takes this advice to the extreme and does everything possible to stay alive. He wants the best plane, when his gun sticks he begins cleaning and loading his own guns, and he uses ethically questionable methods of patrolling. In a discussion with a fellow pilot, he tells him that the best way to kill is to hide in
the sun and then strike the German unawares. The man is appalled at this method but Rocky defends himself by saying he is the most successful of the squadron and, most importantly, that he is still alive.

This chapter opened with a description of the closing scene of *Ace of Aces*. The *mise-en-scene* of the closing mirrors exactly the opening shots of the film. Nancy and Rocky meander slowly into a picturesque clearing holding hands. Rocky seats himself in a somewhat reclining position with Nancy resting next to him. They spend a few carefree minutes discussing their future marriage and family life. They want to marry and have children while Rocky works as an artist. Both are young and innocent, believing the entire world lies before them. When they return to Nancy’s family home, the news of the war breaks out and their lives change forever.

After witnessing the transformation of Rocky and Nancy during the war, the film ends with the couple in the same position. Rocky has been discharged due to injury. He had taken one last flight, one final mission in which to exercise the control he fetishizes, before leaving the squadron to become an instructor and been shot down. His vaunted control failed. Now he limps slowly along with a cane as he and Nancy enter the clearing. She orders him to sit down and chastises him for not attempting to create new art. Rocky replies that he has tried, but failed. To this, Nancy expresses concern and he explains, “They told me to destroy, Nancy, to kill. The little things of the old days they took them from me.” Nancy will not allow him to admit defeat and lose his passion. “They took your birthright. But win it back, Rocky. You have years with which to forget.” She then reminds him of their promise to marry and have a family from before the war. She asks him, “you will do right by me, Mr. Thorne?”

It is possible that her phrasing here means to signal that she is pregnant from the night they spent together in Paris. If this is the case, his perceived loss of masculinity as a result of the loss of his ability to produce art does not extend to his ability to produce a family.
kiss. The war has forever changed him and he cannot return to his life as it was before he was taught to kill. His demeanor and mood has changed. He kisses Nancy and agrees to marriage, but the tone is different. There is a sadness hanging over the scene, rather than a happiness and the promise of a future of bliss. The war has left Rocky morose and downtrodden. He is physically and mentally broken, then cast aside to get on as best he can. It is not clear that he will be able to leave his trauma behind, or even to use it to enrich his art.

It is also significant to note that Rocky is a sculptor. Gabriel Koureas discusses in his article, *Memory, Masculinity, and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930*, that sculptors were usually male and, “seen as needing to be in control and able to dominate material. . . Sculpture was seen as virile and the sculptor, like the climber, needed strength to master each peak. Sculpture was seen as a comrade/mistress who would accompany the sculptor to the grave.” Based on this assessment, Rocky’s reaction to the war makes sense. He has control over his art, but it is only in the air that he feels anything akin that level of control. As a sculptor, Rocky is depicted as the peak of virile masculinity and he demonstrates his skill and power when he becomes the most successful flier. When the war is over, Rocky loses his ability to produce art. His powers wane. He has died a metaphorical death and his creative abilities have left him as a result. His loss of abilities touches on the feared loss of masculinity in war wounded. Megan Kate Nelson, writing about Civil War veterans explains that many wounded veterans would be photographed with their family and children to demonstrate that they were still virile men. Edward Slavishak discusses a similar occurrence with those wounded in the work place. Many would be photographed either working or surrounded by family to show that they were still masculine men, regardless of injury. When the film ends, Rocky still plans to marry Nancy, but

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his masculinity and virility is called into question by the loss of his artistic abilities. There are many works dealing with the figurative and literal loss of masculinity in war. The most famous, of course, is Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, published by Scribner’s in 1926, and a best-seller. Rocky’s tale can be seen as an extension of the lost masculinity theme, one which audiences would have already been exposed to.

The impact that the war has had on Rocky is both visible and invisible. He walks with a cane and a limp, the most telling signs. In close ups, his face has become hardened and his eyes no longer look young and innocent. Even the tone of his voice has changed. It has taken on a hard edge and his manner of speech has lost the happiness of his pre-War life. Hidden from view is his inability to create art as he did before his combat experience. This wound, while just as detrimental as a physical injury, is invisible and typical of shell shock victims. Paul, the protagonist of the following film, *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head*, experiences a similar transformation during the war.

*The Man Who Reclaimed His Head*

Starring Claude Rains in his first visible role, *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* was released by Universal Pictures in 1934. The film begins in France in 1915 during an air raid. Paul is standing in a lawyer’s office pleading for him to listen; from there the action takes place in flashback. Years before the war Paul was a struggling writer trying to support his wife and child. He had written previously for Henry Dumont, but had decided he no longer wanted to write political pieces. Dumont offers Paul another job, but he is hesitant. Adele, his wife, desperately wants Paul to accept the position to make more money. Paul wants to keep his identity and freedom and he believes he will lose those by working for Dumont. However, in the

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81 Claude Rains had risen to fame with *The Invisible Man*. This would be his first on screen role where the audience could see his face. Much of the film’s promotion focused on this fact.
end, he relents and accepts the position. He begins to write anti-war articles for the paper using Dumont’s name.

As Paul gets more money, we see his social status change as his home gets bigger and his possessions grow. Meanwhile, Dumont becomes a sensation and is called a, “Hero of the Rabble,” by munitions dealers with whom he has a meeting. Some of his political advisors believe that Dumont could be elected to a high office, but he must tone down his anti-war stance. He brings this idea up to Paul, who replies that the people must know of the, “duplicity of men who profit from the misery and death of human kind,” and explains that as long as the munitions industry is privatized there will be war. Paul believes that the munitions industry is behind the attempt to get Dumont to stop talking about disarming the country. These concerns were particularly mainstream, and prompted numerous hearings on Capitol Hill, which drew widespread and approving news coverage. Audiences could be assumed to understand and perhaps even share the conspiratorial notion that arms merchants steered the nation into the war.

After the exchange, Dumont takes Adele to tea and they go dancing. When she returns home, she excitingly tells Paul about the outing and explains that they discussed him and his writing. Sometime later, Linette, their daughter, awakens in the middle of the night frightened that there is a war coming. She asks for her mother, but Adele is at the opera with Dumont. When she gets back, Paul is still awake, they quarrel and he tells her he will not go out while war is being discussed.

Paul develops a chart to illustrate that there are 50 men are behind all of the world’s wars. Dumont will hear none of this and turns him away. Later while Paul and Linette are picking flowers, the news of the archduke’s death breaks. Dumont meets with munitions dealers and a discussion takes place regarding the sale of weapons to the enemy to remain competitive.
Dumont effectively sells his papers to the munitions dealers and begins to publish pro-war pieces. Next the film cuts to a mob yelling about the sale of weapons. One man breaks from the crowd and begins to speak out. Paul witnesses both the man’s speech and his subsequent beating by the mob, he intervenes and is also beaten. After the police break the riot up, Paul goes to talk to Dumont. He quits because he feels that he has been betrayed.

While still in Dumont’s office, an assistant comes in and announces that war has broken out. This is a scene which points to the helplessness people felt as the fabled “guns of August” began to warm up. It seemed to many in Europe and the United States that a vast military machine was turning on and there was no way to stop it. This sensation of helplessness at the arrival of the Great War would be remembered and chronicled often. Paul is heartbroken but tells Dumont that, while he will be forced to fight and defend the country, his opinion will prevail and after the war he will have kept his integrity. Later, Paul is drafted and after a tearful goodbye with Adele, he goes to the front. Paul is transferred to Verdun and while at the front finds out that not only has Dumont officially sold his papers to the munitions dealers, but that he has been preventing Paul from receiving leave so that Dumont can visit Adele. This information spurs Paul into action and he goes AWOL. Adele, meanwhile, is at home making bandages for the front and has just sent Dumont a letter, cutting ties and accusing him of keeping Paul at the front. Dumont shows up and as he tries to seduce Adele, Paul arrives. Upon seeing the two of them together, Paul attacks Dumont.

The film cuts back to the lawyer’s office from the beginning of the film. Paul explains that he just wanted to take back what Dumont had originally taken from him; that is, Dumont had taken his brain. DeMarnay, the lawyer, calls the police but assures Paul that he will be treated with respect and doubts he will receive jail time. The film ends as Paul is taken away and
DeMarney tells him, “you are not the accused, you are the accuser.” The significant aspect of this film surrounds the implication that the munitions industry is responsible for orchestrating World War I and pitting one country against another. This is comparable to what was seen in films like *Modern Times* and *Metropolis* where the leadership of the factories are to blame for the conditions of the workers, but the blame is placed on the machines.\(^{82}\)

While the entire film illustrates this point of view, there are two specific scenes that deserve a closer look since they get to the root of the issues analyzed here. The first is when Dumont meets with two munitions dealers. As the two men enter his office, they express the quick nature of the meeting as they must be off to London and Germany. To this, Dumont replies, “Rather urgent, huh? In what part of the world are you gentlemen planning to sell the next war? My readers will be terribly interested.” To which one of the arms men responds, “You’ll serve your readers better, Dumont, if you stopped calling our people ‘Merchants of Death,’ and told them that preparedness is the surest guarantee of peace. . .and the surest guarantee of dividends.” After this they all laugh and Dumont goes to pour them a drink. The dealers then explain to him that has a chance at high office, with the caveat that he must relent on his pacifist views. They want him to promote peace based on preparedness rather than disarmament. It is important to recall that the theme of preparedness as precursor to war dominated most of the interwar years. Such developments as the Kellog-Briand Pact, the 1928 international agreement abjuring war, or the Capitol Hill hearings on arms dealing during the 1930s, all played on the belief that military weaponry, its sale and purchase, ensured eventual war. Indeed, so entrenched was this idea that overcoming it was one of Franklin Roosevelt’s major challenges before Pearl Harbor.

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\(^{82}\) *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head*, directed by Edward Ludwig (1933; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures).
The placement of the men in this scene is important to understanding the power dynamic at play. The action takes place in Dumont’s office. He sits behind is desk in an ornate, throne-like chair. The two men sit on the other side of his desk in low backed captain chairs on either end of the desk framing Dumont in the center. Dumont is in control of the situation, which is further illustrated by the exchange of dialogue. While the munitions dealers wield large amounts of money and influence, Dumont has control of the populace. At the end, they vaguely threaten his ability to attain high office without their support, but they are also cognizant that they need Dumont’s support to turn the tide of public opinion.

One of the key concepts brought to light in this scene is the idea of preparedness to guarantee peace. Dumont has been promoting an idea of disarmament via Paul’s articles. Paul has a staunch anti-war stance and believes that peace can only be attained with a complete disarmament by all nations. This would have been a death sentence for the munitions industry. This battle between preparedness and disarmament took place throughout the 1930s until the outbreak of World War II. In fact, the suspicions felt by many powerful politicians and large portions of the citizenry against any military build-up formed the major challenge to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his attempts to move the economy towards a preparedness footing by 1940.

In advertisements and reviews for the film, the indictment of the munitions industry was a clear focus. One of these includes an article by Howard M. LeSourd in *Motion Picture and the Family* stating that the film illustrates, “that wars are stirred up by those who profit financially out of the blood and misery of the masses…that ambitious individuals are bought up to carry out their sinister plans…that the mass of people are blind puppets too dumb to think for
themselves.”

The last part of this description directly plays into the scene above, as the munitions dealers explain to Dumont that his articles are driving public opinion.

Released the same year as *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head*, H. C. Engelbrecht and F. C. Hanighen’s book *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* called out the arms industry interests for playing a large role in American military involvement. However, they lay most of the blame for the promotion of warfare at the feet of investment bankers, stating, “through their pressure to put the United States into the war these bankers brought about results which have well-nigh wrecked the contemporary world.”

The book also points out that while it aims to expose the evil forces at play behind the push to war, we must, “remain conscious of forces such as patriotism, imperialism, nationalism, and capitalism and how they play into the war.” This reminder of the additional forces at play, brings us to the next scene that needs closer scrutiny.

The second scene of interest takes place during a meeting of arms dealers after the assassination of the archduke, but before the official declaration of war. A telegram is delivered to a gentleman sitting at the head of a conference table. Behind him is a large map of the world. He reads the telegram out to the rest of the room, “All countries cancel army leaves. France denounces German army maneuvers as disguised mobilization.” The men around the table all begin to speak at once and snippets of comments are heard. One man exclaims, “that’s how it starts!” and others question what Serbia and Austria are doing. The man continues reading the telegram after explaining that the events are very exciting, “Russia encourages Serbia to oppose all Austrian demands. Five Austrian army cars stopped at the frontier.” He ends the telegram by

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85 Ibid., vii.
telling that them there is a last bit of information that should not interest them and says, “munitions stock boom on all exchanges.” After this they all chuckle in amusement. The conspiratorial nature of the scene—a cabal of wealthy tycoons cynically amused as the world moves towards conflagration—would have had real sway over many viewers.

The men’s amusement is interrupted by the arrival of Dumont. He sits down with them and they all begin discussing how best to promote the war via his newspapers. Dumont’s placement at the table is significant. In the previous scene, taking place in his office, Dumont sits behind his desk in the throne-like chair and holds a clear place of power. Now he has taken a place at the table of arms dealers and has become one with their war conspiracy. The man reading the telegram is standing in front of a large atlas of the world, symbolizing not only his leadership role, but the role of all the men in orchestrating wars across the world. Throughout the scene, the camera angle changes to a low-angle shot to look at up at the man. This further places him in a position of power and emphasizes Dumont’s new role. Also significant is that when Dumont was shown in power, he was always seated. He was clearly in charge of the situation, but not as powerful as the man now standing in front of a room of people in charge of the arms industry.

The scene continues as one of the men expresses remorse for the loss of life that will follow a declaration of war and questions the use of patriotism. Another counters this by pointing out he manufactures liquid fire. They begin to question how long the war will last, some say eighteen months, other three years. Dumont says five years and explains that patriotism will prolong the war. Another of the men questions what will happen to their “gentlemen’s agreement,” and it is voted that they will continue a process of competitive bidding through a Swiss agent. In essence, they agree to continue selling arms to enemy forces. They have all
already pulled their patents from enemy factories. This will ensure the purchases still go through their companies.

The above segment of the scene harkens back to the Merchants of Death point about the underlying forces at play in the push to war. Dumont ensures the men that patriotism will prolong the war and his paper will promote the cause. In a review for the film by Heather Angel in Hollywood, she calls the film a, “compelling and forceful argument against war that every thinking person will appreciate. . .” She goes on to explain that she grew up in England during the War and lost her father in a munitions explosion, explaining, “he died for his country, but so unnecessarily—for war is not necessary.” Another review by Motion Picture Daily states, “With war declared Atwill [Dumont] sacrifices his humane ideals to the patriotic but selfish blandishments of the munitions makers.” Yet another review, this time by the Motion Picture Herald, references the munitions makers lack of concern for the horrors of war as long as their, “swollen dividends are secure,” and goes on to say the film is, “a revelation of the part which munitions-makers have in the causing and fostering of war and the power of a controlled press to foster nationalistic patriotism. . .”86 There is a clear understanding here that the film is depicting a view of the War in which those who profited the most from it orchestrated the start of and the continuation of the conflict. This belief was not uncommon during the interwar years of disillusionment in the government. It was also seen in the government in Gerald Nye’s speech calling for neutrality in 1939, which will be explored more later in this dissertation.

After the discussion of how the dealers could keep selling to enemy powers, the gentleman reading the telegram at the head of the table then brings up the necessity of protecting...
their plants. He walks to the map and points to an area in France that is particularly vulnerable. If a bombardment occurred there, it would end the war and destroy their plants. As he explains this point, the camera zooms in on him from an upward angle. With his arms outstretched, he takes up most of the screen. Coupled with the glimpse of the map behind him, the power of the man this shot is meant to convey is undeniable. Dumont has a solution to this by suggesting “mutual exemptions” to conserve natural resources by general agreement. To this, all the men murmur in agreement and rise to toast Dumont. This follows a montage of newspaper articles describing Dumont’s support for an arms buildup.

This last portion of the scene, coupled with the enemy powers discussion above, is extremely important as it points to the arm’s dealers directly planning how to prolong the war and ensure the highest profit. Senator Gerald Nye (R-ND), mentioned above, was a progressive Republican and staunch isolationist during this period. From 1934-1936 he chaired the Special Committee on the Investigation of the Munitions Industry. This committee aimed to discover links between American involvement in the First World War and the munitions industry but found little in the way of concrete evidence. In a speech before Congress in 1939, three years after the committee findings and on the cusp of the US entrance into the Second World War, Nye points out the munitions industry’s selling to enemy powers.

“Our Boys couldn’t go to war anywhere without having our own munitions fired back at them. And yet decent American businessmen will say that to have a war is the only way in which business will ‘pick up.’ They will tell you that, if we are to have adequate production capacity at home to meet the possible emergencies of war, we must increase the foreign market for American-made ships and American-made munitions. In other words, we must sell now to countries who may someday be our foes, in order that we may have productive capacity if and when the rest of the world decides to use what we sold them against us. A good policy! Don’t alter it. Don’t rock the boat.”
In this portion of the speech, Nye explicitly calls out the absurdity of selling arms to foreign powers, in this case the Germans, when there is a possibility for them to be used against our forces. Later in his speech he calls for government control of the industry to prevent the for profits mind-set.

The above discussions demonstrate the film industry’s indictment of the First World War as a conflict manufactured for profit where men were sacrificed to line the pockets of those in charge. The toll the war had on humanity was pushed aside, as seen when the liquid fire dealer’s concerns were squashed. Immediately following Dumont’s first meeting with the arm’s dealers, Paul comes to talk to him, pointing out an article in a paper for a shell that included a poison with no known antidote. He tells Dumont that these are sold with no thought for the impact they had on men’s bodies and only with an eye towards the profit that could be made from the shells. As with films such as Metropolis or Dawn Patrol, those in positions of power were making the decisions that directly impacted the lives and bodies of millions of men with little thought about the impact this would have upon them. The last film surveyed here provides further examples of the changes that occurred to soldier during the war.

**Surrender**

*Surrender* was released in 1931 and takes place in Northern Prussia during the Great War and ends shortly after Armistice Day. It begins at the castle of Count Reichendorf as he sends his four sons off to fight for Germany. As he sends them off, he tells them that he fought for the country in 1870 and now it is their turn. An intertitle announces a time jump of three years and the loss of three sons for the Count. He has begun to regret the war and the loss it has brought upon him, complaining about the generals in charge and their inadequate leadership on the front. The castle has been turned into a prison camp with the ruthless Captain Ebbing in charge. The
rest of the film depicts the last days of the war and the love that develops between Axelle, the last son’s fiancé, and Dumaine, one of the prisoners at the camp. There are three specific scenes that illustrate the mental and physical toll the war had on the men fighting.87

The first takes place early on, Axelle lives at the Count’s castle waiting for Dieterich to return. She has lost her parents and her fortune because of the war. Ebbing and the Count discuss the war, the Count is criticizing those in Berlin for the management of the conflict and the destruction of the homeland. Ebbing tells him it is a small price to pay. The Count leaves to get air and Axelle and Ebbing are left alone. He criticizes her for waiting for Dieterich, telling her that life is brief and why should she wait for anything. When she pulls away from his advances, he replies, “I know... I’m only half a man now.” She tries to explain that is not the reason for her saying no. To which he replies,

“Thank you, it’s nice of you to deny it. However, when I knew you before the war, when I was whole, then I should have wooed you in the conventional, romantic manner... with flowers, pretty speeches, moonlight. That sort of thing would be ridiculous for me now... Do you remember the first time that I met you? The Military Ball! I was the dashing young officer. You were a naïve young girl. Your first visit to Berlin. I remember that night. You were interested, you were even dazzled. I could see it in your eyes. And I thought, what a charming girl. Why hurry? I’ll wait. And then a week later war broke out and I was called. Doesn’t that prove that any waiting is foolish.”

Axelle listens to his speech, but tells him he is forgetting Dieterich, to whom she is engaged. He spits at the name and scornfully replies, “Can’t you understand my love for you is more intense than his can ever be??” He then pauses and as he rubs the covered side of his face, he quietly says, “and more enduring.” The scene fades to black and an intertitle announces the prison camp.

87 Surrender, directed by William K. Howard (1931; Burbank: Fox Pictures).
This exchange between Axelle and Ebbing sheds light on two critical issues. The first is the hurried nature of war romance. Ebbing laments the fact that he did not try to woo Axelle when they first met. In peace time, this would not have been an issue as they would have had more time for meetings and introductions. But this was wartime and Ebbing left shortly after for the front and lost his chance with Axelle. Similar instances of wartime romance take place in films such as *Strange Interlude* (a woman waits to marry the love of her life but he dies in combat), *Men Must Fight* (a woman has sex with the man she loves the night before he must leave for the front, they plan to marry upon his return, but he dies and she finds out that she is pregnant), and *Such Men are Dangerous* (to be discussed later). In these films and others, the key is that the war caused an escalation in the process of romantic relationships. The other issue this exchange illustrates is the perceived loss of masculinity of wounded veterans. Ebbing feels that he is no longer good enough for Axelle because of his war wounds. He no longer sees himself as whole and assumes the rest of society does not either. This idea is brought to light later in the film in the last scene to be discussed.

The next scene takes place after Dieterich comes back from the front. Prior to the scene of interest, the Count reminisces about his old days of war and tells Dieterich that today the men are weak and in his day, they once captured 60 regiments. Dieterich responds by telling him that the war is different today, “You fought with flags flying and music playing. Gloriously, magnificently. The war we’re fighting is different, entirely different.” The camera cuts to a close up of Dieterich’s face as he continues, “A war. . . a war impossible to describe to you. A war of which you can have no conception, absolutely no conception.” A siren signaling the escape of some of the prisoners interrupt the exchange.
Later, Axelle sees Dieterich playing the piano. He stops and she asks him to continue. Dieterich replies that he can no longer play or read, he cannot settle down to anything, questioning, “After the music you’ve heard out there on the front, this music is too unreal. What’s Beethoven once you’ve heard the Big Berthas?” He then wonders why they should care about music and poetry and calls it the babbling of a weak child. He realizes his father was right, he should have learned military tactics in school rather than poetry and philosophy. Axelle tries to calm him and tells him once the war is over, everything he stands for will return. But he no longer knows what he stands for. She tells him he stands for life and beauty. But he laughs and explains the irony of his being the last surviving son. “My three brothers lie on the battlefield while I walk after them, a living corpse waiting for the end, if there was any sense in anything they would have survived, not me, because they believed in it all, they believed in Prussia and her destiny as a high power. . . I don’t! I can’t endure it all! Why was I saved??” This is a classic example of survivor guilt, a term which was not then known, but a phenomenon that was obviously common in a world with millions of war dead.

Dieterich has returned from the war broken, a shell of his former self. The Last Flight, discussed at length in the next chapter, illustrates similar feelings after the war. In Ace of Aces Rocky has lost his ability to produce art when he returns from the war. The experiences these men have had on the front, have mentally broken them. They have lost their creative edge and passion for life. In the face of senseless death and destruction, they do not understand what purpose culture serves. Dieterich questions why he has survived when his military minded brothers have died. This disillusionment was found throughout the cultural discourse of the 1920s and into the 1930s. In songs, films, plays, books, and art, the emotional turmoil of the war played out. Dieterich was not alone in his sentiment.
The last scene of interest in the film takes place at the end of the film. A group of prisoners led an escape from the prison and Dumaine decides to join in the plan. They are caught and sentenced to death. Axelle pleads with Ebbing to save Dumaine and he agrees, but then blames her for his demise as a soldier. Shortly after this exchange, he receives word of the armistice and the order to halt all disciplinary measures for prisoners. Ebbing explains to Hugo, his assistant, that in peace time he had hoped to find use for him, but that he now has no use for himself. He has decided to leave Hugo his money and instructs him to destroy all of his personal papers. Ebbing takes his gun from his holster, Hugo grabs onto it. Ebbing explains to Hugo that he is logical, “A certain heroism clings to a mutilated soldier in wartime, the uniform covers much. But civilian clothes are much less graceful. To be assembled like a machine in the morning. To be taken apart again at night. To go stomping along boulevards watching whole men pursue their pleasures. The prospect does not entertain me.” After this he dismisses Hugo and leads his dog outside, a gunshot is heard and the scene cuts to the Count playing war games. Dumaine and Axelle run to each other and the film ends as they embrace.

The above scenes demonstrate the physical and mental toll the war had on its participants. Ebbing lost the use of his left arm and his face had been so badly damaged he was forced to cover it. This was not only a physical wound as it also deeply affected his psyche and his ability to enter a romantic relationship. Ultimately Ebbing chooses suicide because he does not think he can adjust to civilian life with his physical state. As discussed above, he perceives himself to have lost his ability to be a man and therefore seems himself as useless. Ebbing’s comments about wounded veterans in peacetime illustrate the fear discussed by Megan Kate Nelson in *Ruin Nation.*

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88 Later, Beth Linker also discusses this fear in her study of World War I veterans.
Writing primarily about Civil War veterans, Nelson explains that when, “soldiers were blown apart, they lost their distinctive character, a major component of their masculinity.” As with World War I, enlistment appeals were couched with masculinity. Men could demonstrate how masculine they were by fighting to protect their family and defend their country. They also, “proved their worth through intensely individual acts of physical aggression and bravery.”

Nelson goes on to say that recognition of these acts was crucial in the assertion of the soldiers’ individualism and masculinity. They must be recognized by both fellow soldiers and by family members. However, “Bodily ruination often prevented these acts of recognition, putting the wounded or dead soldier’s masculinity in peril.”

Nelson also writes about the fears of amputees upon returning home and whether they would be able to marry and have a family. This ties directly back to Ebbing’s fears in Surrender that lead to his suicide, Rocky’s loss of art in Ace of Aces, and is a recurring theme in Laurence Stallings’ Plumes.

The above films highlight the similarities between the depiction of World War I during wartime and the modern industrial workplace. In both types of films, there is an emphasis on the replaceability of the soldier/worker, a distant leadership who send men to their death, allusions to a larger economic conspiracy driving progress/war, and the mental and physical toll that war/work has on the body. The question remains of how these men are portrayed after they have been used up by their respective machines. The following chapter will examine the post-War lives of the wounded veteran in film—when his heroism fades and he becomes a symbol of war’s waste—and connect this to the portrayal of the workers in the first chapter.

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89 Nelson, Ruin Nation, 169.
90 Ibid., 190.
Chapter 3: “War’s Waste Always Casts Long Shadows:” The Wounded Veteran on the Screen

Two soldiers sit on the edge of a hospital bed; one has bandaged hands, the other covers his left eye with his hand. It is November 11, 1918, Armistice Day. The Great War is over. They discuss what they will do now that they are civilians. The consensus between the two is that they will, “get tight,” and “stay tight.” The scene fades and we next see the two men ushered into the office of the doctor. As they stand before him, the doctor suggests they take the first boat home they can get. He tells Shep, now wearing sunglasses to mask his facial tic, that his face will heal with time and a normal life. Cary, who is unable to take his discharge papers due to his bandaged hands, is told to exercise his fingers regularly and that in time they too will heal. Shep and Cary leave the office and the doctor comments to an offscreen aide, “there they go, out to face life, and their whole training was in preparation for death.” As Shep and Cary leave the hospital, the doctor and aide watch from a window above. The aide questions if they can go on flying, perhaps work with the Airmail service. The doctor replies, “I’m afraid they’re unfit for further service in that direction. They fell, you know—six thousand meters. Like dropping a fine Swiss watch on the pavement. Shattered both of them. Their nervous systems are deranged, disorganized, brittle…spent bullets. That’s it. They’re like projectiles, shaped for war and hurled at the enemy. They’ve described a beautiful, high-arching trajectory. And they’ve fallen back to Earth spent. Cooled off. Useless.” The aide, still optimistic about the men’s future replies, “oh, well, if they take care of themselves, they’ll pull through all right.” The doctor refutes this by replying, “Even if they do take care of themselves, what good are they? What can you expect of them? I hate to think what may become of them.”91

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91 *The Last Flight*, directed by William Dieterle (1931; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.
The above exchange takes place during the opening minutes of the 1931 film, *The Last Flight*. The rest of the film follows Shep and Cary, along with two other veterans on their journey to navigate the post-War worlds as Spent Bullets. In the end, the men have little luck putting their lives back together and only Cary goes on to live a somewhat normal existence. The dialogue between the doctor and his aide illustrates the idea that these men were viewed as unfortunate byproducts of the war machine. Equated to no more than another weapon at the disposal of the military, they have little chance of a healthy and normal future. Instead they have been used up, both mentally and physically, and cast aside by an uncaring society.

With the new killing technology of World War I, a host of issues arose around the medical care of the wounded. Certainly, the issue of wound care had been an issue in prior wars. As one of the first wars to be photographed, the Civil War provides us with visual evidence of the cost of war. Matthew Brady’s 1862 photography exhibit, “The Dead of Antietam,” was one of the first times the public had been exposed to the consequences of war in such a violent and visual fashion. Brady’s sobering exhibit was a cultural sensation, leading many observers at the time to note that he had brought the true nature of war to the civilian world. This was a far cry from portraits of martial glory. The Civil War also provides an early example of the use of photography in documenting medical procedures and recovery—particularly in regard to plastic surgery and facial reconstruction.

Megan Kate Nelson’s *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* is an environmental and cultural study about the idea of ruination during the Civil War. Nelson examines how destruction of the landscape, the city and home, and the body was handled during and after the Civil War. Her discussion of the ruined body provides an excellent basis for a comparison between the post-Civil War and post-World War I wounded veteran.
Nelson explains that wounded bodies, “became sites on which Americans inscribed a range of social anxieties—including concerns about the impact of warfare on masculinity, the production of ‘machine men…’ Men went to war to make something of themselves. But as minié balls whizzed through the air and shells exploded into hundreds of fragments, the war’s technologies unmade men.”\(^{92}\) These unmade men needed to find a place in society and were portrayed in popular culture discourse in specific ways.

Focusing primarily on amputees, Nelson describes the development of the “empty sleeve” narrative that highlighted the bravery, patriotism, and masculinity of those who lost limbs.\(^{93}\) The empty sleeve became a visual reminder of the sacrifice these men had made. Unfortunately, on the flip side of the empty sleeve narrative, the “Incomplete Man” was created by soldiers and civilians. This vision of the veteran emphasized that threats to an, “amputee’s status as a man always remained, lurking.”\(^{94}\) It developed as a way to, “express concerns about the masculinity of veterans, the role of women in shoring up that masculinity, and the return to ‘normalcy’ at home during and after the war.”\(^{95}\) Those veterans who chose to wear a prosthetic were the site of further fears as they came to, “embody…an unsettling reminder of the increasingly powerful role of technology in American culture and the ways that war could turn soldiers into ‘machine men…’”\(^{96}\) Nelson explains that there was a recognition that mechanical inventions were responsible for the carnage of the Civil War quoting Oliver Wendell Holmes comparison of the war’s violence to mechanical technologies in agriculture. Holmes, of course, was famous for being thrice wounded and returning to battle each time. This experience is

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 179.
\(^{94}\) Ibid., 186.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., 186.
\(^{96}\) Ibid., 211.
widely held to have been pivotal in forming his tough-minded pragmatism, which in turn became synonymous with his legal notions. With soldiers surviving the war with shrapnel still in their bodies and innovations in prosthetics creating a more life-like limb, many, “saw wartime technologies as having redefined humans as war machines.” Nelson concludes her chapter on ruined bodies by stating that, “Like shattered cities, houses, and forests, these men were wartime ruins, material reminders of the war’s violence.” In World War I films and other popular culture discourse, a similar occurrence takes place as wounded veterans are relegated to the background yet remain reminders of the war.

The magnitude of World War I resulted in a record number of casualties, but advances in battlefield medicine also meant that soldiers who once would have died were saved, to live with wounds that earlier would have been fatal. Medical staff worked non-stop to help the wounded and develop innovative ways of caring for them. Wounds ranged from the invisible (shell shock) to the psychically catastrophic. Men were brought into hospital camps with horrific burns both inside and outside the body, faces torn apart from stray bullets over No-Man’s-Land and shrapnel, limbs torn off and mangled. As medical staff became more successful in dealing with the wounded and saving their lives, the question began to arise of what would happen when these men returned home.

War’s Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America, by Beth Linker looks at the rehabilitation and readjustment of amputees after World War I. After the Civil War, the U.S. government developed a pension system that allowed those wounded during service to collect a pension to supplement or replace their income. Originally estimated by the government to cost a couple of million dollars, by the time of U.S. entry into the Great War, the pension system had

97 Ibid., 215.
98 Ibid., 227.
cost billions. The military did not want to repeat the cost of the pensions after World War I. But more than that, there was also a desire that, “physical ‘handicaps,’ ‘pauperism,’ and ‘defects of manhood’ could all be conquered on the home front.” Military hospitals began to focus on rehabilitation and, “sought…to educate the nation to accept disabled soldiers while also providing the injured with the tools to reintegrate into ‘normal’ life as seamlessly as possible.”

Linker points out that wage earning was equated with manhood and that rehabilitation was aimed at getting disabled veterans back into the workplace and making, “a man manly.” This new policy was based on the assumption that men were the primary wage earners for the home—an assumption that drove much of Progressive Era legislation from child labor laws to mother’s pensions. If that ability was taken away it threatened the manhood and independence of the veteran. Linker explains that the War Risk Insurance Act was another example of Progressive Era legislation aimed at protecting a vision of the American family with a working father and a mother and children at home. The WRIA had three purposes. The first was money allotted to care for dependents while the soldier was away. The second was voluntary life and disability insurance at subsidized rates. The last was a system of disability compensation based on a fixed scale and dependent on the severity of the disability. This last purpose was a way to subsidize the income of the veteran, rather than replace it with a pension as in the Civil War.

The new system was mean to, “cure the amputee of his dependency by putting him on his ‘feet’ again.” In the films discussed below, many of the rehabilitation goals outlined by Linker are depicted as falling short as wounded veterans struggle and fail to find a place in the post-War world. It is clear that this official campaign was an early 20th Century continuation of the federal efforts

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100 Ibid., 4.
101 Ibid., 30-31.
102 Ibid., 32.
which began with the United States Sanitary Commission, during the Civil War. That war saw the systematization of casualty care; the new war saw improvements and additional levels of administrative and medical oversight.

Nelson and Linker both limit their discussions to amputees in the post-Civil War and World War I eras. Edward Slavishak, discussed at length in the first chapter, also examines the depictions of amputees in his work on early twentieth century industrial Pittsburgh. In many of the examples he provides, the imagery and language used mirrors those used by Nelson and Linker. After the Battle of Homestead of 1892, writers struggled to find ways to describe the violence but a decade later, the Pittsburgh Survey would employ similar techniques to highlight the, “appearance of damaged and spent working bodies…”

Slavishak also describes how amputees were pictured with family or at work, demonstrating their ability to continue working and procreating. Those that lost limbs in work related accidents were encouraged to buy prosthetics to appear whole again and to help them, “forget their loss and move on without harboring persistent memory of their dismemberment.” This idea of hiding the wound and forgetting the loss is prevalent in the discourse on World War I injury. The reasons for this may be legion, but clearly there was some effort to assuage common guilt at sending healthy young men into harm’s way. Each visibly wounded casualty was a living reminder of the ultimately confusing causes of entry into the Great War.

Amputations only account for a small percentage of the war-related causalities of World War I. Represented in the films discussed below are two additional types of wounds soldiers experienced during the conflict—facial injuries and shell shock. The new medical technologies of World War I meant that men were able to survive more severe wounds. Among the medical

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104 Ibid., 251.
profession at the time and scholars of the war in the years that followed, it was widely agreed that facial wounds were the most traumatic. Trench warfare and steel helmets left faces and necks vulnerable and airplane crashes often resulted in wounds to the face. On the other hand, the protection of a steel helmet meant that a soldier might survive a head wound, but with potential brain damage. One surgeon even remarked that wartime facial injuries resulted in a greater loss of bony framework versus peacetime facial injuries. This was all coupled with the fact that several days could pass before a soldier was treated.\textsuperscript{105} The face of a person was thought to be the center of their personality and identity. When the face was disfigured a person had to psychologically adjust to their new guise which often times proved difficult, while also facing the world with a visage that did not adhere to standards of appearance. Dr. Albee, one of the doctors at Sidcup in England, wrote, “the psychological effect on a man who must go through life, an object of horror to himself as well as to others, is beyond description…It is a fairly common experience for the maladjusted person to feel like a stranger to his world. It must be unmitigated hell to feel like a stranger to yourself.”\textsuperscript{106}

The importance of the face aligns with changes in standards of beauty in the twentieth century. Beth Haiken explains her in article, “Plastic Surgery and American Beauty at 1921,” that Victorian culture dictated that beauty was an internal quality of character and health. However, by the 1920s, most Americans had come to, “understand physical beauty as an external, independent—and thus alterable—quality, the pursuit of which demanded a significant amount of time, attention, and money.”\textsuperscript{107} Haiken’s study focuses mainly on ideals of female

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\item Beth Haiken, “Plastic Surgery and American Beauty at 1921,” \textit{Bulletin of the History of Medicine} 68, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 442.
\item Caroline Alexander, “Faces of War” Smithsonian Institute, accessed February 5, 2018, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/faces-of-war-145799854/
\item Beth Haiken, “Plastic Surgery and American Beauty at 1921” 431.
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beauty and the development of plastic surgery as an elective procedure, but she locates the
maturity of plastic surgery as a field with World War I. Beauty culture, she explains, lay, “within
America’s democratic tradition of self-improvement.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, the pursuit of being
beautiful was viewed as just another way to get ahead and improve the self in America.

Haiken goes on to explain that in mending facial wounds, surgeons emphasized
functionality, but that appearance factored into repairs because of the importance put on the face.
It was, “…widely recognized that a man who did not look like a man, to himself and to others,
would not be able to live as one. Facial disfigurements were particularly debilitating because
they were conspicuous; they could not be covered up by clothes or gloves.”¹⁰⁹ Plastic surgery
had both an individual and economic incentive. Individual in that it would allow these men to
readjust to society and live fulfilling lives after their release from the service. Economic because
they would become employable and thus would no longer, “remain public wards.”¹¹⁰ In a sense,
these two incentives go hand-in-hand as men who were unable to provide for themselves and
their families were unable to fully re-enter society as an individual.

The second group featured in the films below, are those who embody the characteristics
of shell shock. A more in-depth discussion of the symptoms and effects of shell shock takes
place in the section on the film The Last Flight. In the United States, Shell shock saw a transition
in the way it was viewed at the end of the war and into the 1920s. According to Annessa Stagner,
in her article, “Healing the Soldier, Restoring the Nation,” shell shock was initially depicted and
thought of as temporary and curable. As the war ended and the country began the process of
moving on, it became apparent that shell shock went much deeper. This shift in thought, she

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 436.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 443.
¹¹⁰ Ibid., 444.
argues, coincided with changes in debates over the nature of mental illness and how much responsibility the government had to care for its veterans.\textsuperscript{111}

While Europe saw far larger numbers of shell shock cases, it is estimated that the United States saw between 15,000 and 76,000. The disparity between the figures can be attributed to varying criteria of diagnosis and poorly kept records. American portrayals of shell shock usually depicted it as a valid injury, rather than as a form of hysteria seen in British and other European depictions.\textsuperscript{112} Psychiatrists studying shell shock before American entry into the war, “suggested that soldiers’ witnessing of the horrors of industrial warfare caused shell shock, a type of psychological trauma.”\textsuperscript{113} Treating this type of psychological trauma was a first for American doctors. Little documentation of the psychological state of Civil War veterans existed, which meant that doctors had to develop protocols with little or no precedent. In treating these cases, doctors emphasized the role of women in rehabilitation. “American women played the most central and crucial role. The wife, or mother, or sister had to realize the soldier’s suffering, dedicate herself to his care, and maintain a ‘cheerful expectation’ that he would recover.”\textsuperscript{114} It was generally determined that a four-month recovery period was all that was needed to cure these men and then send them home to their wives and loved ones. \textit{The Man From Yesterday} and \textit{The Last Flight} include elements of women caring for wounded veterans and examines the effect this has upon the women and those men they care for.

As the war ended, the country entered into a period of national recovery and sought to forget, or at least return to what Warren Harding could call “normalcy.” It was discovered,

\textsuperscript{111} Annessa Stagner, “Healing the Soldier, Rebuilding the Nation,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 49, no. 2 (2014) 256.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 257.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 258.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 263.
however, that the ability to cure shell shock in short four months, even with, “the love of a woman” was a pipe dream. Popular depictions of shell shock struck an impatient cord, and people began to question the legitimacy of the disorder. Some deemed that something must have been mentally wrong with a man prior to his entry into service that caused the condition, since many who returned did not manifest symptoms. Shell shock was also increasingly blamed for veteran suicides as death rates rose steadily through the 1920s and into the 1930s. With the Great Depression, shell shock can to be seem as a stand in for the malaise falling on the country and a way to explore the feelings the economic turmoil brought on.\textsuperscript{115}

When World War I ended, the wounded provided a visual reminder of the horror of the conflict. On the screen, filmmakers commented on the horrors of the war using predominantly invisible wounds. The films that follow include at least one character who has been physically and/or mentally wounded during the war. They examine how the war experience has irrevocably changed the life of the character, focusing specifically on Shell shock, the disillusioning aftermath of the war and the place of wounded veterans in the background of society, the feelings of being a burden to loved ones, and the suicide of veterans.

\textit{Grand Hotel}

Released in 1932 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayor, \textit{Grand Hotel} was intended to capitalize on the popularity of the original Broadway play and utilize the talents of MGM’s top stars. \textit{Grand Hotel} is notable for many reasons. It marked the first time a film successfully used an ensemble cast that resulted in a cycle of films based on this model, the first time that famed silent film star Greta Garbo spoke on screen, and played up a faux-rivalry between Garbo and Joan Crawford (the other main female star) intended to generate publicity. But for the purposes of this study, it

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 268.
is the character of Doctor Otternschlag played by Lewis Stone that is most important. Stone’s role allows the film to explore and expose the issue of war wound damage.

The story of *Grant Hotel* centers on the events in a single day at the Grand Hotel in Berlin. The film opens with each of the key characters arriving at the hotel. As the camera pans around the lobby, it stops on the Doctor approaching the front desk, asking for messages, and receiving none. He is a long-term resident of the hotel and this is his daily routine. Physically the side of his face is badly scarred and his hand is covered in a protective glove. After he leaves the desk, the Baron speaks about him to another person staying at the hotel. “Seems like he’s always waiting for something…but it never happens.” To which the man he is speaking to replies, “The war dropped him here and forgot him.” The Baron replies, “ahh yes, I was in the war.” As this conversation takes place, the Doctor continues walking along the front desk, asking variously for letters, messages, telegrams, and whether any people are asking for him. Each time he is told no. He stands a distance away from the desk and observes Kringlelein’s struggle to get a larger room, then offers his own room explaining, “it doesn’t matter where I stay.”

Later the Doctor sits pouring his own drinks. He says to Kringlelein, “what do you do here at the Grant Hotel? Eat, sleep, loaf around. Flirt a little, dance a little. A hundred doors leading to one hall. No one knows anything about the person next to them. And when you leave, someone occupies your room…lies in your bed. That’s the end.” He’s clearly drunk, leaning into Kringlelein as he speaks. A few scenes later he tells Kringlelein that a man without a woman is a dead man. A cut to the Baron dancing with Flammachen and then back to the Doctor with Kringlelein. “I worked as a surgeon in the Great War. Til the end. Grenade in my face. I carried

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diphtheria bacilli in the wound, 1920. Isolated two years.” He then seems realize what he has
told him and encourages Kringlelien to keep drinking.

Andrew Kelly points out in his book Cinema and the Great War, that disabled veterans
were mostly left out of film. Amputees and other visibly wounded veterans were rarely
included. 117 They hardly cut a glamorous on-screen image in an industry dependent upon glamor.
The Doctor’s character in Grand Hotel is a notable exception to this rule. The wound on his face,
is clearly visible and his gloved hand is also perceptibly injured.

These wounds did not go unnoticed by audiences. Screenland refers to him as, “a one-
eyed doctor.” Motion Picture Herald, notes that in the play the Doctor has a patch over one eye
but in the film, “Mr. Goulding has disfigured the whole side of Mr. Stone’s face with acid burns.
This was not necessary.” In yet another Motion Picture Herald article, this time discussing how
the film should be exploited in theater fronts, the author discusses the use of portraits of each star
in character. He explains, “Upon inspecting the portraits one sees that it was my endeavor to
present the characters in their most alluring and salable moods. For instance, Lewis Stone played
the somewhat obnoxious part of a doctor whose face bore a hideous disfigurement. A faithful
reproduction of this character might send a chicken-hearted shopper far from the theatre.
Therefore, Mr. Stone looked out from his lobby frame happily minus disfigurement.” 118 These
articles all admonish the filmmakers for going too far in the disfigurement of the Doctor, with
the last one noting that audiences may shy away from the film because of the character. While
filmmakers were apt to comment on the condition of the veteran after the war, going so far depict

117 Andrew Kelly, Cinema and the Great War (New York: Routledge, 1997), 149.
Irvining Sinclair, “The Theatre Front,” Motion Picture Herald, December 17, 1932, 60.
his actual wounds seemed to be a bit too much. When physical wounds were shown, the characters were likely in the background and not an active part of the plot.\textsuperscript{119}

Susan Biernoff discusses the depiction of disfigurement in post-War Britain. She explains that there was a, “collective looking-away,” from facial wounds. This aversion took the form of “the absence of mirrors on facial wards, the physical and psychological isolation of patients with severe facial injuries, the eventual self-censorship made possible by the development of prosthetic ‘masks…”\textsuperscript{120} Going further, she asserts that the wounded face, “is not equivalent to the wounded body; it presents the trauma of mechanized warfare as a loss of identity and humanity.”\textsuperscript{121} In another piece, Biernoff states that the face, “signifies a transcendent wholeness that compensates for the loss of limb or life. Even in death…the face denotes the incorporeal self.”\textsuperscript{122} In other words, the face provided a person with an identity, so losing parts of the face meant a loss of self. A wounded body could be hidden with clothing, or a prosthetic could return some function to the limb. Men wounded in these ways might be celebrated as heroes. This dynamic allowed the public to move past the trauma of the war. A wounded face, on the other hand, could not be covered with clothing. Face masks fitted to the person and painted to look like a human form did not entirely hide the wound. In fact, they accentuated the uncanny awareness that beneath the mask lay hideous disfigurement. These men were clear reminders of the trauma and loss of the war and the horrific toll of modern industrial warfare.

\textsuperscript{119} In another example of this, \textit{Cavalcade} (1933) includes a montage of the changing world in the 1920s. Part of this montage depicts rehabilitation hospitals with what looks like blind veterans learning to weave baskets. The image quickly flashes by on the screen but presents a powerful picture when compared to the rest of the flashes in the montage. \textit{Cavalcade}, directed by Frank Lloyd (1933; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013), Blu-Ray.

\textsuperscript{120} Suzannah Biernoff, “Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britain,” \textit{Social History of Medicine} 24, No. 3 (2011), 668.

\textsuperscript{121} Biernoff, “Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britian,” 669.

With the exception of the closing of the film, the two scenes above make up the major speaking parts for the Doctor.\textsuperscript{123} Throughout the film, he can be seen in the background of many shots either mingling with other hotel patrons or sitting at the bar. In the opening shots, he begins in the front of the camera and then slowly moves into the background as the camera pans along the front desk, also moving along with the camera. Positioning the Doctor in the background during the opening scene and in other areas of the film, illustrates the background position of the veteran. Once back home, they returned to civilian life and lived in the background. As Ebbing said in \textit{Surrender}, “But civilian clothes are much less graceful…To go stomping along boulevards watching whole men pursue their pleasures.” This is exactly what the Doctor does from his background position. He watches the patrons of the hotel come and go, pursuing their life’s desires, while he waits patiently for messages and visitors that will never arrive. The protagonist \textit{The Man from Yesterday} leads a similar life.

\textbf{The Man from Yesterday}

Beginning during the war, \textit{The Man from Yesterday}, released in 1932, follows the life of a woman who lost her husband during the conflict.\textsuperscript{124} The film begins during an air raid in Paris. Sylvia is observed marrying Tony during the raid in a shelter. Shortly after their marriage, he returns to the front where his gas mask is knocked off during an attack. He is declared dead on the field and left behind as his unit retreats. Sylvia is told of his death during her shift at a hospital and the stress of the news causes her to faint during a surgery. Subsequent examination reveals that she is pregnant. After this scene, the film cuts back to Tony. He has been found, alive after all, by the Germans and taken to a field hospital.

\textsuperscript{123} It is Dr. Otterschlag that utters the now famous lines, “Grand Hotel, always the same, people come, people go. Nothing ever happens,” at the end of the film.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{The Man From Yesterday}, directed by Berthold Viertel (1932; Studio City, CA: Paramount Pictures).
Rene, the doctor she was working with at the hospital, offers to take her to Paris and care for her. She agrees and eventually they fall in love. A few years later, Sylvia and Rene live together in Switzerland. She refuses re-marry, since Tony’s body was never found and he is therefore classified as “missing,” which could mean bigamy. While at dinner, one of the doctors at the resort, Dr. Waite, mentions they have many gas cases from the war. Sylvia marvels at this fact since the placid area looks untouched by the war. She compares the wounded to shadows. To which Rene replies, “it’s war. War’s waste always casts long shadows.” Sylvia agrees, “they are made even darker by the brilliance of everything up here…” Sylvia and Rene both compare the wounded to shadows lurking in the background. This is comparable to the Doctor’s character in *Grant Hotel*. He took lurks in the background as a shadow. Sylvia also mentions the beauty of the area and how the wounded stand out against the brilliance of the environment. They serve as a hard reminder of the war and what was lost with little gain.

The film cuts to Tony and Steve at a table. Tony bickers with the waiter and after he leaves Steve makes Tony laugh. He begins coughing uncontrollably—a visible sign of his invisible wounds from the war, no doubt from poison gas. They get up to leave and Dr. Waite points them out to Rene and Sylvia. He explains that Tony and Steve escaped Germany together and that Tony should be dead due to the damage to his lungs but the love of woman he cannot find has kept him alive. He also compares Tony to a “mechanical man, always does the same thing at the same minute, every day.” Sylvia has not seen Tony’s face yet and has no idea that the man Dr. Waite speaks of is her husband.

There are two interesting points here. The first is that Tony has an invisible illness. Unlike the Doctor in *Grand Hotel* or Ebbing in *Surrender*, Tony has no visible physical marker of the wounds he received during the war. This is more in line with the usual depiction of
wounded veterans in leading roles. As discussed above, the Doctor’s visible afflictions were not well received by audiences. With Tony’s invisible wounds, the audience could commiserate with him while still viewing a physically pleasing character. This still proved to be a hard sell. *Motion Picture Herald* stated in its review, “Hard time selling because it is a story with a background of one of the most tragic developments of the war, a subject which most people are trying to forget, it must be tackled from an angle that will ignore the impression of grimness.” Another review, this time in *Motion Picture Magazine*, notes that, “Clive Brook, usually splendid, disappoints as the coughing hero,” and later calls the film, “slow-moving and morbid.”125 Even with an invisible wound, the morbidity of the topic proved too much for some audiences.

Tony’s constant pain is internal and with constant attention to his behavior it can be hidden. This leads to the second point, Dr. Waite’s referring to Tony as a “mechanical man.” In Ebbing’s death speech, he expresses his desire not to live a life wherein he is, “To be assembled like a machine in the morning. To be taken apart again at night.” These descriptions are reminiscent of the short story by Edgar Alan Poe “The Man That Was Used Up.” Poe’s story centers on a man introduced as General John A. B. C. Smith, who is perfect in every way. The man is intent on finding out more about the General and discovers that he fought in a large and violent battle with a group of “Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indians” in the South, but he is unable to find out exactly what happened to the General during the battle. Eventually he visits the General one morning to ask him and finds out that he is made of parts. He arrives in the morning while the General is being put together. Everything from his legs to his very voice is a different piece

of machinery and the best of its kind. The story ends with the man leaving with his mystery solved and concluding that General John A. B. C Smith was, “the man that was used up.”

In the case of the General in Poe’s short story, Tony in *The Man from Yesterday*, and Ebbing in *Surrender*, there is a criticism for the lack of independence and fear for the mechanical-ness of the men. The General relies on his servant to put him together each morning and take him apart at night. Ebbing fears having to rely on others for the rest of his life and is cognizant of the dependence upon others his life would entail. Tony must stick to a strict schedule in order to maintain his well-being and relies on his companion to help him do so. Reglementation and routine, those hallmarks of military organization, are seen as his only salvation. Later when he and Steve separate, there is a noticeable difference in Steve’s demeanor, which will be discussed later. These criticisms of the dependence of the men and the fear of the mechanical-ness of their bodies, is exactly what Megan Kate Nelson outlines in *Ruin Nation* after the Civil War and Beth Linger discusses in *War’s Waste* after World War I.

The rest of *The Man from Yesterday* sees Sylvia discover Tony’s identity. Though in love with Rene, she returns to Paris with Tony out of obligation. They attempt to live happily, but Tony is quickly upset with his inability to live like healthy people and Sylvia reveals her love for Rene. At the end of the movie, Tony decides to leave Sylvia and live his life to the fullest. Before leaving the house, he stops by his son’s room. The boy does not know him and Tony tells him he is going to a café to have fun, eat, and drink. He tells the boy not to ever be a nuisance, tucks him in, and leaves. He goes to a nightclub where he finds Steve with two women. He attempts to spend the evening with them, but the party ends when, clearly sick, Tony spills a drink on one of

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the women and Steve sends them away. Steve admonishes Tony for coming out and Tony replies, “maybe the dead should remain dead, so the living can go on living.” Steve forces Tony to leave the club and plans to take him home to rest. Once in the street Tony collapses on the curb. Two policemen see Steve clutching a streetlamp. Steve explains that he is drunk and Tony is sick and needs a hospital. One of the policemen announce that Tony is dead. When asked how he died, Steve replies, “he died in the war, that’s how.” The scene cuts to Tony Jr. playing with his toy soldiers when Sylvia walks in and asks him to play something else. She goes to pick up one of the fallen soldiers and he stops her, saying, “no, no, mommy, he’s dead. He’s supposed to stay dead too.” She hugs him to her tightly and the film fades to black.

Here, the in the last portion of the film, we see the full extent of Tony’s reliance on others and the effect it has on his psyche and those around him. Sylvia’s life changes dramatically when she and Tony begin their life together. In the time since the war, she has become accustomed to the life with a healthy Rene. Once settled in Paris, Tony and Sylvia attempt a night out on the town but must return early because of Tony’s condition. It is clear that, while Sylvia is in love with Rene, she is trapped by her obligation and also resentful of Tony’s condition and inability to live as a healthy person. Later when Tony arrives at the nightclub where Steve is entertaining two women, there is a noticeable difference in Steve’s behavior. When he and Tony were traveling together, he was more subdued and watchful. But now, he is freer and livelier. The women talk of enjoying life to the fullest and it appears as if they are all doing so. When Tony arrives, Steve returns to his caregiver mode. He questions Tony’s decision to drink and eat so much, he chastises the women for encouraging his reckless behavior, and when Tony spills a drink on one of them and the women begin to yell, Steve chases them away from the table and takes Tony home. It is unclear why Steve is so dedicated to Tony. Dr. Waite alludes to their time
together in a German war camp and their escape, so it can be reasonably concluded that Steve’s dedication stems from that and that perhaps Tony had saved his life. Regardless, Steve never appears resentful of the care he feels obliged to provide to Tony.

It is Tony’s interactions with Sylvia and Steve that make him feel like a nuisance and a burden. We see this in his warning to his son, never to become a nuisance. We see it again at the nightclub when he makes a comment about the dead staying dead, “so the living can keep on living.” Tony has spent years living in his mechanical way, hoping against hope to find Sylvia, trying to keep his broken self together through rote repetition. Once he finds his lost love, he discovers that not only is she in love with someone else, but that any life together would be a terrible burden for her. His dream of returning to his life is impossible; he is, in a real sense, a walking dead man. Linker and Nelson discuss wounded veterans living full and independent lives, but this is something that Tony will never be able to achieve. The Doctor of *Grand Hotel* and Ebbing of *Surrender* would never achieve this either. The survived the war, but only in attenuated fashion that makes real living impossible. While the Doctor can live independently, he has no relations or friends, just the passersby in the hotel. Ebbing believes himself broken and incapable of ever being loved and never gives himself an opportunity to prove that belief wrong.

In an end similar to Ebbing’s, Tony believes his only choice is suicide. When he sets out of the nightclub and finds Steve, he is intent on having one last evening of fun and merriment that will, inevitably, lead to his death. In essence, he sets out to right the wrong of modern medicine allowing him to live. Three times during the film’s conclusion it is mentioned that Tony should have stayed dead or had truly died in the war. The first was mentioned above at the nightclub, the second occurs after Tony’s death when Steve tells the officer that he died in the war, and the last is when Tony’s son tells his mother that the soldier must stay dead. This begs
the moral question of what purpose is there in living when one lives but a half-life? Of course, such a heavy and depressing question did not fit into the ethos of a party decade like the 1920s.

Tony is relegated to a regimented and regulated life where he must follow strict rules in order to survive. In comparable fashion, Richard Plume in Laurence Stallings’ novel, *Plumes*, is denied the life he had before the war when he loses his leg in battle. Prior to his time in the service, he enjoyed a life traversing the woods of Virginia in search of biology specimens and took long walks with his wife. After the war, he moved his family to Washington, DC and experienced great difficulty in traversing the city streets and supporting his family. On outings to parks with his son, he was forced to watch the young boy run around on his own. Throughout the book Richard questions his purpose in surviving the wounds. He also laments that his wife married him on the eve of his departure for France. At one point in the book, when it begins to appear as if things are looking up for the family, the couple goes on a night out to the theater. On their way home, the roads have turned icy and Richard slips on the ice, breaking his remaining knee joint. Lying on the ground in pain he tells her to go away, “Get away. Get away. Don’t you understand the sight of you suffering again for me…I can’t bear for you to grieve again. I’ve broken that knee joint. Job’s gone. Hope’s gone. I’m gone. You were a fool ever to marry a man imbecile enough to rush to war.”

He cannot bear to cause her and his son more pain than he already has and forces her to leave him along the road for the police to find. Both Richard and Tony feel that the lives of their loved ones would have been better had they died in war. In *The Black Cat*, the two main characters feel the same and go about their lives as if they had died in the war.

*The Black Cat*

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Based very loosely on Edgar Allan Poe’s short story of the same name, *The Black Cat* was released in 1934. The film is most notable as the first time screen horror legends Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi would be paired. The story takes place in Eastern Europe, in a remote castle in the countryside. The basic plot of the film is of little importance to this study, however, the two main characters, Poelzig and Dr. Werdergast, are veterans of World War I and it is their experience in the war that drives their actions through the film.128

The story begins with Peter and Joan, newlyweds on their honeymoon, traveling to Hungary. On their journey, they meet Dr. Vitus Werdergast. Werdergast is a veteran of the Great War. Eighteen years before he left his wife and child to enter the war and has spent the fifteen years in a prison camp in Siberia. Now he is on his way visit Poelzig, an old friend. Later that evening, as the trio ride a bus in a remote countryside, a storm causes them to crash. Joan is injured and Werdergast takes her and Peter to Poelzig’s home.

The palatial residence sits upon the ruins of Fort Marmours, a prison camp Poelzig ran during the war. That night, as Joan and Peter sleep, Werdergast accuses Poelzig of selling arms to the Russian army, resulting in a massacre at the prison camp and the death of over 10,000 men. Along with these accusations, Werdergast also claims that Poelzig stole his wife after he left for war. Poelzig assures Werdergast that he is wrong and that Karen, and the child, died of pneumonia after he left.

After the conversation, Poelzig is seen in bed with a blonde woman discussing his plans to sacrifice Joan the following evening in a Satanic ritual. The woman next to him is actually Werdergast’s daughter—not dead and also named Karen. Later she finds out that her father is in the castle and Poelzig kills her. Unaware that his daughter in the castle, but now knowledgeable

128 *Black Cat,* directed Edgar G. Ulmer (1934; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
about Poelzig’s plan to kill Joan, Werdergast plays a game of chess in the hopes of winning the chance for the couple to go free. He loses and Poelzig locks his victims in their rooms.

The following evening, the cult members arrive and the ritual begins. When one of the female members sees something that makes her scream, Werdergast rescues Joan from her place on an altar and runs with her into the depths of the castle. Meanwhile, Peter is hit over the head by Poelzig’s assistant and goes unconscious. As Werdergast carries Joan further into the castle, he discovers Poelzig’s “collection.” A number of dead blonde women are suspended behind glass and perfectly preserved. One of them is his wife, another is his daughter. When Werdergast realizes that Poelzig has killed them, he decides to seek his revenge.

He attacks Poelzig and secures him to a rack in one of the basement rooms, then skins him alive. During this time, Peter wakes up and runs to the basement. He sees Joan and Werdergast attempting to get a key from Poelzig that will help them escape. Peter thinks that Werdergast is attacking Joan and shoots him. As he dies, Werdergast allows Peter and Joan to escape and then pulls a lever activating dynamite from the days of the castle’s use as a World War I fort to blow up the house.

*The Black Cat* takes place almost two decades after World War I has ended and yet the reminders of the war are still everywhere. When Poelzig’s home is first introduced, there is a sweeping view of it overlooking a field of crosses. The house itself is ultra-modern. It is decorated in the latest art deco fashions and is bright and open. Beneath the house, though, lay the ruins of the Fort Marmours. It is dark with twisting stone corridors and hidden rooms. The Fort had been equipped with a network of bombs that could be set off in case of an attack and this set up remains part of the foundation eighteen years later. Edgar G. Ulmer, director of the
film, based the setting on a real French fortress that had been shelled during the War. While hidden in the background or beneath the ground, the ruins of war were to be found all around. The parallels between the house and the veteran are unmistakable. The veteran could come home and build a new life, but it would always be on top of a foundation of the war—hidden beneath the surface as a symbol of all he had lost. In the same way, the glitter of the Jazz Age merely masks the dark horrors of the Great War, which remain underneath, full of malevolent power.

In one particularly powerful scene, Werdergast has accused Poelzig of lying about his wife’s death. After pulling a gun on him, Poelzig responds to the threat by asking Werdergast, “did we not both die at Marmours fifteen years before? Are we any less victims of the war than those whose bodies were torn asunder? Are we not both the living dead?” Werdergast’s threats against Poelzig are useless as the war has already effectively killed them.

The opinion expressed by Poelzig is along the same line of thought that is seen in Rocky, Tony, the Doctor, Ebbing, and others who have been discussed thus far. They believe that just as those who were killed in combat, they have also died in the war and have become shadows of their former selves. Poelzig has been driven to madness by his time in the war while Werdergast was kept in a Siberian prison camp for fifteen years. Both of these men have gone through horrific wartime experiences and have not been able to readjust in the years that followed. In their case, the mental anguish the war has caused has driven them to madness and murder. The last film of this chapter, *The Last Flight*, includes a similar element of war driven madness, along with many of the themes that have been discussed throughout this chapter and ties them together into one tale of the Lost Generation on the screen.

*The Last Flight*

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As previously discussed, *The Last Flight* follows the post-War lives of four wounded soldiers as they travel to Paris and later Lisbon. Over the course of the film the physical and mental barriers the men encounter serve as a constant reminder of what the war has taken from them. The film touches on many themes discussed through this chapter, specifically the idea of the soldier as an instrument of war, the mental and physical toll of the war, and the fear of being a burden or nuisance to society. A *New Movie Magazine* review of the film sums the plot up best by stating, “…Mr. Saunders painted a picture of a crowd of young aviators, grounded by the Armistice, trying to forget before the Paris bars. Broken, embittered, nerves shattered, there is no future for these young chaps, trained to the science of killing. The boys encounter a girl, Nikki, as mad and as irresponsible as themselves and their subsequent adventures as they seek to forget, formed a series of yarns at once touching, amusing, and sad.”

The beginning of this chapter saw a brief description of the opening scenes of *The Last Flight* as the two main protagonists, Shep and Cary are released from a war hospital following the Armistice. Upon their release, the doctor in charge of their case refers to them as spent bullets and fears for their future, “Even if they do take care of themselves, what good are they? What can you expect of them? I hate to think what may become of them.” The opening scenes emphasizes the wounded as a byproduct of the war machine and the limited possibility they had for a normal life after returning home.

The idea of returning to a normal life recurs throughout the film. Shep and Cary decide to go to Paris after their release and meet up with their fellow fliers, Bill and Francis. It is mentioned many times that none of the four plan to return to the states. While in Paris, the men

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130 *The Last Flight*, directed by William Dieterle (1931; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.
131 Frederick James Smith, “Reviews,” *New Movie Magazine*, November 1931, 72-73.
meet and “adopt” a woman named Nikki. Nikki proves to be a strange character, best described by *Variety* as, “sensitively neurotic, sometime goofy, sometime dumb but always good looking,” and seemingly always in need of protection.\textsuperscript{132} She acts as an anchor for the men and provides them with something to hold on to and protect. As Mick LaSalle points out, her relationship with the men is beyond sex. They are not impotent, as Hemingway’s Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, but rather, they are, “too smashed up inside for small human things to make much difference.” They protect Nikki and playfully, moon over her, “as if evoking some dim memory when such things were to live and die for.”\textsuperscript{133}

In one powerful set of scenes, Nikki discusses returning to the states with Shep and Cary. Early one morning, Cary plans to take a trip to the cemetery to visit the grave of the gunner who had died in the crash that burned his hands. Nikki, not knowing the purpose of the trip, announces her plan to go with him. While she waits for him to gather his coat, she and Shep discuss Cary. He warns her that Cary is brittle and that she should not bring up topics of conversation that may upset him (in a previous scene she pointed out his need to use two hands to drink and then cried over his wounded hands when she discovered the reason). Nikki then asks Shep why he does not go home. Shep explains that Cary is not yet ready and fears that people will treat him differently because of his hands. She replies, “Isn’t he just sort of wasting himself?” To which he counters, “on the contrary, he’s trying to get a hold of himself.” She then leaves for the cemetery with Cary but a downpour forces them into a street side café. As they wait for the rain to end, she asks him why Shep drinks so much. He explains that when Shep is drunk his eye stops twitching, going further to say, “a tic is a nervous habit, light under his bandages, he had a devil of a time, he almost lost his mind.” With treatment, the tic would go

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{“Review: ‘The Last Flight’,” Variety}, December 31, 1930.

away, but Shep does not like long treatments. She then asks what he plans to do when he goes home, to which he replies that Shep does not plan to go home, “not in his dark glasses anyway.”

After this exchange Cary goes on to tell Nikki how nothing really matters to him anymore. He reminisces about his childhood home and landscape of his past, but does so in a way that makes it sound as if he is talking of a far off memory, almost of someone else. Earlier in the film, when the fliers first meet Nikki, Frink joins them for a drink. Frink is a newspaper reporter from New York spending time in Paris. It is unclear if he spent time in the war, but it can be assumed by his demeanor, emotional distance from the fliers, and later seen, his lack of knowledge on gun safety and usage, that he has not. Frink asks them why they do not return home and go to work. Bill laughingly replies, “what would I do? Sell washing machines? Drive a milk truck?” then tells him that the only thing they know how to do is drink. Here again we face a nominal survivor, someone who lived through the war but emerged unable to truly live. Frink then replies that there is a life outside with sun and trees growing. At this point Shep breaks in saying, “that sounds pretty pre-War to me.” The sentiment here is the same as Cary’s memories of his childhood. There is a delineation between their pre-War experiences and their post-War experiences and it is apparent that they cannot go back to their lives from before the war. There is an innocence or a purity that has been lost in their war-time experience that prevents them from returning to that life. As film scholar Andrew Kelly put it, “The war is seen to have destroyed the men…the prospect of normality is not only irrelevant, it is a surprise to them that normal life still exists.”^134 Critics picked up on this with *The Educational Screen* explaining that after their plane crash they, “become utterly incapacitated for any effective work…”^135

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^134 Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, 160.
It is only through death that the fliers can find peace. The first death occurs when Bill decides to jump into the arena during a bullfight. He is gored and taken to the hospital. When the group leave him he is on an operating table. Later, as Nikki and Cary leave together on a train, Cary reveals that Bill died at the hospital. The next death is metaphorical, rather than physical. Francis shoots Frink at a shooting gallery and goes on the run. While he does not actually die, Nikki comments that he looked happy and Cary says they will never see him again. In the ending train scene with Nikki, Cary expresses hope that Francis will forget to set his chiming watch and one day just fall asleep for good. Shep is the last of the fliers to die. Moments before Francis shoots Frink, Frink and Cary tussle over the gun that Frink is holding. When it discharges the shell hits Shep. He later dies in a taxi, cradled by Cary, and imagining that he is in a crashing plane.

Through the physical deaths of Bill and Shep and the metaphorical death of Francis, there is a feeling that these men have finally found rest and peace. They are incapable of returning to a normal life and the only option for them is death. In fact, theirs are war deaths deferred. As with Ebbing in Surrender and Tony in The Man from Yesterday, these men had died in a real sense in the war. Post-war they were only able to function as shadows of their former selves. Drowning in alcohol and parties, they attempt to feel something other than the despair and horror brought on by the war, or feel anything at all for that matter. None of it is shown to work and the only way these men can escape from their post-War lives is through death.

Cary is the only one in The Last Flight to survive unscathed. He and Nikki end the film on a train ride into their future. They discuss the fate of each of their friends and then Cary comments, “It doesn’t matter now, without them nothing matters. We only had each other. Comradeship was all we had left, and now it’s gone too.” The experiences of the war had
brought the men together and given them purpose. They protected each other from the outside. Now that they are gone, Cary believes he has no one. Nikki, though, has other plans. She reveals that she is in love with him and shows him the heart shaped rock from their trip to the cemetery. Cary appears eternally grateful for this turn of events. He does not express love of his own, but rather asks what he can do in return because she has become, “so dear to him.” Cary is the only man who can survive because he has someone unburdened by their wartime experiences to care for him. He, himself, is incapable of returning the love she gives but gratefully offers to provide for her in whatever way he can. While it appears that true love shines through at the end of the film, the putatively happy resolution remains tainted by the inability of Cary to reciprocate, the knowledge that while he has Nikki, he still has his own demons to contend with, and the fact that the other main characters could only find peace through death. Cary and Nikki will be together, but it remains an open question whether or not he will ever truly recover the parts of himself the war took away.

Suzannah Biernoff equates the conjugal love of a disfigured veteran with a patriotic devotion, stating, “Disfigurement turns conjugal love into a parable of patriotic devotion, in which the wounds of the war are salved—and the horror of the war erased—by the reinstatement of domestic bonds.” As depicted in Surrender, The Man from Yesterday, and The Last Flight, a return to “domestic bonds,” is impossible. In Surrender, Ebbing chooses suicide instead. The Man from Yesterday sees Tony attempt a relationship with Sylvia only to discover he was too

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136 This is seen in numerous instances. When Bill tackles the horse all the men go to his rescue and clear the matter up with the horse’s owner. Shep admonishes Nikki multiple times for her behavior around Cary. When Frink questions Francis’ sleeping the other’s jump to his defense.

137 It is worth noting here, that Photoplay’s October 1931 review of the film said of the ending, “But when three are killed off, leaving only a somber Dick Barthelmess to marry Nikki, the picture lets down suddenly.”

much of a burden. Cary and Nikki ride off together, but their relationship is tainted with the pain and loss he continues to experience.

The divide between pre- and post-War lives is also expressed by Dieterich in *Surrender* and Rocky in *Ace of Aces*. Dieterich does not understand the purpose of his pre-War interests. Rocky, an artist before the war, has lost his creative ability upon return. Neither Dieterich, nor Rocky, have visible wounds that would prevent from partaking in their pre-War activities. In other words, there is no physical impairment stopping them, but rather their issues lie in their inability to mentally complete these tasks. In *The Last Flight*, the wounds of the fliers are both mental and physical.

Shep and Cary both have visible physical impairments. When introduced at the hospital Cary has heavily bandaged hands and Shep is wearing dark glasses indoors. Upon arrival in Paris, Cary’s hands are no longer bandaged, but as mentioned he must hold a glass with two hands. Shep continues wearing dark glasses, but only during the day. As Shep and Cary leave the hospital, they see Bill and Francis on their way in and explain they are leaving for Paris. Bill and Francis are both bandaged, however, when they arrive in Paris their physical wounds have healed. Unlike the Doctor in *Grand Hotel* or Ebbing in *Surrender*, it is not only the physical wounds of the fliers that leave them in turmoil. All four men exhibit signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or what at the time would have been considered shell shock.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, PTSD is a mental health problem that can develop after life-threatening events, such as combat, natural disasters, car accidents, or sexual assault. Symptoms include reliving the event, avoiding situations that remind one of the event, negative beliefs or feelings, and the

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139 Rocky had been wounded during the war, but had healed and gone back to combat before the conflict’s end. Dieterich was home on leave.
feeling of hyperarousal. PTSD can also lead to depression or anxiety, substance abuse, physical symptoms, relationship problems, and feelings of hopelessness, shame, or despair. Cary, Shep, Bill, and Francis all demonstrate several of these symptoms throughout the film.\(^{140}\) Of course, there was no such terminology in 1918. “Shell shock” was the term of that era.

Cary appears to be the least affected by symptoms of PTSD. Most of his trouble stems from his hands and his self-consciousness from the wounds. He does have negative feelings, specifically a disinterest in things that interested him before the war. Cary also has relationship problems. At the cemetery when he and Nikki are discussing the story of the lovers buried there, he believes that Nikki is in love with him and is visibly upset when she makes a comment that makes him think otherwise. In the last moments of the film Cary and Nikki are on a train by themselves and she tells him she loves him and he asks her what he can do for her in return. He never says he loves her in return. Cary’s response would imply that he is grateful for her love and wishes to give her something in return, as he cannot give his own love which he believes himself incapable.

Shep also appears to suffer from PTSD, but as with Cary, his symptoms are not as definitive. Among the core symptoms, Shep relives the war during his death, telling Cary that he feels like they are spinning and the plane is going down. He certainly has negative feelings, refusing to return to the states and feeling shame because of his eye condition. When he reveals he has been shot and is dying, Nikki and Cary both begin to panic. Shep stops them from attempting to get help, explaining that this (death) is the best thing that had ever happened to


him. Shep also exhibits physical symptoms with his eye tic, which Cary explained was a result of stress from light under his bandages in the hospital.

Bill and Francis are the clearest cases of PTSD among the men. Bill had been an All-American football player from Montana before the war. Not much is said about his service, but we know he was a flier. Post-War he takes risks and is always willing to do dangerous feats if asked. On the night they meet Nikki, he tackles a horse on a dare. Later while in Spain he jumps in the arena and is gored by a bull which leads to his death. His reasoning for these actions is that it, “seemed like a good idea at the time.” We see here a classic case of a damaged psyche recapitulating brushes with death. This behavior corresponds with the symptom of hyperarousal. Even when Bill is not in a state of rage or recklessness, he is always the loudest and most boisterous of the group. When they meet Nikki, Bill is the most vocal in his admiration of her and her features. At one point he goes on at length about her back and later about the shape of her legs.

Francis is the most severe of the men. In combat he shot down twelve enemy planes, garnering the nickname “Sudden Death.” Cary tells Nikki that Francis, “lost interest” when his partner was killed. Now he has developed a habit of falling asleep during the day and carries a chiming watch to help him stay awake—a physical effect of the PTSD. He always has a far-away look in his eye, like he is not quite there or paying attention. The morning Nikki and Cary go to the cemetery, Francis sleeps periodically on the couch. He wakes up just long enough to have another drink then falls back to sleep. When Frink throws a glass into the fire place, the sudden noise wakes Francis up and he jolts awake. Later, after Bill’s goring at the bull fight, the remaining group go to a carnival. They hear gun shots from a nearby shooting gallery (to which Shep comments that it, “sounds like old times.”) and walk over to try their hand. Cary and Shep
both demonstrate their skill and then Francis picks up a rifle and rapidly shoots down an entire row of targets. As Cary attempts to show Nikki how to shoot, Frink frivolously picks up one of the hand guns and jokingly points it towards her. Cary and the others immediately jump into action and tell him never to point a loaded gun. This puts Frink on the defensive and after a short scuffle with Cary, the gun discharges.\footnote{It is here that Shep is injured. The shot hits him in the stomach but he hides this fact until he, Cary, and Nikki are in a taxi on the way back to the hotel.} Still holding the gun, Frink backs up and tells them all to back off. It is then that Francis picks up a rifle and rapidly shoots Frink multiple times. Seeing that he has done, he bids the others good bye and escapes out the side of the carnival. After he has gone, Nikki comments that the look in Francis’ eye while shooting the gun was the happiest she had ever seen him.

All of the men turn to substance abuse for relief. Alcohol serves as a constant tonic for the duration of the film. \textit{Screenland} refers the men as, “…the ‘I-don’t-give-a-care-boys,’ to whom life is just one long martini.”\footnote{“Best Pictures,” \textit{Screenland}, November 1931, 57.} Certainly, alcohol’s anesthetizing qualities made it the drug of choice for many veterans seeking to mask their pain. This provides a sharply contrapuntal angle to the playful image of bathtub gin and frolic during Prohibition. Shep tells Nikki numerous times to keep drinking as it will make her “laugh and play,” and when he is still in the hospital he tells Cary he plans to go to Paris to “get tight and stay tight.” He drinks to stop his eye tic and to forget his experiences of the war. All four men drink from morning until night. The morning after they meet Nikki, Shep, Bill, and Francis go to the hotel bar for a hangover cure, return to Nikki’s room, and order cocktails.

Drinking in films of this time was not unusual. \textit{The Thin Man} series of films starring William Powell and Myrna Loy see the central protagonist carry along a thermos of martinis as

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he and his wife solve crimes. In fact, it is difficult to find a film from the 1930s that does not include alcohol consumption of some kind, though it is mostly shown to be casual or social drinking. Alcohol abuse plays heavily into a bizarre film released in 1930 called *Girl of the Port*. The jungle themed musical takes place on a British owned island colony. The plot revolves around a show girl who appears on the island one day. She meets a World War I veteran with severe PTSD that is triggered by fire and who drinks heavily to escape the trauma of the war. They fall in love and he lives with her in an attempt to get sober. By the end of the film, he has stopped drinking and recovered enough to take part in an island ritual of fire walking. After walking through the wall of flames they go off into the sunset and live happily ever after.¹⁴³

In *The Last Flight* the consumption is less casual and more like that of *Girl of the Port*. *Motion Picture Herald* describes the men as running, “…from one Paris bar to another and then to Portugal, in search of forgetfulness.” While *Motion Picture Daily* says that the men are, “attempting to drown their memories of the conflict’s horrors.”¹⁴⁴ The men consume copious amounts of liquor. The cocktails they order while in Nikki’s apartment are brought in on multiple trays, each containing at least ten glasses. At night clubs their tables are always full of empty glasses and beside the table are countless empty bottles of wine and champagne. As in *Dawn Patrol*, these men are using alcohol to numb the pain of their war time experiences. This vision of a depressant utilized to self-medicate damaged veterans fits neither into the “demon rum” or “bathtub gin” Prohibition, and marks a rather nuanced view of the alcohol issue during the years of the Volstead Act.

¹⁴³ This film lends credence to Biernoff’s assertion that the love of a woman is all that is needed to cure a man of shell shock.
Response to the film and the depiction of the men was varied. A *Variety* review stated, “Direction was successful in keeping the shell-shocked side of the permanently wounded airmen continuously before the audience.” The *New Movie Magazine* referred to the dialogue as, “brittle and unconventional,” but commented that the performances were all solid efforts. *Screenland* called the film more than a war epic and explained that the film is, “…the grave-gay and intimate account of the after effects of the war on four aviators whose lives were practically wrecked like their planes.” *Motion Picture Daily* also commented on the war elements of the film, but thought it eventually turned into, “unfortunately,” a melodrama. The melodrama aspect was also lamented in *Movie Classic* when they pointed out in their “Ten Second Reviews,” that, “It might have been an excellent study of post-War emotions if it hadn’t become a melodrama.”¹⁴⁵ Most of the negative reviews found fault with the structure of the film, rather than the subject matter as seen with *The Man from Yesterday* or the appearance of the fliers as with *Grand Hotel*. The plot of the film and the depiction of the fliers as spent bullets appears to have been well received and understood.

In the other films discussed above, Rocky, Ebbing, and Dieterich all exhibit signs of PTSD and arguments can certainly be made to include Paul from *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* and almost the entire cast of *Dawn Patrol* to the list. John of *The Crowd*, as discussed, develops PTSD after the death of his daughter which leads to his needing to seek employment as a street clown. Freder and the Tramp also exhibit signs of PTSD in *Metropolis* and *Modern Times*. The condition of these men is just another side effect of their being cast aside by the

Frederick James Smith, “Reviews,” *New Movie Magazine* November 1931, 72-73.
“Best Pictures,” *Screenland*, November 1931, 57.
“Tabloid Reviews,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, November 1931, 72.
structures that caused their downfall. The war or the modern working environment has used up the potential of these men and when their purpose has been served, they have been left to get along the best they can—whether it be finding solace in alcohol, drifting from job to job, or ending their suffering by death.

The above analysis focuses on those films that include a character who has been wounded and had found himself unable to readjust after his release from the service. What happens when the veteran is able to readjust? The man who returns home from Europe ready to pick up where he left off and live a successful post-War life? The following chapter examines depictions of men who have come back from war, adjusted to post-War life, but have been held back in their potential to earn a living and support a family by the economic constraints of society.
Chapter 4: “We came, we marched away, to fight for USA, but where are we today?” The Veteran as the Forgotten Man

The scene opens on a young family living in a tenement in Hell’s Kitchen. Their young child is sick and the husband, Guy, reads the wanted ads looking for jobs. He finds nothing, but reads an article about a man stealing money to support his family. His wife, Ellen, is optimistic he will find something soon, but he is losing hope. Guy dons his old army coat and prepares to go out in search of work. As he pulls it on he exclaims, “Wow, what a picnic that war was compared to this one.” He puts his hand in one of the pockets and feels an old revolver. As Guy prepares to leave, he says to Ellen, “Medals on my chest and scars on my back! Say you’d never tell it to look at me, but I was a hero once, now I’m bust, and not in the hall of fame either.” He then says he is leaving to go join the “Army of the Unemployed,” in search of work. Ellen hugs him and feels the revolver in his pocket. Guy leaves.

Sometime later, Ellen is anxiously waiting for Guy’s return. Suddenly, she hears two policemen outside. They are discussing a recent armed robbery and comment that they are authorized to aim to kill if they find the suspect. Knowing that Guy has taken his revolver and hearing the story he read in the paper earlier about the man stealing money, she fears the worst. As her anxiety builds, she hears two guns shots in the distance and then footsteps. Guy comes through the door with eggs, chicken, and a new doll. Ellen hesitantly asks where he has gotten the money for all the goods. He explains to her that he hocked the revolver.

The story of Guy and Ellen comes from the 1930 short entitled The Hard Guy, starring Spencer Tracey in one of his first on screen roles. While only six minutes long, the short film sends a powerful message about unemployment and the plight of many World War I veterans in the post-War era. Nearly a decade after the war has ended, he decides to get his old army coat
out of his trunk, perhaps he is hoping it will draw sympathy and he will find work. Despite coming back with food and a new toy for his daughter, he is unsuccessful in finding employment. His and his family’s relief is only temporary. The short is demonstrative of a larger group of films featuring unemployed World War I veterans referred to as Forgotten Men.  

William Graham Sumner first introduced the Forgotten Man as part of a series of essays for *Harper’s Weekly* in the spring of 1883. Later that year, the essays were collected and published together in *What the Social Classes Owe Each Other*. Sumner, a sociologist and son of an English immigrant, taught at Yale University from 1872-1909. He wrote widely about laissez-faire economics, individual liberty, and social inequalities, while also subscribing to the ideal of Social Darwinism. Sumner believed that poverty was the natural state for those who were inherently inferior and that any form of social welfare that helped them was a hindrance to society.

Sumner defined the Forgotten Man as a middle-class worker who was taxed to pay for programs helping those he did not feel deserved the help. He explains that A (the government) and B (the upper class) form policies to help X (the poor) and in turn, A, B, and C are expected to pay for those policies. C, the middle class, has no say in the creation of these policies, and thus becomes the Forgotten Man. He describes the Forgotten Man as, “the simple, honest laborer, ready to earn his living by productive work. We pass him by because he is independent, self-supporting, and asks no favors. He does not appeal to the emotions or excite the sentiments. He only wants to make a contract and fulfill it, with respect on both sides and favor on neither side.”

In other words, the Forgotten Man is the middle-class laborer who does not ask for help but...
suffers because so much is taken from him. He goes on to explain that the Forgotten Man earns a living from the production of capital throughout the country and that, “…every particle of capital which is wasted on the vicious, the idle, and the shiftless is so much taken from the capital available to reward the independent and productive laborer.” Through his struggles, the Forgotten Man is silent and we do not know he is suffering to pay for the welfare programs created by the government. It is because of this silence, that the Forgotten Man must be remembered and protected, “against the burdens of the goodfornothing.”

The Forgotten Man was not limited to only male workers. Sumner clarifies, “All the burdens fall on him, or on her, for it is time to remember that the Forgotten Man is not seldom a woman…If you go and look at the mill, it will captivate your imagination until you remember all the women in all the garrets, and all the artisans’ and laborers’ wives and children who are spending their hours of labor, not to get goods which they need, but to pay for the industrial system which only stands in their way and makes it harder for them to get the goods.” With this description, Sumner accomplishes two things. First, he calls attention to the large factories taking advantage of workers by paying them low wages and then charging them high prices for goods. The second establishes that the Forgotten Man can be applied to women and children in the work force. In doing so, Sumner emphasizes the exploitation of what was perceived to be a weaker group of people in 1883 at the expense of a group he deems unsuitable to receive help. He also gives women an individual identity and earning power—making them contributing members of the economy. The Forgotten Man and Woman risk losing their dignity because they are over taxed to pay for welfare programs that take care of an undeserving group of people. Sumner also believes that it was not the government’s responsibility to control who was rich or poor and

instead this was determined by God’s will. Government intervention was interfering with the will of God.\textsuperscript{149}

Sumner’s vision of the Forgotten Man remained popular through the late nineteenth century and played a role in forming the popular opinion of the unemployed that lasted until the Great Depression hit. Beth Linker’s discussion of war rehabilitation and the changes to the pension system with World War I demonstrates this vision. It was believed that employment was the best option for the war veteran. If they could work and support their families as the sole breadwinner, they would be happier and they would secure their masculine position. The ability to earn a wage was an integral part of the definition of manhood. A man who was not earning a wage was economically dependent and this was linked with womanliness. “Economic dependency…came to be understood as the real handicap that thwarted full physical recovery of the veteran and the fiscal strength of the nation.”\textsuperscript{150} These ideas tie directly back to Sumner and his belief that the poor were just unwilling to help themselves and were undeserving of government help.

According to Amity Shales, author of \textit{The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression}, Ray Moley, working for the Franklin Roosevelt campaign, remembered the term, “Forgotten Man,” but not its origins. He inserted the phrase into one of Roosevelt’s early campaign speeches.\textsuperscript{151} On April 7, 1932, Roosevelt gave a radio address, that would become known as, “The Forgotten Man Speech,” evoking the image of the Forgotten Man. Referring to the struggles taking place during the Depression, he explains that these, “unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.  
economic power for plans like those of 1917 that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the **forgotten man** at the bottom of the economic pyramid.” Roosevelt follows by outlining three objectives, “restoring farmers’ buying power, relief to the small banks and home-owners and a reconstructed tariff policy…”

Roosevelt explains that the government must reverse its policy of providing economic relief from the top down and create a policy that helps from the bottom up. He asks Americans to remember World War I, both the sacrifices made by those who served and the mobilization that went into fighting the war. He calls for a new mobilization of the economy that harkens back to 1917, but this time to help the struggling working class, rather than fighting a war. By asking Americans to remember World War I, he is asking for the public to remember a time when America faced an emergency and prevailed. In doing this, the link between the World War I veteran and the Forgotten Man is crucial. The Forgotten Man must become a veteran to emphasize the link between the American victory in the war and the hope of a new American victory over the Great Depression that is the center of Roosevelt’s campaign. This link also emphasizes the sacrifice made by these men when the country needed help and importance of helping them now when they are in need.

The difference between Roosevelt’s Forgotten Man and Sumner’s lies in the definition. Sumner clearly establishes the Forgotten Man as a worker, someone making money and paying taxes, male or female. For Sumner, he is forgotten because of his silent struggling to pay for programs that help the undeserving poor. Roosevelt reverses this stance. He takes the Forgotten Man and gives him a solid male identity by equipping him with a gun in 1917 and sending him

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to Europe. Roosevelt’s Forgotten Man does not have a job, or has a job that does not provide enough income to support his family. In essence, he is the beneficiary of the programs that Sumner is arguing against in his essay, but no longer undeserving because he has fought for the country and sacrificed only to be rewarded with nothing. Both are betrayed by the public and government which ignore their struggles—but in different ways. Harking back to World War I when the country was a risk, Roosevelt likens the current economic struggle to a war and explains that the country is again at risk. The public must mobilize to help the unemployed and repair the economy or the nation will fail.

As mentioned, this version of the Forgotten Man evolved, almost by accident when a speechwriter inserted the phrase in a speech without knowing the origins. Shales explains that not all of Roosevelt’s staff were unaware of the background. Samuel Rosenman, another of his speechwriters, not only picked up on the history of the phrase but also knew that it signaled a huge policy shift. Rosenman recognized that this new Forgotten Man was, “‘…entirely contrary to the philosophy that had prevailed in Washington since 1921, that the object of the government was to provide prosperity for those who lived and worked at the top of the economic pyramid, in the belief that prosperity would trickle down to the bottom of the heap and benefit all.’”¹⁵³ This new philosophy would become the backbone of Roosevelt’s campaign and would help to propel him to the presidency.

Not only did the Roosevelt campaign shift the philosophy of Washington with the Forgotten Man, they also went out and found him in America. James Michael Curley, the mayor of Boston and member of the Roosevelt team, set out to find the Forgotten Man and show him to the American public. In a newsreel entitled, “The Forgotten Man,” Mayor Curley spoke on the

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existence of the Forgotten Man and where he could be found. He explained, “I have made it my business to ascertain if such an individual really existed in America and have endeavored to ascertain the underlying causes for his presence in our midst and I found upon investigation that he was one of the products of the industrial depression with which America has been visited during the now nearly four years that have passed.” He goes on to list cities and the number of unemployed he encountered in each of them.154

Finally, he transitions into a discussion of the Bonus Army and the Forgotten Men waiting, “patiently and patriotically,” and when the bonus was rejected, “there was no complaint against the government; there was not general condemnation of public officials…”155 The Bonus Army was a group of veterans who marched on Washington in 1932 demanding the early payment of their war bonus. Originally, the bonus was to be paid in 1945 but veterans were some of the hardest hit during the Depression as they had already had troubles adjusting to post-War life and finding work in the wake of the war. The Senate struck the bill down to pay the bonus on June 15. The Bonus Army refused to leave Washington until they were paid. On July 28, President Hoover ordered General Douglas MacArthur and a group of soldiers to fix the situation. They shot tear gas into the camp and the Bonus Army set fire to the tents. Images of the night spread all over the country and brought the struggle of the veterans to light. The Bonus Army debacle illustrated the idea of the Forgotten Man. The veterans had been asked to go to war, fought and succeeded, but were forgotten upon returning home.156 Curley flawlessly blends the unemployed and the veteran so that one cannot be told from the other. The Forgotten Man was legitimized by his veteran status in Roosevelt’s speech, but not all of the unemployed had

154 James Guilfoyle, On the Trail of the Forgotten Man (Boston: Peabody Masters Printers, 1933), 180.
155 Ibid., 181.
served. Curley draws attention to the struggle of all the out of work men in the country while still evoking the image of the veteran.

Drawing comparisons was not unique to the Roosevelt campaign. President Hoover had also used World War I analogies in discussing the Depression. However, his doing so was meant from a moral angle, rather than political. He feared that, “direct federal aid to victims of the depression would...undermine individual initiative and destroy the traditional balance between state and federal authority.”\(^{157}\) Hoover’s adherence to past policies resulted in his becoming a symbol of, “depression ills and unresponsive government.”\(^{158}\) In other words, Hoover was the greatest symbol of those who were forgetting the Forgotten Man.

As translated on the screen, the Forgotten Man is a World War I veteran struggling to make ends meet. Unlike the previous two chapters, these veterans came back (mostly) healthy and ready to resume their lives. They had answered the call to serve and protect, did their duty in Europe, and came back to only to find the world had moved on without them. The films that follow depict the lives of these Forgotten Men when they return from the war as they struggle with a world of economic hardship, separation from loved ones, fear of the growing machine based technology taking away their jobs, and, in extreme cases, turning to a life of crime to survive.

\textit{I am A Fugitive from a Chain Gang}

\textit{I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang}, released by Warner Bros in 1932, stars Paul Muni as a World War I veteran falsely accused of a crime. The film begins with the end of World War I as James Allen returns home. He is met at the train station by family and friends. His boss from


\(^{158}\) Ibid., 104.
before the war even comes to greet him and surprises him by saying that his old job is still waiting for him. At first Allen is hesitant to accept the job as he wants something more. During his time in the service he had worked with the engineering corps and had grown to love construction and design. His plan upon returning was to find a job utilizing these skills. Allen wants more from life than just a factory job, he wants a career that is fulfilling and makes him happy. However, his family urges him to take his old job back and he, reluctantly, listens.

It does not take long for Allen to lose interest in the work, he wants to be more creative and hands-on. He stares longingly out the window beside his desk at the construction of a bridge. He decides to quit and, against his family’s warning, goes in search of employment more suitable to his goals. A map of the United States with foot prints walking across it illustrates the failure of his search. Everywhere he goes the jobs are scarce and he is turned away. One day he meets another man in search of work and they go to a lunch counter to see what they can get with the little money they have left. The man robs the restaurant and Allen is falsely accused of the crime. He is sentenced to hard labor and sent to a chain gang. Throughout the rest of the film Allen escapes, finds success, is turned in by a scorned lover, and then escapes again. The film ends with Allen meeting with the woman he loves one final time. When she asks him how he will continue to live on the run, he replies, “I steal,” and fades into the night.\footnote{I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (1932; Burbank: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.}

When James Allen returns from the war, he wants more than the life he had before. His family cannot understand this change that has come over him in Europe and why he is no longer content with this old job. He explains, “The Army changes a fellow, it kind of makes him think different, I don’t want to spend the rest of my life following a factory whistle instead of a bugle call or be cooped up in a shipping room all day. I want to do something worthwhile.” He wants
to make a difference and get a feeling of fulfillment and freedom from his job rather than remaining a cog in the system. Similar to *The Last Flight*, Allen has changed and cannot lead the same life as before the war. The difference is what kind of life he now desires. Emmett Early in *The War Veteran in Film*, explains, “‘The drive in *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* is one of restlessness, the inability to settle down after having had a taste of another, more demanding life.” The fliers desire lives that are filled with pleasure and excitement to take away the pain of the war and make them forget their experiences. Allen wants to make a difference in the world and has found inspiration from his wartime experience.

The story of James Allen is based on the true story of Robert Burns. As with Allen, Burns was sent to a chain gang after he was falsely accused of a robbery. The harsh conditions of the chain gang caused Burns to escape. He was successful in creating a new life for himself until he was turned in by his estranged wife. He was promised that if he served 90 more days of his sentence, he would be released. When 90 days turned into a year, he escaped again and at the time of the film’s release was currently on the run. The film is based on his bestselling autobiography *I am A Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*. Unlike Allen, Burns’ return from the war was not a celebrated affair. Instead he found out his girlfriend had married another man and his job had been given away during his time in the service. He was forced to go on the road to find work, ending up in Georgia when he was framed for the lunch counter robbery. After his first escape, Burns fled to Chicago and became a successful magazine editor. Allen, also fleeing to Chicago, became a successful engineer and utilized the skills he learned in the army.

162 During production Warner Bros. decided to remove Georgia from the title after state officials threatened to sue the studio.
The decision to open the film with Allen coming home to fanfare and a job serves two purposes. The first is that it lessens the indictment on the government and industry so as not to offend. His discontent is all psychological. He cannot adjust to the same monotonous life. The second thing this does is to make Allen’s motives purer. He only wants to find happiness through helping the nation improve itself, while also creating a better life for himself. His reward is unemployment and jail time.

Allen can also no longer fit in with his family and friends. They do not understand where his new drive comes from and why he cannot just settle down to his life from before the war. It is because of this lack of understanding that causes him to not fit in with society. In accordance with Roosevelt’s Forgotten Man, Allen has sacrificed for the country but has been given nothing in return. He is the man at the bottom of the pyramid who needs the relief programs Roosevelt plans to implement. By blending the economic hardship he encounters and his drive to become more than just a factory worker, he becomes a more sympathetic character, someone striving to achieve the American Dream but crushed by an unhelpful society.

Not only does he find nothing but unemployment, he is even tricked into returning to prison by the state. As with the real Burns, Allen agrees to return to prison to finish 90 days of his sentence and then he will receive a pardon. When his time is up, it is clear the prison officials have no intention of pardoning him because of the poor publicity Allen has brought to the state and the system of hard labor after his first escape. This system illustrates the dangers of blind faith in the government that sent millions of men to their death in World War I. Rocky in Ace of Aces, compared the men going off to war as lemmings marching over a cliff to their death. Dawn Patrol saw an emphasis on the leadership sending men off to their death with little regard for age.

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or experience level. These men were willing to die for their country, though, because they were promised a better life after the war and a safer future. Instead, they found an inability to psychologically adjust to post-War life, a society largely unwilling to acknowledge the wounds of war, and unemployment. The film and the book it is based on portrays an American system that crushes the spirit. That, “first sends him to war. And if that doesn’t kill him, stifle any impulse he has for a rewarding existence. If that fails, set him loose in an economy in which there’s no work, then right the political justice system. And, finally, create prisons designed to kill people if they stay and kill them if they try to escape.” By the end of the film this system has forced Allen to the outskirts of society, an outlaw forced to steal and run to survive. Another Warner Bros. production, *Heroes for Sale* was released in 1933. The original title for the film was *Breadline*. According to *Variety* the title was changed in May of 1933, “figuring better times are here.” Tom Holmes is a World War I veteran who is wounded in the back on the front and captured by Germans. While a prisoner of war, Tom receives inadequate medical care and is given morphine to dull the pain in his back. After the war ends, Tom is released but he is addicted to morphine. He finds a job at a bank, but is soon fired after he is

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164 LaSalle, *Dangerous Men*, 195.
accused of stealing money for drugs.\textsuperscript{166} Avoiding jail time, he is sent to a narcotics farm to recover and when he returns he finds his mother has died. Still needing to make a living, Tom goes off to search for a place to live and a job. Both come fairly quickly. He finds a cheap room in a boarding house and a job at a laundry down the street. He also falls in love with and marries his neighbor, Ruth.

Tom’s hard work at the laundry gains attention when he develops a way to increase the number of customers and then develops a machine, with the help of a neighbor, to save the company money. The downside to this new invention is the possibility of it eliminating hundreds of jobs at the company. To save them, Tom strikes a deal with the owner—if he signs the technology over no one will be fired. The owner readily agrees and the patent is signed over.

Unfortunately, the deal only lasts a short time. When the owner dies, the company changes hands and the new leadership refuses to follow the agreement. Hundreds of employees are fired. The scorned workers riot and march to the laundry to destroy the machines. In the chaos, Tom’s wife is trampled to death and Tom is arrested for inciting the workers and sentenced to five years of hard labor. After doing his time, Tom returns to the city only to be run out again and accused of Communist activities. Forced to go on the run, he must leave his young son behind. The money from the laundry machine has been invested for him while in jail and now amounts to over $50,000. Not wanting what he considers blood money, he donates the funds to his friend’s soup kitchen to feed those who are hungry and out of work. He gives her instructions to keep the kitchen open all day, every day, until the money runs out.

\textsuperscript{166} To add insult to injury, the bank is owned to the father of the man who betrayed him on the battlefield. Roger leaves Tom for dead and then takes solo credit for the success of the mission. As Tom is fired, the bank president lectures him on how he should be more like his war hero son.
The film ends with Tom, a derelict, going from town to town looking for work. On the road, he meets other out of work veterans—including Roger. Roger explains that his father’s bank failed when the Depression hit and his father committed suicide when it came to light that he had been stealing money. Roger served two years for aiding in the theft. At each new town and city, they are turned away and forced to continue searching. In Tennessee, the police call the men hobos and Tom replies, “We’re not tramps! We’re ex-servicemen.” This falls on deaf ears and he is forced to continue his journey of finding employment. Once called upon by the government to fight for the country, that same government has forgotten him in his time of need. Roger ponders if this is the end of America. Tom replies that he does not believe so and asks if Roger has read Roosevelt’s inaugural address. He believes that while it may be the end of them, that America will prosper again under Roosevelt. He has found hope in the New Deal. After he praises Roosevelt, the film cuts to the diner and a shot of a plaque on the wall. Mary and Tom’s son look at it and Mary states, “He’s given everything, and taken nothing.”

When Tom returns from the front, he has trouble readjusting at first because of his morphine addiction. However, after his trip to the narcotics farm, any trace of turmoil from his war service appears cured. Whatever problems Tom encounters from that point on in the film stem from larger problems in society—from unethical business practices to unfair incarceration on a chain gang to a lack of jobs. Throughout the film, Tom is portrayed as one of Roosevelt’s Forgotten Men and the last scene with Mary and Tom, Jr. drives that point home. Forced to leave his family behind and disrespected at every town he comes to, but still holding out hope for the future—Tom is the ultimate Forgotten Man. He continues to fight and search for a stable life and

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167 *Heroes for Sale*, directed by William Wellman (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2009), DVD.
job. As Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy note, “His selfless sacrifice of all his worldly possessions provides a model for all Americans.”

Reviews of the film did not ignore the links between World War I and the Depression. Most include a reference to the film as “post-War,” and mention elements such as, “activities of American vets,” “unemployment satire,” or “depression story.” The press book for the film includes advertisement ideas in the shape of war medals and emphasizes the veteran angle. One advertisement uses the headline, “War and ‘Peace,’” adding significance to lack of peace for Tom after the war. Another discusses Richard Barthelemess’, who plays Tom, preparation for the role and describes his experience going to a flophouse and veterans he found there. All of these focus on the film’s depiction of the plight of the war veteran and his inability to find peace.

Originally, Heroes for Sale was not to end on a note of hope for a prosperous future. Tom was to die and in the final shots a dialogue between two unnamed characters was to take place. In the exchange, a boy describes him as a wonderful man and asks if there was anybody else like him. To this, a girl replies, “Yes, another man—a man who died on the cross at Calvary 1900 years ago.” This final scene likens Tom’s character and his sacrifice to that of Christ. With this ending, the Forgotten Man is Christ-like in the struggles he endures for his country. His death would have also come at the hands of the system that had pushed him out of his home and onto the streets—a direct indictment of the United State government.

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169 “Calendar of Current Events,” Variety, June 1933.
170 “Heroes for Sale,” Motion Picture Copyright, microfilm, reel no. 211, LP Reel 3953-4000.
Bloomfield, Peaceful Revolution, 165.
The released ending of the film was ordered on March 8, 1933 and four days after Roosevelt’s first inaugural address. The film was now to end on a note of hope for the future. Roosevelt’s speech would be referenced directly demonstrating faith in the new government.

Tom has been given every reason to despair and agree with Roger’s view on the end of America, and yet he does not. He believes that Roosevelt will pull the country out of the Depression and that success will return.172

Early in the election, Jack Warner had been approached by the Roosevelt campaign for his support. Warner threw his, and that of the studio’s, support behind Roosevelt by including nods to the current situation into the films produced. Prior to the election, films such as Gold Diggers of 1933 included themes that brought to light the Depression. Discussed later, the musical number, “Remember My Forgotten Man,” calls on the government to help World War I veterans in need. Warner also used 42nd Street’s exploitation campaign for Roosevelt’s benefit by creating the “42nd Street Express.” This was a train car that traveled around the country promoting both the new film and Roosevelt. After he was elected, the studio threw its support behind the new administration and the New Deal. At the end of Footlight Parade (1933) the NRA Eagle is formed during a musical number. The conclusion of Wild Boys of the Road (1933) a judge bearing a strong resemblance to Roosevelt helps the young protagonists return to their families and promises their parents will soon find jobs because of the New Deal. In Heroes for Sale this support came from the message of hope by Tom and his belief in Roosevelt’s speech. In doing this, the film’s end becomes a message for audiences not to lose hope and that if they continue to endure the Depression just a bit longer, it will end and America will prosper once more. In using the Forgotten Man, who has been cheated by the government, has lost everything,

172 Bloomfield, Peaceful Revolution, 165.
and who continues to struggle—all while holding out hope for a better future, the message becomes stronger. His sacrifice becomes a model for Americans struggling through the Depression—the Forgotten Man remembered.\footnote{Gold Diggers of 1933, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD. Footlight Parade, directed by Lloyd Bacon (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD. Wild Boys of the Road, directed by William A. Wellman (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2009), DVD. Roffman and Purdy, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, 84-86.}

Of particular significance is the reaction by the workers to losing their jobs at the laundry. When three quarters of the staff is let go, the workers riot. The new management of the company is responsible for this atrocity. But the workers do not blame them. They blame Tom and the rioters arrive at his home. He explains to them that he had no part in the job losses and had bargained with the previous owner to save their jobs. He suggests they take the new owners to court. Satisfied that he is innocent in the loss of their jobs, they then decided to go after the machines and destroy them. At no time does it occur to the mob that the new leadership of the company is at fault for their unemployment. The following scene of the mob marching to the laundry is reminiscent of Metropolis as the workers destroy the heart machine. Again, they do not blame the management for the poor working conditions, they blame the machines. It is also comparable to the fears of mechanical veterans post-War and idea that the wounded would be taken over by machine parts and the questions surrounding their humanity.

Even though it is Tom’s invention that has ultimately caused the riot, he has done everything he could to prevent the workers from getting fired. In regard to the Roosevelt Forgotten Man, Tom is deserving of help because of his wartime service. His refusal to budge on his moral principles and fight to keep the laundry employees in their jobs makes him that much more sympathetic. He will not compromise his integrity by selling the patent to the laundry.
machine. Instead he insists on striking a deal to protect the workers, knowing that if the management refuses he could lose money. Tom does not want the workers to suffer so that he may gain. After his release from jail, Tom is in possession of enough money to support himself and his son for many years. Yet he will not take it as it was made at the expense of the workers. Tom’s strict adherence to his moral code is comparable to Paul in The Man Who Reclaimed His Head. Paul refused to write articles promoting the war and as punishment Dumont had him sent to the front and kept him from getting leave. In the end, Paul sought revenge on Dumont and killed him—most likely losing his family in the process. Both Tom and Paul pay a steep price for taking the moral high ground. Ultimately, Tom is separated from his son and friends and forced to wander the country in search of a job. This struggle and separation from loved ones is also depicted in Gold Diggers of 1933.

**Gold Diggers of 1933**

Billed as the first sound film, the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 revolutionized the film industry. Studio heads clamored to convert to sound technology. The rise of the talkie brought with it an increase in popularity for many genres. The gangster and war genres, in particular, benefited as filmmakers experimented with the new medium. Sound also saw the birth of new genres, one of which was the musical. In 1929 and 1930 fifty-five and seventy-five musicals were released respectively. At this time, musicals attempted to be realistic stories with music inserted into the plot. By the end of 1930 and into 1931, the popularity of the musical had dropped significantly. *Whoopee*, released in 1930, was marketed as a new kind of musical stating, “Don’t say you’re fed up on musical comedies. Go to see ‘Whoopee’ instead…This is the new type of screen musical. There is no attempt at realism.” Musical had come to been as
unrealistic portrayals of life and, while Whoopee did see box office success, it was not enough to save the genre. Only eleven musicals were released in 1931 and ten in 1932.\footnote{Rick Altman, \textit{Film/Genre}, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 31-32.}

The backstage plot was one of the ways that filmmakers developed to make musicals more realistic. The basic idea centered on the production of a Broadway show and the issues that arise while the show is in production. Usually this involved the big star of the production falling ill and a young and unknown talent taking their place or competition with a rival theater to create the best show—and always there was a love story involved. The backstage subgenre allowed for the inclusion of musical numbers throughout the film as part of the rehearsal or the show on opening night. This was done to great effect in the 1929 \textit{Gold Diggers of Broadway}. The most successful, though, is Warner Bros.’ 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street released in 1933. 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street started a renaissance for the musical and based on pre-release press alone, Warner Bros. began production on \textit{Gold Diggers of 1933}.

Originally titled \textit{High Life} in order to keep it secret, \textit{Gold Diggers of 1933} was based off the plot of \textit{Gold Diggers of Broadway} and a 1919 play of the same name with a modern update to include Depression era themes of poverty, hardship, and unemployment.\footnote{Arthur Hove, “Introduction: In Search of Happiness,” in \textit{Gold Diggers of 1933}, ed. Tino Balio, Wisconsin/Warner Bros Screenplay Series (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 198), 9-33.} The film follows the lives of three women living in New York during the Great Depression. They are struggling to find work on Broadway as each new show they find either lacks the startup funds or gets shut down for running out of money. Eventually they find a wealthy neighbor who offers to fund a new show and write numbers for the production. The bulk of the film surrounds the new show’s production and the three chorus girls meeting and marrying three wealthy gentlemen. The four songs included in the film are “We’re in the Money,” “Pettin’ in the Park,” “Shadow Waltz,” and
“Remember My Forgotten Man.” The first and last songs are of the most importance to this study.\textsuperscript{176}

By the last six minutes of \textit{Gold Diggers of 1933}, all the story lines have been concluded—the three main couples are happily united and appear to be ready for a life of marital bliss and wealth and the show is a huge hit with the director already planning his next production. Carol, one of the three main showgirls, is called on stage for the last big number, “Remember My Forgotten Man.” Visually, the number is striking. The song begins with Carol in a doorway along a street. She watches as a man throws down his cigarette and another man, this one in a ragged suit, stoops to pick up the half-smoked cigarette. He looks at it disappointed because it has gone out. She walks over to him and uses her own, new, cigarette to light his. She then gives the man the new cigarette and takes the small one for herself. He smiles at her and walks away. She leans against a streetlight and begins to speak the lyrics to the song. Filming the opening in this way raises the question of whether she is a prostitute. Why is she on the street and what has brought her there? Later, an analysis of the lyrics will further this assumption.

When Carol finishes speaking her part, done in extreme close up, Etta Moten is seen in a window sill and begins to sing the lyrics. The scene cuts to a woman in another window holding a baby, then to an older woman on a rocking chair, then back to Moten. These women are representative of various types of hardships experienced because of World War I and the Depression. With the number taking place in 1933, it can be inferred that the woman holding the child is not a mother left single by the war. Rather, she is a mother whose husband has left to find work. The mother and child are left behind to get by as best they can until he returns. The

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Gold Diggers of 1933}, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.
other woman pictured is older and sits in a rocking chair twisting a piece of fabric. She is the representation of the mother who has sacrificed her son for the war.  

Carol begins walking down the street back to the doorframe she had come from and encounters a policeman picking up a man along the side of the road. She notices that he has a World War I service medal attached to his coat. She stares at the policeman and motions for the other man to leave. This is the first visual of the Forgotten Man. The man in the opening was ragged but we are not clear on his veteran status. This is man is undeniably a veteran. There is also a certain level of contempt for the police and authority. The policeman is in the wrong for attempting to arrest this man. He sacrificed for his country and has been cast aside to live on the street. Carol recognizes the man’s plight, but the uncaring leadership does not. The contempt demonstrated is similar to that depicted in *Metropolis, Modern Times, Dawn Patrol*, and *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*.

Suddenly the screen cuts to black and the Army is depicted as marching to war amid a crowd of cheering women and waving flags. The tone is happy and patriotic with the women rushing into the marching lines and kissing the men goodbye. Another fade to black and the men are marching to the front in the rain. The atmosphere has transformed from cheering women and well-wishers, to rain and thundering artillery. The camera pans out and a second group of men appear marching in the opposite direction. These men are wounded with bloodied and bandaged bodies and a few are carried along on stretchers. They are the future of the men going off to the

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177 The sacrificing mother is a popular archetype in war films. *The Big Parade, All Quiet on the Western Front, What Price Glory?*, and *Cavalcade* all include some version of the sacrificial mother. *Seven Days Leave* released in 1930 is an interesting departure from the usually tragic character. In this film, a childless woman pretends to have a son on the front and even goes so far as to write letters to him. She does this to fit in with the other women in the neighborhood who gather and trade stories of the horrors their sons experience. It turns out the name she has chosen actually belongs to a real soldier and when he goes on leave she convinces him to pretend to be her son. He agrees and the two become close and end up having a positive effect on each other. At the end of his leave he goes back to the front and she receives a letter saying he has been killed.
front. The scene again rapidly cuts to black. The soldiers are now civilians in a breadline and marching along a table to get food. The Busby Berkeley trademark “parade of faces,” takes place with close-ups of the marching poor. As each face passes by the men are haggard and wearing ragged clothing. They look as if they carry the weight of the world on their shoulders—demoralized at their core.

Another fade to black reveals the men now marching, in uniform, on a three-tiered set of arches while another group, in civilian clothing, marches towards the audience. They have begun to sing their own version of the song. The civilian group stops, turns, and Carol is seen in the middle of the group. They kneel before her while she sings. The scene cuts to a close-up of Carol, then pulls back and a crowd of women have joined in behind the civilian men. They all reach out their arms to Carol. The last shot is Carol framed by the Forgotten Men and Women with the tiers of marching soldiers behind her. The screen fades to black and the film ends.

This last portion of the song ties everything seen together. The uniformed men marching in the tiers represent the World War I veteran and emphasizes the link with the unemployed. Those in the breadline come from under the arches and march towards the audience. They are the future of the silhouetted soldier marching above their heads. Carol’s place at the center of the men illustrates the impact the situation has had on women. The men all reach to her but do not touch her. There is a physical separation between the sexes. Men and woman cannot be together because of the Depression. As their men had gone off to war in 1917, they must now leave again to find work and the women are left behind. This is also alluded to in the window scenes with the

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178 Busby Berkeley, the choreography director of the film, was known for his lavish musical numbers. Most of these would include the “parade of faces,” which involved the camera panning along a line of dancers in close-up. It was usually used to highlight the youth and beauty of the dancers. The other three musical numbers in the picture included the parade of faces and close-ups of young, beautiful women. Jeffery Spivak, Buzz (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2011).
women at home by themselves. Their expressions are demoralized and weighted and matches that of the men in the breadline. Matthew Johnson, a biographer of Joan Blondell, describes the visual of the men reaching for Carol, “They reach out to her in communion, each a victim of society’s betrayal.” The Forgotten Man has been betrayed by society and the government and they continue to ignore his pleas. This is coupled with the feeling that the government had also betrayed the country by entering into World War I. A generation of young men had died in the war and little had been achieved. This musical number is another example of the plethora of films that exhibited this feeling of betrayal.\footnote{Gold Diggers: FDR’s New Deal...Broadway Bound, directed by Eric Clawson and Karen Hillhouse, (2006; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD. Matthew Kennedy, Joan Blondell (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 56.}

Visually, “Remember My Forgotten Man,” is a representation of the Forgotten Man. Sumner’s Forgotten Man is imposed upon by the government to take care of the poor. When this impinges his or her ability to live, the government forgets him and moves on. Roosevelt’s Forgotten Man is the World War I veteran that has been asked by the government to fight a war and then forgotten when he returns home—the spent bullets. These men need remembered now in order to pull the economy out of the Depression. They are the backbone of the country.

Thus far, only the aesthetics of the musical number has been discussed. Lyrically, the song has the same impact. The song begins by questioning whether the man (in regard to the film, “the man,” is the one Carol gives a cigarette to) is deserving of sympathy but also pointing out that that does not matter. The singer was content until the war began and her man was asked to fight. She explains, “You put a rifle in his hand/you sent him far away/ you shouted: ‘Hip-hooray!’” She goes on to explain that the Forgotten Man was asked to cultivate the land and with hard work he did so. Now though, he is broken. He is unable to take care of the singer and this
has also broken her. She ends her song, “And once, he used to love me/ I was happy then/ he used to take care of me/ won’t you bring him back again?...Forgetting him, you see/ means you’re forgetting me/ like my forgotten man.”

The lyrics in this portion of the song correspond with the visual components and align with the Roosevelt Forgotten Man. The Forgotten Man was asked by his government to fight the war and left to fend for himself when he returned. When he most needs help, he is ignored. In doing this, the wives, mothers, children—they are all forgotten as well. He is unable to care for his family. The song adds another factor, called attention to by Roosevelt in particular, but left out of the visual representation—the plight of the farmer. Carol sings, “you had him cultivate the land/he walked behind the plow/the sweat fell from his brow.” As mentioned above, one of Roosevelt’s objectives was to alleviate the suffering of the farming sector. During his “Forgotten Man Speech,” he stated, “I cannot escape the conclusion that one of the essential parts of a national program of restoration must be to restore purchasing power to the farming half of the country.” In the song, the men had done what was asked of them by farming the land and going to war. Now they deserve aid in their time of need. Mick LaSalle points out that the song raises the question, “If a citizen has an implicit obligation to come to the government’s aid in a time of need, why not the other way around?” This idea, which permeated the Depression era, is fully illustrated in the song.180

Another element of this song is the Forgotten Woman. The original Forgotten Man outlined by Sumner allowed for employed women to also be forgotten. Roosevelt shifted this when he made the Forgotten Man a veteran of the First World War. This took away the agency of women and meant that she must be attached to a man for her happiness and security. Carol is

180 LaSalle, Dangerous Men, 190.
the consequence of allowing the Forgotten Man to remain forgotten. From her style of dress, placement along on a corner, and the familiar way she treats the men she encounters, the message is that she is a prostitute. As she sings, it is clear that she has experienced the loss in the song first hand. She is forced to walk the street to survive. She explains that she was once happy and taken care of, but now that her man is gone she is not. When the men are unable to fulfill their duty of taking care of their woman, she is forced to the street to survive and by ignoring, or forgetting the Man, society is taking an active hand in the sexual corruption of the Woman.  

The message sent to audiences is that by forgetting the Forgotten Man, women are also forgotten, forcing a separation of the sexes, similar to what happened during World War I. This serves to further the link between the Great Depression and the Great War.  

In many of the films that take place during or immediately after the war, there is a separation of the sexes. *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) looks at the experience of soldiers and includes a scene with German infantry spending the night with French farm girls, after which they must leave to go back to the front. *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) looks at the hurried wartime romance between a British nurse and a French soldier in Italy. She discovers she is pregnant after he leaves for the front and dies after fleeing to Switzerland to have the child. Taking place after the war, *Strange Interlude* (1932) is a strange film that includes a love triangle that develops when a woman cannot marry her true love after he dies in the war. After his death, she seeks the company of many men before marrying a man she does not love in order to find security. She then has an affair with another man and finds herself wishing she had married him instead. It becomes clear throughout the film that her life would have been very different had her first love not died in the war—separating them forever. *Ace of Aces, Surrender, The Man Who Reclaimed*
His Head, Grand Hotel, The Black Cat, and The Man From Yesterday, all previously discussed also include this story line. These examples take place during the war and the force separating man and woman is World War I.

*I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* and *Heroes for Sale* also depict a separation of the sexes. With *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, Allen returns from war wanting more out of life than what he had experienced prior to his service. When he leaves to find a new job, he also breaks up with this girlfriend from before the war. After his first escape from prison, he meets and marries a woman who blackmails him. They become estranged and he falls in love with Helen. He is forced away from her after his second escape when he must stay on the run to survive. In *Heroes for Sale*, Tom is separated from his mother when she dies while he is at the narcotics farm. His wife is trampled to death during a riot caused by the firing of hundreds of laundry workers. After Tom is released from jail he is forced from the city because it is believed he is a communist supporter. He is forced to leave his son behind, but also Mary. Mary owns the boarding house where he lived after his stint in rehab and she runs the soup kitchen he has given his fortune to. After the death of his wife, he and Mary have fallen in love as she helps him navigate his tumultuous life. When Tom leaves town, Mary is left behind alone. In *The Crowd*, it appears as if John and Mary will separate when he cannot find work. Once he becomes a street clown, they reconcile. All of these instances, and the examples in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, have some connection to World War I and the Depression.

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182*All Quiet on the Western Front*, directed by Lewis Milestone (1930; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.
*A Farewell to Arms*, directed by Frank Borzage (1932; Chatsworth, CA: Westlake Entertainment Group, 2004), DVD.
The trend of the separation of the sexes demonstrated in these films was not created by the film industry to call more attention to the plight of the Forgotten Man. Between 1929 and 1933 the marriage rate declined 22% and the birth rate declined 15%, illustrating the impact the Depression was having on families across the country. Other films during this period showed the creation of the couple as crucial to the continuation of gender norms. The Forgotten Man films reflect the couple as torn apart and women unable to conform to the model of wife and mother.183 These films serve to underscore Roosevelt’s call to arms by warning that continued indifference would result in the disintegration of the American family and the detriment of women and children. The fabric of society was at stake and traditional American values were in danger of crumbling.

After the montage of men marching to war, marching to the front, and then joining the breadline, the last portion of the song begins and is sung by the men that surround Carol. The men explain that they were asked to fight and did so out of pride and glory, but that that glory died with the war. When they came back to the United States, they were asked to live again as they did before, but were unable to do so. They end their lament by saying, “Remember your forgotten men/ You’ve got to let us live again/ We came, we marched away, to fight for USA, but where are we today?” This harkens directly back to Roosevelt’s speech. Roosevelt evoked the image of the government mobilizing hundreds of thousands of troops for World War I and succeeding in doing so. Now, when the country is in the middle of an economic catastrophe, those men have been forgotten when they are the answer to the issues facing the nation. If this group can be mobilized and employed again, Roosevelt believes the economy can recover.

183 Martin Rubin, “1933-Movies and the New Deal in Entertainment,” in American Cinema of the 1930s, ed. Ina Rae Hark (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 110. Films that depict the creation of the couple idea include: Divorcee (1930), Female (1933), and Kept Husbands (1932)
When the men conclude their part of the song, Carol picks it back up and sings her part again. It is the last question of the men’s portion, “…but where are we today?” that is most telling of both the song and the movie as a whole. “Remember My Forgotten Man,” is the last musical number featured in the film and when it ends, the Warner’s logo appears and the curtain falls. As abruptly as the film ends, it begins just as suddenly with the song, “We’re in the Money.” Also known as, “The Gold Diggers Song,” this number features women wearing costumes made of gold and silver coins, singing that the Depression is over, they are able to pay rent, and they are out of the breadline. Large coins provide the backdrop for the number. As the women sing, dance, and rejoice at their newfound riches, the police come in to repossess the props for unpaid bills, going so far as taking the coins that make up the costume of the dancers. The production is shut down and the women are all sent home—out of work and back to the breadline.

By opening the film in this way, a dreamlike state is created. While the production is shut down, the song demonstrates that hope still existed for the Depression to end. When the women are sent home the story beings as they attempt to find work. As they struggle they are depicted as stealing milk off a neighbor’s balcony, sharing one bed, and sharing one nice outfit that rotates between them for interviews. Eventually they do find work and then wealthy husbands. It appears as if they find stability in a world that seems to be in constant flux. All seems well—until the last number. It is at this point that the dreamy quality that has taken hold of the film ends. “Remember My Forgotten Man,” provides a stark reality, especially when compared to the rest of the film. The number is saturated with the effects of World War I on the nation, society’s apathy for the plight of the veterans, and a social consciousness for the issues facing the United States. The juxtaposition of “We’re in the Money,” and “Remember My Forgotten Man,” as the
bookends of the film illustrate the sense of hope held by Americans and their sense of despair due to the Depression, leaving the audience truly wondering, “where are we today?”

On the heels of Roosevelt’s first inauguration, while Americans were asking what was next, the Atlantic Monthly published an article by Wilson Follett titled, “The Forgotten Man to his President.” In the article, Follett explains to Roosevelt that the American people have placed their faith in him and offers a warning. He has been elected on the pretense of changing the country and pulling it out of the Depression. If he lets the American public down, they will abandon him. He explains that Roosevelt was not elected so much on his merit, but on the failings of his predecessors, stating, “…but because their acts in the preceding twelve years suffered by comparisons with any tolerable standard.” Follett also says that he believes that had Roosevelt been in office during the Bonus Army incident, that he would have gone out to meet the veterans and struck a deal with them rather than running them out of Washington with fire hoses and tear gas. Follett ends his message to Roosevelt by asking what kind of politician he is, “We are ready, heart and ear, for a savior. Have we him? Or have we, instead, an attractive and facile man, an able politician, a fluent compromiser, whose importance to history in the long run will be that he once called attention to the neglected works of William Graham Sumner?” Follett’s article draws attention to the failings of post-War America to follow through with the promises of 1917 and asks now that the trust of the American people not be misplaced to navigate out of the Depression. The films discussed above all represent the fear and hope outlined in Follett’s article. They place emphasis on the service of the veterans during World War I and the failure of society to provide for them on their return. They depict the forced separation that took place both during the war and during the Depression. Above all, they

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184 Spivak, Buzz, 76.
demonstrate the hope for the future that Roosevelt’s election had brought, the same hope felt in 1917 when the thousands marched off to, “make the world safe for democracy.”
On a snowy evening, an elderly squirrel walks through a village decorated for Christmas. Around him the houses appear to be constructed from military helmets and gas masks. As he passes through the village, other animals are caroling and singing “Peace on Earth.” When he arrives home, his grandchildren are just getting ready for bed. They beg him for a story and as he takes them on his lap and begins to sit in the comfy rocking chair vacated by his daughter, he sits on her knitting. Comically pulling the knitting needles from his backside, he recites “oh yes, peace on earth, good will towards men, yes good will towards men.” His grandchildren look at confusedly at him and ask what men are. Their question seems to catch him off guard and he chuckles while explaining that, “there ain’t no men in the world no more, sonnies.” He then begins to tell them of men and describes them as monsters who, “wore great big iron pots on their head and walked on their hind legs and they carried terrible lookin’ shootin’ irons with knives on the end of them.” As he continues, he tells his grandchildren about how men fought war after war, each more absurd than the last, until only two remained, at which point they killed each other and ended the human race. He concludes his story by describing the rebuilding done by the animals after the demise of man and how they live peacefully with one another. When he finishes his tale, his grandchildren are asleep and he goes back out into the village made with the leftovers of mankind.

This scene comes from the 1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer animated short, “Peace on Earth.” It was the first MGM animated film nominated for an Oscar for Best Short Subject (it

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186 During this montage of marching armies depicting the various wars, among the armies are Flatfoots versus the Non-Flatfoots and the Meat Eaters versus the Vegetarians.
would lose to the Walt Disney produced, “Ugly Duckling”). “Peace on Earth” was released on December 9, 1939, just three short months after Germany invaded Poland. While produced for children, the short film sends a powerful message to adults about the futility of war and the dangers of continued fighting. The previous chapters of this dissertation discussed how the World War I veteran was used to portray a broader message about the war and the current state of affairs. With the stricter enforcement of the Production Code in 1934, the socio-critical element of many films was downplayed or eliminated. This was coupled with the Great Depression raging across the country. The plight of the wounded veteran was overshadowed by the millions of unemployed and the out of work veteran was no longer needed to legitimize a state of unemployment. Films such as My Man Godfrey portrayed the poor without a veteran history to legitimize their state. The number of films with World War I veterans decreased throughout the 1930s. But with a new world war looming in Europe, the number of war related films saw an increase by the end of the decade. The following films are case study examples of how World War I veterans were used to reflect the socio-critical issues at the end of the 1930’s and into the era of World War II and demonstrate a change in the character from the pre-Code veteran and continued use of the veteran for contemporary purposes.

The Roaring Twenties

Released in 1939 by Warner Bros., The Roaring Twenties, follows the wartime and post-war experience of three men. The main character is Eddie Bartlett, he is a mechanic before the war and plans to resume his job when his service ends. Lloyd Hart is fresh out of law school when he joins the war and plans to open his own firm when the war ends. George Hally works for his father’s saloon before the war and uses his experience on the front to hone his skills in
fighting, hoping to circumvent Prohibition and continue in the saloon business. Lloyd and George both accomplish their goals. Lloyd becomes a successful lawyer and George becomes a successful bootlegger by capitalizing on Prohibition.

Eddie’s post-war life is much different. He is released from the army in late 1919, after the celebrations for returning soldiers end. He is unable to get his job back and goes to work as a part-time taxi driver. One evening he is picked up for bootlegging when he is asked to deliver a package containing alcohol. When he gets out of jail he is offered a job as a bootlegger and accepts. The rest of the film follows Eddie’s career in the bootlegging business through the end of Prohibition. When Prohibition ends, Eddie is out of work once again. The film concludes with this death on the steps of the Community Church. There are three key instances in the film that are relevant to this discussion of the World War I veteran.188

The first is the opening of the film. A title card opens the film with an introduction relating current events to the events of World War I, “Today, while the earth shakes beneath the heels of the marching troops, while a great portion of the world trembles before the threats of acquisitive power-mad men, we of America have little time to remember an astounding era in our own recent history an era which will grow more and more incredible with each passing generation until someday people will say it never could’ve happened at all. April, 1918. Almost a million American young men are engaged in a struggle which they have been told will make the world safe for democracy.” This transitions into scenes of battle on the front. Eddie, George, and Lloyd are waiting out a bombardment in a shell hole. They chat as the shells burst overhead.

Later the three are in a bombed out building discussing their plans for after the war. Lloyd plans to open his own law office in the Woolworth building, he even has an office picked

188 *The Roaring Twenties*, directed Raoul Walsh (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.
out. Before answering what his plans are after the war, George pauses to shoot a German and
laughs as he says, “that sucker jumped three feet in the air and come down stiff as a board.” He
then explains he wants to continue with the saloon business and plans to go against Prohibition.
Earlier, he had expressed his resentment for the authority of the Army and this further establishes
his outlaw personality. Eddie says he wants to go back to his old job and save money to own his
own mechanic shop. When George criticizes him by saying, “you want to make money the hard
way,” Eddie brushes it off by replying that he just wants to stay out of trouble. As they talk, a
young German appears and Lloyd refuses to shoot him because he looks to be around fifteen.
George has no trouble and shoots the boy while saying, “he won’t see 16.” Right after George
shoots the boy, the three men receive word that the Armistice has been signed and the war is
over. They celebrate and George looks at his gun stating, “you know, I like this, I think I’ll take
it with me.” The scene then cuts to men returning on a ship amid cheers and parades and the
changes taking place throughout the country.

This opening portion of the film establishes the personalities of the three main
caracters—George the tough-guy gangster, Lloyd the mild-mannered lawyer, and Eddie who
does his duty while in service and dreams of owning his own business upon discharge. It is
George who is of particular importance here. He comes into the Army already having issues with
authority. He has a background in the saloon business, working for his father before the war,
possibly as a bouncer. It is also clear that he has a tendency towards violence. In the short time
the three men are talking in the building, George kills two Germans and jokes about both. He
shows no remorse for his actions. His comment after the armistice is announced about taking the
gun home with him also alludes to the idea of the war teaching him further violent skills that he
can take with him into the illegal liquor business. The war has not directly led to George’s future as a criminal, but it has given him skills to make him a better criminal.

The second scene of importance takes place when Eddie returns from the front. After the armistice, a newsreel-like voiceover explains that New York has tired of the constant stream of triumphant returning soldiers. Eddie comes back with the last group at the end of the year, “almost forgotten by all but their relatives and friends.” When he returns to the mechanic for his job, there are two men talking while working on a car. One of them notes that Eddie used to work there and thinks he will get his job back because of his uniform. The other replies, “yeah, those monkeys are gonna find out what a picnic they had on Uncle Sam’s dough while we stayed home and worked.” Eddie is turned down by his old boss and asks what happened to the promise of his job always being there. The boss apologizes but there is nothing he can do to help. As Eddie dejectedly leaves the shop, he hears the two men working on the car singing, “Left, I had a good job and I left, left,” to a marching tune. He turns around and punches them.

This is followed by a montage of newsreel voiceovers documenting the current events and Eddie’s struggle to find work. He goes from business to business only to be turned away. Businesses close and employment lines increase across New York City. The voiceover explains, “Back in this country, the boys who had returned from overseas begin to find out that the world has moved on during the time they spent in France….Everywhere things have changed, but particularly in New York. The old Broadway is only a memory, gone are many of the famous landmarks. For already, America is feeling the effects of Prohibition. There’s a concentrated effort at adjustment to normal peace time activity but unemployment, coming in the wake of the wartime boom is beginning to grip the country.”
There seems to be contradicting messages when Eddie attempts to regain his job and the voiceover and montage immediately following. On the one hand, Eddie’s inability to return to work is directly blamed on the war. He had been gone for two years and in that time another man has been hired to do the job. As the owner of the garage explains, he cannot fire the new man because Eddie has come back from the war. If Eddie had not gone to Europe, he could have continued to work and his job would have been secure. There is also the resentment from the two men working on a car when Eddie arrives. They both criticize his decision for having gone to war and leaving a good job behind. If the United States had not gotten involved in the war or if Eddie had decided to stay home, this would not be an issue. There is no mention of whether Eddie is a volunteer or was drafted, just that he made a poor choice in going to Europe and has lost his job because of it.

On the other hand, the voiceover and montage contradicts all of this. Blame seems to be placed on the changing culture of the country and Prohibition rather than the war. Images of couples dancing, rising hemlines, and masses of people illustrate the changes that have taken place. New York City is zeroed in on as the center of these changes and everything the soldiers had known from before the war is now gone. The last line of the voiceover explains that people are attempting to get back to normal peace time activities but fail because of unemployment. The line before that though mentions America beginning to feel the effects of Prohibition. While the wartime boom has ended and the result is unemployment, the inability to fully bounce back from this seems to be blamed on Prohibition. The fault lies, not with the war but with the addition of Prohibition which added an extra layer of change and problems to content with in the post-war culture of the United States. Soldiers were unable to keep up with the rapid changes taking place across the United States and had a more difficult time finding employment because of this.
Fed up, Eddie begins to drive a friend’s taxi part-time. One evening, he is asked to deliver a package. Unknown to him, the package is illegal alcohol and he is arrested. He is sentenced to jailtime and while there his cellmate recognizes he is a veteran. When Eddie asks how he knew, the man replies, “we all got the stamp on us, we can’t sit still. We’ve seen too much action, too much blood. They think after that we can just sit around and twiddle our thumbs. We can’t.” Later, the man discusses how he has considered killing himself with a gun he used in a robbery.

Similar to the portrayal of veterans seen in earlier films in this dissertation, the man Eddie meets in jail exhibits symptoms of shell shock. He is not content with his new civilian life and feels as if he cannot fit in because he has seen too many horrible things. His words echo those of Rocky, Shep, Cary, and Tony. He feels useless and restless, turning to crime to survive and quickly losing his will to continue living. His comments about using the gun from the robbery reflect the high number of veteran suicides seen in the wake of the war. Here the war is portrayed as the blame for the problems this man has encountered.

The woman who was in the taxi when Eddie was arrested pays his jail fines and offers him a job in the bootlegging business. She explains that she knew someone who went to France and never came back and wants to help Eddie. He decides to take her offer and a newsreel explains that he has joined the “army against Prohibition.” The use this phrase is of interesting because of the idea of Eddie’s going into another war. In essence, he is going from one front to the next. Earlier in the film, a voiceover explains that, “the soldiers find they’ve returned to face, on a different front, the same old struggle: the struggle to survive.” The war against Prohibition provides yet a third a front.
Eight years earlier, the gangster film *The Public Enemy* almost included a similar scene. In the original ending of that film, gangster Tommy Powers is murdered by a rival gang and placed on the front porch of his home. His war veteran brother finds his body and in an act of revenge goes to his military trunk, removes a hand grenade, and leaves in search of the gang. The Production Code Administration demanded the ending be changed because the portrayed link between criminal activity and veterans was too strong. In both cases, the veterans are brought into lives of crime. With *The Public Enemy*, the veteran turns to crime in order to avenge the death of his brother. In *The Roaring Twenties*, the veteran is forced into racketeering because of unemployment and his inability to find a stable paying job.

While most of *The Roaring Twenties* is in line with the films of the early 1930s and the portrayal of veteran’s postwar problems with employment and readjustment, there seems to be a shift in the cause of these issues. The earlier films place a larger blame on the wartime leadership and government for the war itself and postwar problems. In *The Roaring Twenties*, the blame is placed on the individual. Each of the three main characters make choices that lead to their success or failure. George plans while the war is still taking place to break the law and continue selling alcohol. He becomes one of the most successful bootleggers in the country and after Prohibition ends continues as a crime boss by entering the gambling racket. Lloyd planned to become a successful lawyer, even having his office picked out in the city. After the war he works hard to accomplish this goal. He does fall into the racketeering life briefly, when Eddie hires him as a lawyer for his taxi business that fronts his bootlegging. Lloyd is aware that what he is doing is illegal, but no one has gotten hurt and he feels a loyalty towards Eddie because of their wartime experiences. It is not until someone is killed that Lloyd leaves Eddie’s business. After that he marries, has children, and finds stable and legal employment as a lawyer.
Eddie expresses his desire to own a mechanic shop and plans to go back to his old job. His goal is very close-ended. George is almost guaranteed success because he plans to circumvent the law. Lloyd wants to be a lawyer, and while he dreams of working in the Woolworth building, that is an end goal for one day. Eddie has no plan beyond returning to his old life, which he cannot do because the country has changed while he was away. Once this fails, he has no contingency. He is shown attempting to find work and then settling to drive the taxi part time. When he is offered the job as a racketeer he quickly chooses that life, which can be interpreted as a weakness on his part for not trying hard to find legitimate employment. There is no larger indictment on the leadership or government, rather it is the individual choices of the men that drives the plot. They are in control of their future, which is a shift from previous veteran films that portrayed the veterans at the mercy of an uncaring leadership and government.

Stanley Soloman in his work *Beyond Formula: American Film Genres* points out that once Eddie decides to become a criminal, he realizes that he is in control of his own destiny, “whereas when he tries to find an honest existence for himself he is entirely at the mercy of an indifferent, sometimes cruel society.” The reason for this cruel society remain ambiguous. Certainly, the war has played a role in the unemployment and problems with readjustment, but the introduction of Prohibition has brought an additional catalyst to the mix. This acts to lessen the blame of World War I.

While *The Roaring Twenties* begins to break from tradition in questioning the war and blaming it for many of the world’s troubles by alluding to the possibility that Prohibition had caused many of the problems of the 1920s, coupled with *Peace on Earth* the narrative remains

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largely unchanged. The Great War showed humanity that war is futile and nothing good comes from fighting. The following year, the film *The Fighting 69th* shows a shift in this narrative.

**The Fighting 69th**

Again, starring James Cagney as Jerry Plunkett, the Warner Bros. film *The Fighting 69th* is based on the true combat experiences of Father Duffy and the Irish Brigade. The story focuses on Jerry Plunkett, a draftee who resents having to be in the service and who believes himself “yella” after seeing the destruction that shells have on the body. Father Duffy becomes a mentor for Plunkett and encourages him to keep his faith and pray to help with his fear. By the end of the film, Plunkett has transformed from being unruly and fearful to brave and self-sacrificing. After Father Duffy is wounded in a hospital roof collapse, Plunkett goes back to the front to see Mike, a soldier he has fought with many times during the course of the film, attempt to take on a machine gun nest. When Mike gets injured, Plunkett takes over the task and jumps on a grenade to save the other man’s life. Father Duffy delivers Plunkett’s Last Rites and Plunkett expresses his lack of fear has he dies. The film ends with a statue of Father Duffy in Time’s Square and the ghosts of men marching past it with a voiceover of a prayer by Father Duffy asking to be kind to those of America’s Lost Generation and to let the rest of the world see the United States as a beacon of peace and be inspired.190

In many ways, the transformation that Plunkett experiences in Europe is similar what the United States goes through during World War I. Plunkett never wanted to be in the service. From the time he was first drafted and entered training camp, he was depicted as reluctant to fight and follow orders. Once he seems the horrific toll the war takes on man and sees the only person to believe in him wounded, he has a change of heart and sacrifices himself for the good of the unit. The United States was reluctant to engage itself in the European conflict. The threat was to the European powers, not to the United States. In 1917, when the U.S. finally enters the war, it is under the auspice of “making the world safe for

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democracy.” In other words, the United States has become willing to sacrifice men in the name of peace and for the good of the world.

Coming during the first year of the Second World War in Europe, The Fighting 69th takes a stance towards the center on the question of war. On the one hand, the prayer at the end of the film establishes the isolationist policy of the United States and makes the country a standard for war-torn Europe to work towards. On the other, the courage of the American forces and the heroism of these men is celebrated. There is no question of why the men are fighting, there is no implication that those in charge are inept or uncaring, the film does not end with the men having died in vain for a war which brought little resolution. Instead, the country is celebrated as courageous and those who fought are thanked for their service. The desire to remain isolated from the war in Europe is still apparent but behind this, if needed, the United States will again enter the war and again be the bringers of peace. Warner Bros. also did not demonize Germans as would be seen in the films that took a more staunch stance in support of either war. The ambiguous stance towards World War II demonstrates that Warner Bros. was conscious of the political climate of the time and did not want to push too far towards one way or the other.¹⁹¹ The last film discussed in this dissertation completes the transformation of the World War I films.

**Sergeant York**

Released in 1941, Warner Bros.’ Sergeant York is a biographical film focusing on the wartime experiences of Alvin York. Comparable in success to All Quiet on the Western Front, Sergeant York was nominated for ten Academy Awards and won for Best Actor and Best Film Editing. The story begins in the mountains of Tennessee in 1916. Alvin is an excellent shot and known around the community for his drinking and wild behavior. When he meets Gracie, he changes with the aim to marry her. One evening, when his plan to buy a plot of land fails he goes out into a thunderstorm and is struck by lightning. Surviving the strike, he turns to God and becomes a religious man. The war is in full swing in Europe, but

many in the small Tennessee community do not know the war is taking place and those who do know do not see how it pertains to them at all.

When the United States enters the war, many of the young men in the community plan to join the army. Alvin decides to wait to be drafted. In reality, Alvin is not registered with the draft. He tells Pastor Pile, the religious leader, that he will not register because, “war is killin’ and the book’s agin it, so the war is agin the book.” Pile encourages Alvin to register as a Conscientious Objector. When the church is not recognized as exempt from the draft, Alvin plans to appeal but is drafted before the appeal can go through. While at camp, Alvin reveals his talent shooting and is promoted. Once at the front, he proves himself by taking out an entire German force by himself, taking 132 prisoners total and killing 20. He is promoted to Sergeant and awarded medals. He arrives home a hero and is offered endorsements and entertainment deals. He turns them all down to return to Tennessee where he finds a farm and land waiting for him and Gracie. The film ends as they walk across the land to their future.¹⁹²

There are three important scenes in the film that set the tone for the feelings of the war. The first is after Alvin leaves for camp. His mother and sister are still at home and his sister questions why the war is being fought. His mother responds, “I don’t rightly know child, I don’t rightly know.” This is of importance because it is not clear what these men are being drafted or volunteering for. They are leaving to fight and die, but to what end? The war means little to the people in this small Tennessee community, why should they be expected to fight?

This scene demonstrates, not only a question being asked in 1917, but also in 1941. Why should the United States involve itself in yet another European conflict? Alvin’s conscientious objector status is based on his religious beliefs. He does not want to involve himself in any conflict where he is required to kill another human. With Alvin’s mother and sister, both on the homefront and more representative of the whole of the United States, questioning why the war is fought, the answer that comes later in the film is set up to both respond to Alvin’s C.O. status and his mother and sister’s question.

¹⁹² *Sergeant York*, directed by Howard Hawks (1941; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.
When Alvin arrives in camp, it is well known that he tried to escape service by being declared a conscientious objector. He is assigned to work digging ditches and the men treat him with suspicion. During target practice, Alvin proves his worth by making six bullseyes in a row. Major Buxton asks to see him and tells him he has been suggested for a promotion to Corporal. Alvin declines because of his religion. Major Buxton gives him a book of United States history and explains that every American shares the heritage of freedom and must fight to defend that heritage. He then gives Alvin ten days leave to consider his options. When he returns, if he still feels that accepting the promotion is against his religion, Major Buxton will recommend Alvin’s exemption from service.

In a powerful scene, Alvin takes the history book back home and sits on a mountain side with a sweeping view of the valley below. As he sits, he hears both Pastor Pile and Major Buxton in his head discussing their respective views. The voices begin to blend together until all he hears are the words, “God,” and “Country.” He returns to camp and accepts the promotion. He has decided to defend his country’s freedom and God’s creation.

In Major Buxton’s speech to Alvin about the duty of America and in the mix of voices he hears on the cliff, the echoes of Wilson’s desire to make the world safe for democracy can be heard once again. It is the duty of the United States to intervene and bring the world back to peace. While the country may not have been pulled into the war yet, by the time of the film’s release, it is clear that the pendulum of support for the war was swinging in favor of action.

Shortly after Alvin brings in his German prisoners, Buxton questions him on why he killed the twenty Germans. Alvin replies, “I figured them guns was killin’ hundreds, maybe thousands, there wasn’t nothing anybody could do but stop them guns and that’s what I done.” His decision to take lives came as a result of his desire to save lives.

As with The Fighting 69th and Plunkett’s transformation into a self-sacrificing model soldier, Alvin has transformed as well. He was originally reluctant to join the fighting because he did not believe it was his place to take the life of another. However, he changes his mind when he realizes that by killing a few he actually saved many. The United State’s entrance into World War I shortened the war and saved
lives. We sacrificed men and resources to bring peace to the world and at the time of the Sergeant York’s release, it appeared as if the United States was on the brink of doing so again.

The release of Sergeant York came just months before the United States would be brought into World War II with the attack on Pearl Harbor. The film marks an important shift in the narrative of World War I films and veterans. Alvin York came home and was celebrated as a true American hero. Much as the United States itself had to learn why it was fighting, Alvin experienced a change of heart as he entered the Army and decided to fight for freedom. World War I was no longer a war fought in vain for nothing, but rather it had become a display of American heroism. Just as Alvin York’s actions led to the saving of lives, America’s role in the war had done the same. Unlike the films of the early 1930s, there was no question of why the United States fought the war and no hint that veterans returned to a society who had forgotten them. Instead, Sergeant York shows a United States ready to defend its freedom by any means, helping bring the rest of the world to peace, and celebrating returning veterans.

The Future of the Veteran

As discussed earlier, Peter Rollins and John E. O’Connor explained there were two contrasting ways of remembering World War I. The first is the heroic, romantic view of war as seen in the films of the early 1920s and the second is that of sacrificial slaughter and the wasting of a generation, the films which make up the bulk of this dissertation. The films discussed above demonstrate each of these viewpoints. Peace on Earth illustrates a world, so war torn that humans have eliminated themselves altogether and the world has been taken over by animals. The Roaring Twenties comments on the age of the recruits in the German army and includes the needless death of a young soldier just minutes before the armistice is announced. When the men return from war, the film then portrays the difficulty of readjustment and the struggle to survive in the face of a cruel and uncaring society. The Fighting 69th marks a time of transition. There is an element of sacrificial slaughter, but it is presented as being for the greater good of humanity. The question of whether the United States should be fighting is left ambiguous.

Sergeant York marks a full return to the heroic vision of the early 1920s. There is glory in the victory of Alvin York, he has fought and won for America and returns a hero.

The reality is that Peter Rollins and John E. O’Connor only break the surface with their characterization of World War I films. What we can learn these goes far deeper than glory or slaughter. From the films discussed through the chapters of this dissertation we see the concerns, changes, and problems of society cast on to body of the veteran for the audience to attempt an understanding of the shifting culture. As the modern industrial society grew and unemployment skyrocketed, the veteran became the lens through which the population came to understand these changes.

The elements found throughout the films in this dissertation continue to be included in films even through the contemporary era. 1972’s Johnny Got His Gun, based on the 1939 anti-war novel by Dalton Trumbo, uses the atrocities of World War I to provide a larger message about the Vietnam War. More recently, the popular television series Downton Abbey (2010-2015) and Boardwalk Empire (2010-2014) both included World War I veterans as lead characters. Downton Abbey discussed the toll of impotency on romantic relationships in the post-war world, the changes the aristocracy experienced in the wake of the war in England, and the impact of the war on those at home. The role of women took a center stage in the series as the mansion house became a convalescent home and the women took on prominent leadership roles in the running of the home. As Maggie Andrews explains in “Poppies, Tommies, and Remembrance,” increasingly media is moving from remembrance on the battlefield to remembrance on the home front and exploring the lives of women during the war. Boardwalk Empire took on shell shock, veteran crime rates, and the horrific facial wounds that altered a veteran’s entire life.

Even the Harry Potter franchise has taken on the plight of the World War I veteran. The first installment of the new films series Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them (2016) sees the non-magic character Jacob return from the war in the same time period as Eddie Bartlett without the fanfare of well-wishers. He desperately wants to open a bakery but is turned down for a bank loan because machines can

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do the job faster and the food tastes the same. Jacob works for a canning factory, and while his job waits for him when he returns home, he expresses his and others discontent working there explaining that they are all dying on the inside and are becoming just another cog in the machine. Jacob’s words echo those of James Allen, Rocky Thorne, and Eddie Bartlett from over half a century earlier and represents just how deeply the wounds left by World War I continue to impact the world.
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VITA
Tiffany I. Weaver

Education

Pennsylvania State University- Harrisburg
2013 – present
PhD: American Studies

Shippensburg University
2010-2012
Master of Arts: Applied History
Master of Science: Organizational Development and Leadership Concentration of Historical Administration

Shippensburg University
2006-2009
Bachelor of Arts: History, concentration: Public History
Minor: International Studies

Selected Presentations


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