"Seeing is Believing":

American Male Identity through Hollywood's WWI

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between war movies and their effect on American culture during the years 1925-1941. As white American men confronted the changes taking place in the twentieth-century, they turned to new forms of idealized identity—specifically, Hollywood representations of heroic masculinity. In the years between WWI and WWII, as white men faced challenges to their cultural hegemony, American men sought nostalgic forms of idealized masculinity through Hollywood heroes.

Hollywood's war genre provided audiences with ideal versions of masculinity via men onscreen. Soldiers in movies became the epitome of masculinity and American identity in a transitional era of "modern" values—combining Victorian and twentieth century definitions of American manhood. The exceptional and masculine narrative in Hollywood movies shaped how audiences reacted to onscreen heroes and the history portrayed. Spectators fashioned identities through their fondness of actor's roles and used those identities in their everyday lives.

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If it was not for my dearest friend, Kendra Robinson, I doubt I would have gone back to school and completed my degree. She was a rock when I needed one, and she always pushed me to succeed. Her example is what made me decide to pursue a Master degree. My parents also deserve recognition here. Many times when I thought I might fail, their help and support encouraged me to do better.

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Introduction
Hollywood Culture, Hollywood's War

When the Army drafted Alvin York in 1917, he tried to register as a conscientious objector due to his religious beliefs. The draft board discarded his objections, and York reported to basic training at Camp Gordon, Georgia in November. He became one of World War I's most decorated soldiers and returned to rural Tennessee, a national hero. Congress awarded York the Medal of Honor for helping capture 132 German soldiers, and France bestowed the French Croix de Guerre.[1] Because of his heroic feats in war, Alvin York became a role model for Americans throughout the years between WWI and WWII, with his exploits memorialized in books, newspapers, and later in film.

Sergeant York, a 1941 movie produced by Warner Brothers, tells York's tale as he evolved from hard-drinking rabble-rouser to national hero—beloved by all, welcomed by presidents, and courted by intellectuals and filmmakers alike. His exploits became a symbol of national pride and achievement at a time directly before America entered the Second World War. Gary Cooper won an Academy Award for his role as York, with his slow Tennessee twang and portrayal of a backward hillbilly. Supported by a cast that included Joan Leslie and Walter Brennan, Warner Bros. claimed *Sergeant York* united a country on the brink of war.[2]

The film turned out to be a stirring success, listed in the top ten films of 1941 by the *New York Times*. Bosley Crowther, film reviewer for the *New York Times*, believed it a true

[1] "Medal of Honor Recipients: World War I," U. S. Army Center of Military History, June 3, 2015, accessed April 23, 2017, http://www.history.army.mil/moh/worldwari.html.

[2] Michael Birdwell, "'The Devil's Tool' Alvin York and *Sergeant York*," in *Hollywood's World War I: Motion Picture Images*, ed. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 123.

portrait of "America's No. 1 hero."[3] Film reviewers and critics praised its realism and interventionist message. One reviewer noted, "York symbolizes the fundamental elements America needs to survive in a world where democracy and moral honesty are the targets of fierce, destructive forces."[4] Another critic called it "a clarion film that reaches the public at a moment when its stirring and patriotic message is probably most needed," and went on to call it "film biography at its best."[5] According to historian Michael Birdwell, *Sergeant York* became one of the most famous films in the intervention debate in America, allowing audiences a glimpse into the life of a decorated hero.[6]

Sergeant York portrayed Alvin York as overcoming his views on fighting through love of country and a stern duty to God. York's superiors in the Army and his beloved pastor showed him that fighting did not contradict his belief in the Bible. He fought and killed in France at the behest of those male role models he most admired. York killed in service to the American nation and many people admired him for it. Sergeant York, both the man and Hollywood's image, became an idol for white men across America as he committed to defending the nation.

In fact, the Hollywood war genre—specifically, movies about the Great War—played a significant role in twentieth century American culture. When Hollywood produced movies about WWI during the interwar years, they reinforced constructions of ideal masculinity and American exceptionalism in spectators and forced them to grapple with war's consequences. Films about the war showed that cinema spoke to the hearts of its

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[3] Bosley Crowther, *New York Times Film Reviews: 1913-1968*, six volumes (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1970), July 3, 1941, vol. 3, 1796-7.

[4] "Reviews of the New Films," *The Film Daily*, July 3, 1941, 4.

[5] "Film Reviews," *Variety*, July 2, 1941, 12.

[6] Birdwell in Rollins and O'Connor, 122.

audience, often without alienating viewers while making significant amounts of money. The memory presented onscreen became one of the defining issues in a national conversation about white manhood and the ways men understood how to act. Audiences used these movies as expressions of their identity, and the influence of Hollywood reached as far as the halls of Congressional power.

The Question of Contested Masculinity

Hollywood's heroes became one way white men in America fashioned masculine identities for themselves. They saw favorite actors in roles that required manly virtues. As films exposed audiences to these onscreen personas, they constructed ideal versions of masculinity for male audience members. War films reinforced American masculinity and what film scholar Liz Clarke called the "he-men" phenomena. Essentially, men saw manly heroics in theaters and wanted to emulate those examples. Hollywood war heroes became the epitome of twentieth century masculinity in the interwar years.

This study questions how war, nation-states, and masculinity worked together in the interwar period, and how isolationists preceding World War II contested Hollywood's image. It also looks at the changing heteronormative masculinity of the years between the world wars as men faced multiple challenges to their male hegemony. I argue Hollywood's representations of male identity, especially the memory of Hollywood's WWI and the characters onscreen, became ideal descriptions of white masculinity for audiences to use in their own expressions of manhood. Specifically, I studied twelve films about WWI to analyze the film-as-text and the role of male protagonists in these movies. This became important in 1941 as we try to understand why isolationist senators took umbrage at movies about war and sought to appropriate Hollywood's message for political gain.

I examine the cultural influence of Hollywood wars on white American men and their place in helping construct white American male identity in the 1920s and 1930s. Drawing on the works of historian Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America* (first ed., 1996) and Deborah L. Masden's *American Exceptionalism* (1998), my first chapter provides a narrative of masculinity and exceptionalism in American culture, beginning in 1890 and ending in 1940.[7] The term masculinity was constantly in flux during these years, and a broad understanding of American manhood is necessary to understand the changes taking place in 1925-1940. Because no precise definition of masculinity exists, I instead argue that the transitional masculinity of the early decades made its way into Hollywood films and presented audiences with different versions of manhood from which to choose an ideal identity.

1920s American culture experienced a shift from Victorian and Progressive values to modern principles. Although there was a movement towards this new concept of American culture, there was at the same time the continuation of past values as exemplified by the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in 1920s America.[8] Hollywood reflected this shift in interwar movies, but it came in sporadic fits and starts. Some of the male protagonists onscreen reflected an older manly identity, that of the self-made man, family man, or the lover. Some Hollywood heroes personified a more modern definition of male identity—sexually and physically

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[7] Kimmel's argument traced how a changing American culture in the twentieth century shaped masculinity as men dealt with modernity and other challenges. As a literature professor, Madsen explores the historical meaning of exceptionalism primarily through American writing. She also makes forays into Native American and Chicano responses to American exceptionalism. Madsen claimed in her introduction, although there existed three centuries of counter-arguments, American exceptionalism survived in literature, art, and through Hollywood representations, especially the Western genre. Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: a cultural history* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Debra Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1998).

[8] David E. Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939: Decades of Promise and Pain* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2002), 7.

aggressive, stoic, and nationalistic, "as if by his example Americans could be convinced that the individual, through raw nerve and sheer determination, could overcome the economic disaster which had befallen the nation."[9] War movies of the thirties move away from the typical story of the war years and the twenties. Instead, the story focused on the frontlines, fatalism, comradeship, courage, and battlefield heroism. However, Hollywood heroes during these years became relatable models for male audiences.

Using this framework, Chapter II looks at interwar movies about WWI, starting with *The Big Parade* (1925) and ending with *Sergeant York* (1941). Along the way, this chapter analyzes *What Price Glory* (1926) and *Wings* (1927), the winner of the first Academy Award for Best Picture, as well as the anti-war films of 1930: *Journey's End* (1930), *The Dawn Patrol* (1930), and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). Howard Hughes' *Hell's Angels* (1930) became the first of a new era in WWI movies as the war took on an idealistic tone in film and glorified heroism. *Today we Live* (1933) and *The Road to Glory* (1936) continued the trend of romanticism and heroism while the remade *The Dawn Patrol* (1938) and *The Fighting 69th* (1940) became the first of the outspokenly interventionist movies produced by Warner Bros. I explore the public's reaction to these movies by studying trade journals, newspapers, and film reviews. I build on the work of other historians such as Michael T. Isenberg, Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, and Andrew Kelly, who have each illuminated vital aspects of this genre.

These movies typically had a male protagonist who has to overcome certain odds—cowardice, pacifism, horror at war, futility, and loss—to reach the pinnacle of American manhood. Film protagonists—all white males—epitomized early twentieth century

[9] Joan Mellen, *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 71.

masculinity, but each character idealized different aspects of the Victorian Era and modern manhood. Nonetheless, these heroes became the ideal white male champions, and the Hollywood war narrative motivated audiences to adopt what they saw onscreen as accurate reflections of society. Most importantly, film heroes embraced war in service to nation as key to American masculinity. Sergeant York's conversion from pacifism to violence became a symbol for a vigorous and assertive nation.

In the final chapter, I examine how isolationist politicians in 1941 took exception to the way Hollywood portrayed war and the developing European conflict, attacking Hollywood for what they believed was pro-war propaganda. The senators claimed movies could influence society, sometimes overtly and sometimes subtly, towards joining the European war. The subcommittee criticized these same war movies due to their attitudes of hate and fearmongering. They wanted government regulation of Hollywood and a balanced portrayal between isolation and intervention in war films. In my analysis, I will show how senators sought to limit the uneven influence of these movies, attacking Hollywood executives, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the biased depiction of war. They accepted the themes prevalent in war movies and pushed back against Hollywood's cultural imperialism. At this moment, these movies influenced and made a specific contribution to American culture.

By 1941, film audiences accepted York's moral dilemma through their love for Cooper's heroic on-screen persona. Viewers had a chance to see a favorite actor grapple with the same questions and problems they felt as another world war started. When Cooper's portrayal of York decided to fight, spectators felt a sense of kinship with him, perhaps overcoming any protests they felt towards the growing conflict in Europe. Cooper's

popularity—and by extension, York's—helped guide audiences as they struggled with a mounting desire to battle Nazi Germany. Film heroes increasingly defined the ways in which men sought perfect examples of masculinity.

Visual illustrations of ideal masculinity became especially significant in the interwar years because Hollywood became a purveyor of normative American cultural. Hollywood built their stories on what they thought audiences wanted to see and spectators paid to see movies that best spoke to their core values. Consequently, there existed a cyclical relationship between Hollywood and the audience, with each feeding off the other and reinforcing ideal masculine identity. As audiences accepted Hollywood heroes as perfect examples of manhood, Hollywood characters came to reflect white male society's dominant ideologies.

Masculinity encompassed the traits and characteristics culture dictated as most manly. This was a constantly changing definition as men struggled to identify what authority they retained in society as they sought ways to express traditional hegemonic control.[10] In the twentieth century, these traits sometimes included physical perfection, independence, a sense of adventure, courage, self-reliance, and patriotism. American white men strove to reach these perfect versions of masculinity so other men would accept them as manly.

American exceptionalism embraced patriotism, nationalism, and a sense of moral superiority over other cultures. In the nineteenth century, this meant Westward expansion and displacing non-white residents in a quest for the perfect society. After the closing of the western frontier in 1890, Americans turned to other instances of exceptionalism such as the

[10] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

imperialist ambitions of the twentieth century. Much like the Hollywood Western genre, war films idealized heroic actions in service to the greater good of community and nation. Hollywood actors, the characters they portrayed, and equally popular men became the ideal example of American manhood.

Many of the same attributes weave throughout the ideas of exceptionalism, identity, and white American manhood. Possibly this is because American culture during these years accepted the idea that white men control society.[11] Cultural constructs of masculinity and exceptionalism were so closely interwoven that at times it is difficult to separate the two. Hollywood used these constructions to shape their onscreen heroes.

The terms manhood and masculinity become complicated when looking at these years for a few reasons, especially in relation to white male identity. For one, manhood and masculinity represented different categories of male identity. Before the 1890s, the word manhood represented Victorian manly traits such as independence, honor, and strong-willed self-reliance.[12] Gale Bederman's 1995 analysis of early twentieth century masculinity, *Manliness & Civilization*, explains how the term masculinity did not join the common vernacular until the 1910s when middle-class men needed a noun to describe "masculine things in the aggregate."[13] This came to define the popular notion of twentieth century masculine males as physical, aggressive, and passionate.

Additionally, there was not a static definition of masculinity. Masculinity never encompassed a single trait that people could point to as the definitive example of manhood.

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[11] Bederman, 11.

[12] Ibid., 18.

[13] Ibid., 16-19.

Instead, there was a constantly shifting vision of what made white males manly. It became particularly true in the interwar years when white middle-class men faced so many challenges to their power and authority. Interwar men adopted heroes like Teddy Roosevelt or actor Douglas Fairbanks as examples of what it meant to be manly—those who symbolized perfect manhood.[14]

For these reasons, in this study, the term masculinity tends to reflect what I call transitional or ideal masculinity.[15] Men strove to reach these types of masculinity in their everyday lives while facing a society that seemed to change daily. While a static entity known as masculinity did not exist, there always appeared to be an ideal version of manhood, someone like Fairbanks who personified "everything little boys dreamed of becoming and everything men wished they might have retained of an idealized youth."[16] At the same time, since masculinity encompassed so many different expressions, the term transitional masculinity comes to represent a constantly changing view of what makes twentieth century men manly.[17]

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[14] Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 24.

[15] I am not the first to use these terms. Both Gale Bederman and Yvonne Tasker use the terms in relation to shifting views of masculinity. I adopted them here because during the years of my study, they seem the most apt for views of white male hegemonic dominance. Additionally, Tasker uses the terms military and tough masculinity, which both adequately describe Hollywood heroes in the interwar war genre. Yvonne Tasker, "Contested Masculinities: The action film, the war film, and the Western," in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, ed. Kristin Lené Hole, Dijana Jelača, E. Ann Kaplan, and Patrice Petro (New York: Routledge, 2017), 111-120.

[16] Studlar, 23.

[17] For example, the character in *Sergeant York* embodied traits of transitional masculinity. He fought for God and country, but also for his family back home and his fiancé Gracie—the nineteenth century values of the family man. Yet he acted out the heroic ideals of twentieth century masculinity—he was willing to sacrifice himself for his comrades and he captured 132 German soldiers in the process. All so he could get back to rural Tennessee and buy a little farm. York came to represent the nineteenth century values of manhood and the modern definitions of masculinity, the transitional ideals of twentieth century men. For purposes of this paper, manhood and masculinity are interchangeable with the understanding that the modifier Victorian or nineteenth will be used if describing nineteenth century virtues.

Studies about war films tend to focus on WWII and beyond. However, WWI is the first "modern" war and is perhaps more important than the changes wrought by WWII. It became the first war focused on national differences rather than imperial, cultural, or religious differences; this comes back to the idea of national exceptionalism. By looking at how Hollywood masculinity and WWI stories influenced society, we see how white men were increasingly encouraged to wed their identities to nation building through war. Studying these movies helps understand early twentieth century society and its attempted justification for white hegemony. The production of male identity is important for a broader understanding of American society. My work illuminates the particularities of an emerging masculinity that celebrated violence in the name of war as central to American identity. Further, it demonstrates that this definition did not go uncontested, as isolationist politicians attempted to control American reactions to popular memory.

In the years 1925 to 1941, movies about WWI exposed Americans to the consequences of international politics and the reality of fighting; these films' longevity and popularity show spectators' acceptance of these themes. By 1928, 80 million people saw movies each week, with that number increasing by 1939.[18] The story's realism in its constructed narrative was one of the most important parts of the historical memory on screen. Audiences identified with characters with whom they often shared the same values. In WWI films, they often saw a favorite actor depicting heroic events, helping to shape their perception of masculine ideals. Hollywood films about war helped shape an abiding memory of WWI for millions.

[18] Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 144.

More so than any other genre, each and every war film offers ideal versions of the past to spectators, affording them an opportunity to engage with that event and use it in their everyday lives.[19] War strengthens commonly accepted male stereotypes as soldiers defend their nations; war on film reinforces this definition for audiences.[20] If Hollywood films shaped their male characters according to society's dictates, then the heroes became vehicles for the most commonly accepted visions of male masculinity. Directors, writers, and producers changed the inherent messages of these films through the 1920s and 1930s from an almost impassioned plea for the reality and horror of war to a patriotic proclamation for intervention in WWII. War films became a vessel for Hollywood to comment on social issues and present the perfect memory of WWI.

[19] Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 17.

[20] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 55, 7.

Chapter I
White Masculinity, Exceptionalism, and American Identity

Twentieth Century Masculinity and Exceptionalism

After remaking himself into an ideal Western hero, Theodore Roosevelt became the epitome of American masculinity. He owned a ranch in the South Dakotan "Badlands," commanded a company of volunteers in the Spanish-American War, and publicized his Western adventures in popular novels.[21] He celebrated life in the West and commanded American men to adopt the same existence he followed, that of the rough frontiersman. According to Gail Bederman, historians still consider Roosevelt the "quintessential symbol of turn-of-the-century masculinity."[22] Roosevelt became the perfect model for American men and boys as they searched for an idealized identity.

Roosevelt believed manliness started in boyhood, "the chances are strong that he won't be much of a man unless he is a good deal of a boy. He must not be a coward or a weakling, a bully, a shirk, or a prig. He must work hard and play hard…[and] grow into the kind of American man of whom America can be really proud."[23] Teddy Roosevelt perceived men as soldiers and women as mothers. Roosevelt also believed men had to prove their worth by chasing manly pursuits; a spirit of adventure was inherently present in all masculine men.[24] He went on to say boys needed both physical and moral courage as they strove to reach manly ideals. As the Chief Scout Citizen of the Boy Scouts of America, his

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[21] Bederman, 170-171.

[22] Ibid., 171.

[23] Theodore Roosevelt, "The American Boy," in *The Strenuous Life; Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1900), Bartleby.com, 1998, accessed April 6, 2017, www.bartleby.com/58/.

[24] Kimmel, 186-7.

words not only carried weight with men and boys, but he was able to influence those boys who epitomized the traits he most admired.[25] In an era of rapid change and a loss of identity, men had the excellent example of Teddy Roosevelt to sustain their views of white masculinity.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, mounting industrialism, rapid urbanization, immigration, the closing of the frontier, class conflict, and rising consumerism all pointed to a new American culture in the coming century, radically different than one based upon the familial unit and westward expansion.[26] During the twentieth century, white American males grappled with change in the face of this modernized culture. On the one hand, middle-class men learned they had to provide for and protect their family. The best way to do this was by becoming a wage worker in flourishing industrialized cities. On the other hand, they absorbed the myths of the frontier, the self-made man, the spirit of adventure, and rugged individualism. This dichotomy led to a masculine identity crisis. There was a need to redefine what it meant to be male in an increasingly modernized society. Sometimes they did this by adopting symbols of former dominance, such as stories about men in the Wild West or sports culture.[27] Sometimes they idolized men they saw as reinventing masculinity. Teddy Roosevelt's portrayal of the Western ideal is one example of a twentieth century manly man, someone who extolled the virtues of masculinity other men

[25] For example, he wrote his books in popular dime store-sized novels to easily carry them in back pockets. He also contributed to *Boys Life* magazine and became a popular speaker on American male ideals. For more details about Roosevelt, see Kimmel's *Manhood in America*, especially chapter five, and Bederman's *Manliness & Civilization*, chapter five.

[26] Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 5-6.

[27] Kimmel, 118.

desperately searched for. Often men banded together to effect social change. Sometimes they idolized Hollywood movie heroes who embodied all the qualities they wished they had.

A concerted shift away from Victorian and Progressive era values left middle-class men with a sense of loss as they grappled to regain their traditional roles in a modernized society. At the same time, they searched for ways to regain dominance; they struggled through a changing culture that highlighted different characteristics of masculinity. Men in the 1920s and 30s lived on the precipice of a new culture, caught between nineteenth century values and a modern identity. Self-made men lost their jobs. They divorced their wives. Men began to frequent pool halls in larger numbers, they gambled on sporting events, they moved to dirty cities, and all the while women gained an independence nearly unheard of in the Victorian age. Many men felt the dynamic changes taking place jeopardized their manly identity.

One of the driving factors of American men is a need to "prove" their manhood and discover their identity.[28] Whether it is to win approval from male role models, support a family, or maintain an idealized physical perfection, men generally had to fit the stereotype that society defined as masculine. Researchers such as Michael Kimmel, George L. Mosse, and R. W. Connell study the question of masculinity in an American, European, and transnational context, respectively, searching for how twentieth-century males defined manhood and masculinity.[29] From these scholars, a useful synthesis of how men accepted cultural norms in the form of manly heroes begins to emerge.

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[28] Kimmel, *ix.*

[29] Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Mosse, *The Image of Man*; R. W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

Masculinity in its current form is a social construct derived from twentieth century modernism. While manliness is a learned trait, culture and one's social standing continuously redefined the concept of masculinity in society. Beliefs about manhood play a significant role in how society and the self are shaped.[30] Typically, men strive to reach their culture's ideal version of masculinity. By the twentieth century, this meant the traditionally accepted version of the "self-made man" disappeared, and American men had to find new avenues to express their manhood. Masculinity touched nearly every aspect of society, becoming embedded in American culture. It was part of how men attempted to gain respect from their peers. Society lost respect for those white middle-class men unsuccessful in attaining idealized attributes of masculinity; they often failed to acquire better jobs and became "othered" in society. These men joined women and people of non-white ethnicities in that category. White men had to constantly prove their strengths to other men for society to accept them as manly.

Into this province came the beginnings of modern masculinity. The tendency of scholarship is to focus on native-born, white, Protestant, middle-class men as the dominant influence on modern society, especially in the nineteenth century.[31] Historian E. Anthony Rotundo believed this portion of the American population was the most influential in politics, economics, and culture of the nineteenth century, thereby helping define what it meant to be manly in the modern era.[32] As twentieth century American society defined

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[30] E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 6-7.

[31] Dumenil, 12.

[32] Rotundo traces the roles of men from birth through marriage to find how American masculinity changed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He has one chapter on colonial America and his epilogue covers late twentieth century males. While his work does not fit well into the years covered by the topic of this paper, it is important to note that he traces manliness from the colonial era through the end of the nineteenth century. Rotundo's *American Manhood* helped me determine how and why manliness changed the ways it did. He is

gender roles, men needed an "other" upon which to compare themselves. Gender theorist Judith Butler helped clarify the differences between sex and gender; sexes are biological differences between men and women while gender is cultural in which men and women must conform to narrowly defined roles to fit into society.[33] She goes on to say that society constructs sexuality, or gender, "in terms of discourse and power, as long as that power is understood within the spheres of culturally accepted male norms."[34] Rotundo claimed gender provided the basis for a system of power relationships, with the typical white male at the top of the social ladder.[35] Masculinity is a normative stereotype, necessary for society to have a constructed hegemony. There needed to be a widely accepted mode of masculinity upon which to base society's understanding of maleness.

Rotundo's work focused on northern white males as the definitive stereotype of American masculinity. He defined three phases of transformative masculinity from colonial manhood to the modern era.[36] The first phase lasted through the founding of America and into the eighteenth century. Public usefulness to family and community shaped male identity. In widely separate populations, the familial unit became the most important feature of colonial America. The head of household, nearly always the oldest male relative, helped shape community values. Rotundo claimed, "Distinctions between men and women helped to order society in colonial New England," with women typically accepting the roles men

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also well cited in other works, including Kimmel's *Manhood in America* and a chapter in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, ed., *Manliness and morality: Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987),

[33] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 6.

[34] Ibid., 30.

[35] Rotundo, *x*.

[36] Ibid., 2-6.

relegated to them, with few exceptions.[37] This phase continued into the mid-eighteenth century when Americans adopted new social values in the face of cultural changes.

The second phase occurred post-Civil War with the rise of industrialization and unification of the United States. Late eighteenth century men took their identities from their achievements—the so-called self-made man. Society saw the urge for dominance as a virtue while women became the guardians of civilization. In the masculine system, Victorian women were relegated to the home and raising of families. They had to navigate the pitfalls of child rearing while raising boys to become men—contributors to society.

Rotundo's final phase of manhood is that of passionate manhood. Late nineteenth century society put a positive value on male passions in service to self and society. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, "the idea of testing and proving one's manhood became one of the defining experiences in American men's lives."[38] Twentieth century concepts of manhood had their roots in nineteenth century culture. By the twentieth century, ambition, combativeness, competitiveness, and aggression became cultural icons of masculinity.

Themes of American exceptionalism interweave with national male identity and masculinity. American exceptionalism is the idea that America occupies a unique place in world affairs. It is the belief that there exists a coherent national identity and a consensus among the population about that identity.[39] What is distinctive about American exceptionalism is that it encompasses many different themes that Americans find central to beliefs about identity. Foremost among these is the sacred duty of America to spread

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[37] Rotundo, 10-11.

[38] Kimmel, 2.

[39] Madsen, 14.

democracy, first across the continent—at the expense of Native American and Hispanic residents—and later around the globe. However, exceptionalism also included individualism, nationalism, mythology, and moral superiority. These beliefs shaped the direction of Westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, foreign policy, and the cultural imperialism of the late twentieth century.

The nation-state is the most important aspect of exceptionalism. It gives people a framework upon which to hang their identity.[40] When people perceived their nation as superior, they inherently justified any action they identify as making their nation stronger. American exceptionalism emphasized the difference between America and other countries. It placed America at the top of world affairs, even before the rise of America as a global power in the twentieth century. As historian Ian Tyrrell put it, "The United States as a special case 'outside' the normal patterns and laws of history runs deep in American experience."[41] He went on to say America did not face the same problems as other European nations. America as a nation did not have the same class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, or authoritarian governments that marked European nation-states.[42] American exceptionalism and national identity validate idealized masculine identities of the twentieth century.

Exceptionalism permeated every period of American history and shaped the culture of America through government and society.[43] According to Deborah Madsen, the first inklings of exceptionalism came across the pond with the arrival of the Puritans. John

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[40] Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1032.

[41] Ibid., 1031.

[42] Of course, the problem with this view is the Eurocentric position that diminishes all other nations.

[43] Madsen, 1.

Winthrop's 1630 sermon linked Puritan colonization of North America to God's messages of community and Christian values in his parable of the shining city upon a hill. Alexis de Tocqueville reinforced this idea in his nineteenth century book, *Democracy in America* (1835), referring to the unique place of American culture. Herbert Hoover further expanded upon American ideals in his 1922 treatise, *American Individualism*.

As Madsen wrote in her monograph, *American Exceptionalism*, she examined exceptionalism starting with John Winthrop's sermon delivered on the ship *Arbella* during the crossing to Massachusetts. In the sermon, Winthrop set out his goals for Puritan settlers in his sermon, "A Modell of Christian Charity [sic]" (1630). Winthrop claimed, "wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill [sic]," referencing the Matthew 5:14 parable.[44] It was up to the Puritan colonists to become a beacon of light for the nations of Europe. This early form of exceptionalism continued ten years later with another Puritan minister, Peter Bulkeley. New England needed to be an example for the people of earth because they live in a land of abundance in the grace of God.[45] The earliest European settlers in America began the idea of exceptionalism, though it was less defined than in later years when a French visitor to the United States in the nineteenth century explicitly labeled American society exceptional.

Alexis de Tocqueville explicitly declared America exceptional in his book *Democracy in America*, although it carried different connotations than later interpretations. He famously visited the United States during the 1830s where he observed American society and later published his book. Political scientist Harvey C. Mansfield, one of the greatest

[44] Madsen, 18.
[45] Ibid., 19.

translators and editors of political works, called *Democracy in America* "the best book ever written on democracy and the best book ever written on America."[46] De Tocqueville wrote,

> The situation of the Americans is therefore entirely exceptional, and it is to be believed that no [other] democratic people will ever be placed in it. Their wholly Puritan origin, their uniquely commercial habits; the very country they inhabit, which seems to turn their intelligence away from the study of the sciences, letters, and arts; the proximity of Europe, which permits them not to study these without falling back into barbarism; a thousand particular causes, of which I could make only the principal ones known, must have concentrated the American mind in a singular manner in caring for purely material things. Their passions, needs, education, circumstances--all in fact seem to cooperate in making the inhabitants of the United States incline toward the earth. Religion alone, from time to time, makes him raise passing, distracted glances toward Heaven.[47]

De Tocqueville also expanded on the notion of individualism and its source as a democratic institution. One advantage of Americans came from the fact that they were born equal "without having to suffer democratic revolutions."[48] De Tocqueville believed individualism was a natural consequence of democracy and critiqued it as the forerunner of selfishness. He believed when people turn inward rather than outward, they naturally tend toward selfish ideas.

Nearly ninety years later, Hoover recognized individualism as something else, something superior and beneficial to the nation. America could ensure a sense of progress if they were willing to devote themselves to the spirit of individualism, "if we preserve and stimulate the initiative of our people, if we build up our insistence and safeguards to equality of opportunity, if we will glorify service as part of our national character."[49] Hoover saw the ideals of individualism in service to community and nation, "that while we build our society

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[46] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), introduction, *xvii*.

[47] Ibid., 430.

[48] Ibid., 485.

[49] Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1922), 71.

upon the attainment of the individual," those self-same individuals have a sense of service and responsibility to assist others.[50] In Hoover's estimation, individualism became America greatest asset.[51] The individualism of Americans helped shape the concept of early twentieth century exceptionalism. These examples help show the evolution of American exceptionalism from an abstract concept relating to God and religion into a national moral birthright.

Americans, and by extension white American men, had a moral imperative to spread American ideals across the world, yet scholars debate the concept of American exceptionalism as early intellectuals understood it. International Relations scholar David Hughes claimed that rather than an integral part of historic American identity, exceptionalism is a twentieth century term that came to prominence at the same time as the United States rose as a global power.[52] Hughes took this a step further and claimed America used the myth of exceptionalism to justify its extra-legal affairs in regards to foreign policy and nationalist goals.[53] Historian Joyce E. Chaplin believes scholars' constructed exceptionalism stresses positive achievements of a predominantly white population while downplaying negative aspects of society—such as slavery or the displacement of Native Americans. At the same time, she tried to articulate why the "myth" continues.[54] Both

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[50] Hoover, 9, 11.

[51] Ibid., 70.

[52] International Relations academics accepted traditional interpretations of exceptionalism as an easy solution to understanding American foreign relations, accepting the mythological origins of a term that failed to take root until the United States had to combat waning national pride following its defeat in Vietnam and the Reagan era. David Hughes, "Unmaking an exception: A critical genealogy of US exceptionalism," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 41 (2015): 528.

[53] Ibid., 551.

[54] Joyce E. Chaplin, "Expansion and Exceptionalism in Early American History," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003): 1433.

scholars agree that the term "exceptionalism" exists and they both believe it carries negative connotations harmful to scholarly study.

Richard W. Etulain's edited work, *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* (1999), questioned Frederick Jackson Turner's famous thesis regarding the frontier and American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism goes to the roots of American identity and starts with the individuality of the American people. Etulain claims Turner capitalized on the desires of the American people in their search for answers about American identity and provided possibilities in his interpretation of westward expansion.[55] Unfortunately, according to Etulain, Turner left out significant portions of what went into the making of the West and America including the role of women and the subjugation of non-Europeans. Turner's thesis is predicated on the frontier as integral to American identity. While limited in scope, Turner's thesis influenced scholars throughout the interwar years.

However, like Madsen, these scholars implied that most early twentieth century intellectuals accepted the idea of American exceptionalism and it made its way into the common vernacular. Political scientist Trevor B. McCrisken defined American exceptionalism as the *belief* that America's destiny was exceptional, rather than any one event making it so.[56] He believed American exceptionalism became core to forming a national identity as seen in the policies of Westward Expansion, Manifest Destiny, and twentieth century imperialism. President Woodrow Wilson used this justification to enter WWI, rooting his rhetoric in exceptional language, "Our object…is to vindicate the

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[55] Richard W. Etulain, ed., *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 7.

[56] Trevor B. McCrisken, "Exceptionalism," *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, Richard Dean Burns, et al., ed., 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002), *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*, link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/EJ3010308045/OVI C?u=mosc00780&xid=a8daa709, accessed 23 Mar. 2017.

principles of peace and justice…The world must be safe for democracy."[57] Exceptionalism was the standard by which early twentieth century men understood the world.

Modernization in the twentieth century meant a reassessment of the essence of white male identity. Twentieth century transitional masculinity meant embracing physical courage, chivalric ideals, virtuous fortitude, and carried connotations of patriotic and military virtue.[58] As sports historians J. A. Mangan and James Walvin wrote, "The encouragement given to manly pursuits among males…was a function of the mounting concern felt about the physical, and later psychological, condition of a highly urbanised plebian life where physical and social deprivation was widespread."[59] Industrialization and urbanization challenged traditional methods of achieving manhood. White American men were on the cusp of a new idealized identity, but it was not yet understood how society accepted those identities. They had their father's example of the manly self-made, self-reliant man, and a new, evolving definition of courageous, independent, adventurer. They had to look to new representations of manliness and ways to express their masculine identity.

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[57] Woodrow Wilson, "Primary Documents-U.S. Declaration of War with Germany, 2 April 1917," firstworldwar.com, August 22, 2009, accessed March 25, 2017, http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/usawardeclaration.htm.

[58] Mangan and Walvin, 1. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin's edited book focuses on masculinity in the history of sports, which makes sense because Mangan is the editor of *The International Journal of the History of Sports*. Yet their book reaches far beyond athletics and instead searches for the deeper meaning behind the cultural approbation of manliness in the Victorian Age. While the essays in the work range far and wide, they all concern themselves with the role of men in Victorian culture. The volume explores some years beyond the commonly accepted Victorian Era, but these shifting ideas—well elucidated in the introduction—continued to influence both English and American societies well into the modern era.

[59] Ibid., 4. See also Kimmel's work. Kimmel's book is a history of the self-made man—a man who is always striving for something better, something undefinable yet seemingly within reach. In his work, he talks about how men are currently responding to crisis in the same way they have for centuries: self-control, reactive exclusion, and escape. His work is a cultural history of the changing ideals of American manhood, in which he discusses how men needed to find a definition of manhood and later masculinity. Manhood and masculinity are two different things. Masculinity is the male response to modernity and about men proving their worth to other men.

This included othering women, immigrants, and African-Americans. White men felt they needed to continue their hegemonic dominance of civilization by searching for new forms of manly identity and authority.[60] Examples such as Teddy Roosevelt, Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914), and Rudolph Valentino's movie *The Sheik* (1921) continued the masculine ideal of men living outside of civilization without losing their connection to society. Roosevelt transformed himself from a Victorian model of manliness to a more violent version of masculinity through his highly publicized adventures in the West.[61] Burroughs and Valentino romanticized the primitive in their fictionalized treatments of women and minorities.[62] These visions of idealized masculinity came to represent male power and dominance over anyone that was not white and male.

While white men tried to continue their marginalization of others, women played a role in the changing American culture. During the 1920s, men felt threatened by women in the workplace, politics, and consumerism. As women assumed prominent positions in society after suffrage, they left behind the traditional roles in which men tried to relegate them.[63] Women formed an important part of politics, consumer culture, and the economy. While many still stayed home to raise families, they also became the major purchasers of goods and helped shape the market.[64] Historian Lynn Dumenil showed how women influenced what became important in America, from consumer culture to politics to child rearing. She also argued the "new woman" of the twenties was one sign of modern society,

[60] Bederman, 42.
[61] Ibid., 172.
[62] Ibid., 232.
[63] Ibid., 14.
[64] Dumenil, 144.

but, like men, her place was sharply defined by ethnicity, class, and cultural values.[65] Women, by virtue of taking their rightful place in society and not through malice, unintentionally helped nurture white men's feelings of inadequacy.

If masculinity is about men proving to each other their manhood, twentieth century masculine ideals augmented their perception of self.[66] With a changing culture, men needed to find a new way to construct their identity. Yet they had the pitfalls of modernity to navigate. The rise of the wage worker and urbanization increasingly led to men feeling like they lost control of their destiny.[67] Men sensed women were seizing the place of men in politics and the workforce. Federal power changed the dynamic between private and public life, giving rise to new fears and a changed political landscape. Consumerism replaced the old ideals of the self-made man and rugged individualism.[68] White men looked back upon bygone days with nostalgia in an effort to find ways to prove their worth in society. What twentieth century white men really needed was to confront their feelings of inadequacy via an event that screamed manliness and embodied the most desirable traits of masculinity and exceptionalism. They found that experience in WWI, but the Great Depression quickly followed war and an entirely new host of problems.

War and Depression

Nationalism helped play an enormous part in the modern definition of middle-class white manhood, as it required stereotypical men to fulfill the roles of national defender.[69]

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[65] Dumenil, 98.

[66] Rotundo, 222.

[67] Kimmel, 84.

[68] Dumenil, 54-55, 57.

[69] Mosse, 7.

Many link war and nationalism with the highest principles of idealized masculinity. Like exceptionalism, masculinity meant defending one's country and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the greater good. In his book, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (1996), Historian George L. Mosse found the image of a warrior presented a climax to a culture's concept of manliness.[70] War was a great test for men as they searched for their idealized place in society. The nationalism and patriotism of World War I allowed men in Europe and especially the United States to rediscover themes of manhood and identity in a modern world.

WWI became an opportunity for men to explore their primitive side as they defended their country. As war broke out in Europe, American men at first did not have to face the same challenges as their European counterparts. However, of course, they had their chance to fight for their country, "following" men such as John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force, into battle. Even after Woodrow Wilson promised the American people they would stay out of the war, men rallied to fight in Europe following events such as the Zimmerman Telegram, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and Germany declaring unrestricted submarine warfare.[71]

The image of the warrior included the principles of courage, sacrifice, and nationalism, as well as the need for an idealized physical form, in order to win the war and

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[70] Mosse, 107. Mosse's book focuses on men in Europe, but he says that most countries based upon Western traditions generally followed the same path as others. In this case, although Mosse claims there is relatively little work done about masculinity in post-Revolutionary France, that country followed the same general traditions as other countries such as Germany, Italy, and England. This helps to present a broad paradigm for analyzing the construction of modern masculinity and can help analyze American masculinity.

[71] David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), xxvi. According to Reynolds, Wilson wanted to avoid a civil war at home by getting involved in the conflict. The immigrant background of many citizens precipitated a stance of "studied neutrality" in order promote "America's overwhelming civic nationalism." Reynolds, 36.

overcome one's enemies. WWI became an event that expressed nationalism and masculinity like never before, and Pershing became a perfectly symbolic figure of twentieth century masculinity. In a conflict that revolved around national identity, men had a chance to experience masculinity in places like the trenches of France or the seas around England.

After the war had ended, Americans believed themselves the saviors of Europe and civilization.[72] Wilson had sold the war to the public as a quest for democracy and exceptionalism. This was the first war that involved such an incredibly large number of belligerents, not for cultural or religious reasons, but for national interests. At the same time, a larger portion of the American population felt the immediate effects of the war, more so than in previous conflicts; wartime mobilization required the entire population, not just soldiers at the front.[73] The effects and memory of WWI for Americans were also different from other conflicts, yet the population experienced it less than other countries.

For American men, the Great War gave them a chance to discover masculinity away from their comfort zones. They fought the war thousands of miles from family and friends. By the end of the war, they again had a sense of masculine idealized identity as they faced and defeated the largest national crisis in history.[74] Men experienced the primitiveness of war, killing, and death, yet they did so in service to their country. Mosse acknowledged, "The urge to serve in a cause higher than the individual, to put manliness in service to the

[72] Reynolds, xix. Americans also felt a sense of distance from the effects of the war. They not only had a geographical separation from the conflict, but their losses were much lower. Reynolds claimed Americans only lost 116,000 soldiers, half of them from influenza after fighting ended. The interwar years were also bracketed by two much deadlier conflicts, both the Civil War and WWII. The memory of WWI had a much different feel to it than either one of those conflicts. Reynolds, xxi, 413.

[73] Ibid., 424.

[74] Kimmel, 192.

ideal, had also been part of the definition of masculinity from the very beginning."[75] WWI tied masculinity to nationalism more than ever before.

In his German war diary, *In Stahlgewittern* (*The Storm of Steel*, 1920), Jünger wrote that war strips men down to their primordial instincts. The only thing they could then believe in was the masculine urge to dominate.[76] Men found an opportunity through combat to serve their country, reach a physical ideal of manliness, go on an adventure, and compete against other men. When involved in battle, men only cared about the possibility of killing and dying. Service and sacrifice to one's country always spoke to the highest ideals of masculinity, and now that rhetoric was couched in terms of democratic ideals and WWI.[77] At this point, having overcome the crises of a new century and modernity, men reached the climax of early twentieth century masculinity.

After the war, President Warren G. Harding promised the American people a "Return to Normalcy." However, there was not a definition of normal in American society or for white men. Men seemed to face their identity crisis and overcome it; they achieved masculinity by defending their country and killing its enemies. Yet, some men came back from the war with stories of horror and feeling the negative effects of battle. While not all Americans believed in the war's results, many men saw it as a shining moment of male identity. Many saw it as a great victory for the American people. World War I benefitted national symbols of masculinity. Although some saw WWI as a travesty of American nationalism, most saw it as a chance for men to prove their manhood. At least until the next decade.

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[75] Mosse, 109.
[76] Ibid., 110.
[77] Ibid., 156.

White American men soon faced a new crisis to their constructed identity as the world responded to the Great Depression. The stock market crash of 1929 marked a new disaster for men and women as they sought ways to combat the oncoming depression. The depression proved a shock to men trying to provide for their families—one of the essential traits of Victorian Era manhood.[78] Following hard on the heels of WWI and the "Roaring Twenties," the Great Depression of the thirties emasculated men by the thousands. Consider the Bonus Army that marched on Washington, D. C. in 1932—comprised of some 40,000 veterans demanding their veterans benefits—or the widespread rise of "Hoovervilles" for homeless families. Not able to find work, and conversely, keep their families fed, men turned to drink, suicide, or despair in the face of this newest crisis. Part of the solution to the Depression was women entering the workforce in record numbers to help their families. Typically, the American self-made man strove for social mobility and economic success as marks of manhood, but the depression repressed these concepts like never before. Taken together, men had new reasons to feel a loss of masculine identity.

White men during the depression not only felt impotent in front of other men but their families also often saw them as unmanly for their inability to be breadwinners.[79]

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[78] Kimmel, 192.

[79] Josep M. Armengol, "Gendering the Great Depression: rethinking the male body in 1930s American culture and literature," *Journal of Gender Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 60. Armengol is concerned with the depictions and transformation of the male body during the Great Depression. Armengol shows how sources in literature, such as Michael Gold and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Roosevelt's Public Works of Art project of the New Deal, depicts the masculine body to combat the era of depression and reinforce modern masculinity. However, as Armengol shows, some failed to conform to that identity. Instead, John Steinbeck's characters in *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), or artist Paul Cadmus's paintings, provide a counter-point to the manly body as ideal. See also Kimmel, chapter 6, "Muscles, Money, and the M-F Test: Measuring Masculinity Between the Wars," 191-222; Andrew P. Smiler, Gwen Kay, and Benjamin Harris, "Tightening and Loosening Masculinity's (k)Nots: Masculinity in the Hearst Press during the Interwar Period," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 266-279. Smiler, Kay, and Harris examined William Randolph Hearst's *American Weekly* to determine how this psychology oriented paper used accounts of masculinity during the interwar period.

Through his analysis of manly bodies, literature professor Josep M. Armengol found that the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration tried to create a concept of men at work in physical perfection through art and literature, what Armengol called the "hard body."[80] They did this by reimagining how it meant to look manly. Physical perfection is one of the traits of modern masculinity—as men sensed they lost their places in society, Armengol shows they tried to reshape themselves into ideal physical specimens of manliness.

Helping win WWI reinforced white American masculinity, but the horrors of war and the Great Depression crushed those feelings. Because of the Depression, men again had to reevaluate how they perceived masculinity among their peer groups. In the 1920s and 30s, as they confronted their experiences from WWI and seemed to lose their roles as breadwinners, men turned to a new medium for their depictions of manliness.

[80] Armengol, 66.

Chapter II
Manly Men in Hollywood's WWI

Hollywood Wars

As men struggled to adapt to a changing society, they turned to new concepts of heroism and manliness. Hollywood stepped in to fill the breach and provide meaning for male identity. Men felt they needed an ideal hero they could somehow relate to, even if for but a few moments. Hollywood provided nostalgic stories for audience's viewing pleasure. The individualism of the twenties, and by extension the idealized masculinity felt by a seemingly diminished white male population, produced male characters in Hollywood that rarely needed anyone more than a companion or two and a fleeting love interest—a minor role as damsel-in-distress for the masculine lead. This transformed into the rugged heroes of the thirties when men felt they had a greater burden to bear in response to the Depression.

In movies about WWI, even commonly accepted anti-war movies such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), Hollywood shaped a version of modern masculinity with which men could engage.[81] In these movies, Hollywood reinforced stereotypical versions of masculinity, often diminishing alternate versions of manhood.[82] The decades following WWI left many men with a sense of loss as they faced modernization. Viewing movies gave them an outlet for their male desires.

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[81] Hereafter *All Quiet*.

[82] See both Liz Clarke, "Ladies Last: Masculinization of the American War Film in the 1920s," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 43, no. 4 (2015) and Drew Todd, "Decadent Heroes: Dandyism and Masculinity in Art Deco Hollywood," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2004). Clarke studies how Hollywood diminished women's roles in interwar movies to mere spectators. Todd looks at the Hollywood dandy as he shifted from hero to fop in Hollywood films.

Two important themes run throughout war films during the interwar era: perfect masculinity and American exceptionalism. In fact, for a majority of the twentieth century, these two ideas remained so essential that they retained their position of prominence in films all the way into the sixties and seventies. It only slackened—but never completely went away—with the disillusion Americans felt towards involvement in Vietnam. They regained significance in the late eighties and early nineties as Ronald Reagan led a conservative revival. The war genre never fully discarded the ideas of idealized masculinity and exceptionalism, but instead, modern definitions underwent subtle shifts to conform to social norms. It is understandable then that films aimed at audiences' memory about war emphasized these traits.

Men turned to Hollywood movies for one representation of former glory. English professor Joan Mellen found that audiences identified with male heroes in the twenties and thirties as long as they conformed to the image of modern masculinity. In the twenties that meant men who embodied rugged individualism and Progressive Era traits; audiences did not see those male heroes that failed to fit this mold.[83] In the thirties, heroes were the ones that enforced the stereotype of the self-reliant man—subtly different from the self-made man. Film heroes proved the convention that hard work led to economic prosperity. Because it was unmanly to be unable to take care of one's family, Hollywood exemplified the breadwinners and the stoic hero.[84] Men used the onscreen versions of masculinity as a measuring stick upon which to base themselves.

[83] Mellen, 28.

[84] Ibid., 96.

The interwar years also happened to coincide with a turning point in American culture—from the Progressive Era to the modern era. Movies about war in these years are at a strange intersection of Progressive manly values and modern era traits of masculinity. Some movies, such as *The Big Parade* (1925) or 1933's *Today We Live* have women in leading roles with love and family motivating the soldiers. Other films, such as *The Dawn Patrol* (1930) and *Journey's End* (1930) have no female cast in the entire movie, with barely a single reference to women. One thing they all have in common, which differs from the pre-1920s films, is they focused on soldiers and frontline fighting more than any other theme.[85]

War movies typically exemplified the aforementioned themes of idealized masculinity and exceptionalism. Isenberg claimed the "general tone of the industry's attitude toward depicting war on film may be characterized as mildly benevolent."[86] However, not every movie stirs the patriotic blood, not every film speaks to male desire, and not all of them focus on a male protagonist. They navigate the intersection of white American values in different ways depending on the producers, writers, and directors.[87] They largely received popular reception from audiences and critics, with few notable exceptions. Some won Oscars for Best Picture or Best Actor, and more received nominations. Nevertheless, those movies that do not focus on overt themes of male identity are the exception, not the rule in the interwar era.

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[85] Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism: The Movies and World War I* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 171.

[86] Michael T. Isenberg, *War on Film: The American Cinema and World War I, 1914-1941* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Press, 1981), 115.

[87] Historians studied most of these films in different contexts throughout the eighties and nineties.

Heroic Paradigms in War Films

Interwar war movies fall into three broad categories. In these decades of filmmaking, Hollywood blended themes of nineteenth century values and modern principles. In some movies, one can find the focus on family, male breadwinners, and self-made men, or Victorian Era role models. In other movies, heroes exemplify courage, aggression, competition, and manly physiques. A few of the movies represent values from both eras, glorifying war and battlefield heroics while enjoying the company of a beautiful woman or seeking support from their family. This is the transitional masculinity of interwar movies. Those films that tried to adopt values from both eras became markers of a changing male identity that audiences understood represented different modes of masculinity. Nonetheless, American audiences identified with onscreen heroes and enjoyed the historical stories told through film. American white men had idealized masculine leads as role models to use in their everyday lives.

Love is one of the most challenging themes to explore and yet, at least in these films, the easiest to disregard. The male protagonist acted out his heroic deeds *despite* the women in his life, not *because* of them. Female characters in these war films, if there were any, were typically the mothers, sweethearts, or siblings of the main male character. One did not usually see women on the front lines so there could not be that passion and love so desperately needed in romantic films. For this reason, love does not drive the hero's actions.

Unfortunately, in these movies, women usually played a secondary role to male leads.[88] Love exists as part of the human condition, but in very few of these films does it take a prominent role. While seven out of the twelve films had female characters, they

[88] DeBauche, 172.

generally played the role of romantic conquests for men. They also brought men together or looked to male protagonists for protection, which gave male characters the ability to act out twentieth century masculine qualities. If the filmmakers had removed women from the narrative, most of these movies would have retained their core stories.

In war films, nurses are usually the only women seen near the fighting. The *American Film Institute* (*AFI*) categorized *Today We Live* as a romance featuring Joan Crawford in the lead role as a nurse, and it is the only film so classified.[89] It is also the only film where a woman received top billing. According to *AFI* researchers, MGM executives insisted William Faulkner add a female role for Joan Crawford. She was under a $500,000 contract to the studio, working or not. Studio executives felt this was a suitable vehicle for their star, so Faulkner included the character of Ann. The original script was a story about three men in combat; Faulkner added Crawford's part during a rewrite.[90] This example helps show the general disregard with which writers treated women in combat films. Aside from Crawford's character, the women in these films became almost afterthoughts to the war adventures and the story of male heroes.

Ann is caught in a love triangle between Gary Cooper's character, wealthy American Richard Bogard, and her childhood sweetheart Claude Hope, played by Robert Young. The entire story struggled with coherence as many scenes were removed or changed due to time, budget, and filming constraints.[91] *New York Times* reviewer Mordaunt Hall said, "As a drama of war it is not precisely convincing, for coincidences play an important part in its

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[89] Isenberg, 197.

[90] "Today We Live," *AFI: Catalogue of Feature Films*, 2016, accessed January 13, 2017, http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=7233.

[91] Ibid.

arrangement."[92] There is more than a bit of truth in his statement. Starting with the opening credits, when Joan Crawford's name first appeared, the love story played a central role in this film, set against the backdrop of World War I, aviators, sailors, heroism, loss, and sacrifice.

Cooper plays Bogard, a newly arrived American in England at the start of WWI. When asked by customs officials upon debarkation, Cooper clearly declared his neutrality in the war. He wanted to rent a house and enjoy the countryside, playing the sightseeing tourist. After he had rented Ann's house through her solicitor—displacing her to the gardener's cottage—Ann received news of her father's death. This left Ann distraught when she first met Bogard, but she bore the pressure admirably, as women left on the home front are typically depicted. During their first meeting at his new house, when asked how he took his tea, Bogart requested sugar, momentarily forgetting there was a ration in effect due to hostilities. The first scene paints a picture of an American fully detached from the reality of the war, even as he acknowledged that his ship had to dodge a couple of torpedoes on the trip across the Atlantic.

Audiences saw approximately five minutes of interaction between Bogard and Ann before he left the film for the next few scenes. During a visit to her father's memorial, Ann received a surprise visit from her brother—Franchot Tone portrayed Lieutenant Ronnie Boyce-Smith—and their mutual friend and neighbor, the boyish Claude. Both men recently earned commissions in the British navy and returned to visit before shipping off to France eight hours hence. During this scene, audiences learned that the three of them grew up together and Claude had loved Ann for years. Shortly before the lieutenants leave, Claude

[92] Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times Film Reviews*, April 15, 1933, vol. 2, 928.

proposes a postwar marriage and Ann happily accepts. Although she was scared for her brother and new fiancé, Crawford's character presented a brave face while waving farewell to the men in her life.

In Cooper's next scene, he played the role of anxious suitor. Viewers saw Bogard waiting outside Ann's temporary residence as she exited to bike into town. Cooper joined her for part of the trip before riding to view a nearby mountain trail. At the last minute, Ann follows him rather than continue upon her errands. There is no indication of how much time passed between the opening scenes and this one, but in it, Cooper declared his love for Ann, and she reciprocated. In his review, Hall believed the story was slightly confusing because of its disjointed narrative and wrote, "The romance between Bogard and [Ann] is set forth so abruptly that it is apt to seem absurd." Although she seemed conflicted about her feelings toward both Bogard and Claude, Ann's love made Bogard rethink his stance towards the war. Ann decided to become a nurse to be nearer her brother and fiancé while Bogard enlisted in the Royal Air Force. Ann motivated him to fight, claiming she helped him understand the reasons behind the war.

Their love, sacrifice, and the war continued to provide tension throughout the film. When Bogard was mistakenly reported dead in a training accident, Ann became inconsolable and promised a drunken Claude she will always be there for him. The film contains many scenes of typical manly exploits—battlefield heroics, daring, adventure, bravery, and war. At the same time, the love triangle between Bogard, Ann, and Claude became the immediate focus of the story. In the climactic scene, a blinded Claude and Ronnie went on a suicide mission to sink a cruiser, saving Bogard from having to sacrifice

himself. Claude's belief that he would be a burden to Ann drove him to act out heroics for his love.

The story revolved around the characters at war, but it became secondary to romance and sacrifice. It seemed as if producers treated the war as an afterthought, merely the background for their studio star, while the writers wanted to focus on manly exploits. This dichotomy between producers and writers came across to viewers, leading to confusion and the disjointed narrative.

While romance existed in these films, it did not act as a key plot device in the movies. Film scholar Melvyn Stokes claimed Hollywood executives during these years believed women composed their primary audiences and they tried to fashion stories that would appeal to them.[93] This meant an emphasis on romance and melodramas.[94] It is perhaps understandable then why MGM executives required Faulkner to add Crawford's part. Aside from this one film, these movies emphasize male characters rather than the women who played their sweethearts while keeping female characters in the storylines.

While this is the only film in which an actress plays the lead role, it is not the only movie with a love story worked into the screenplay. In *The Big Parade*, *What Price Glory?* (1926), and *Hell's Angels* (1930), the scripts have women integral, although secondary, to the story. Of the three, *The Big Parade*'s romance is most pronounced which makes sense as it was the earliest film directly about WWI in the post-war years. In the movie, rich playboy Jim Apperson (John Gilbert) fell in love with a farm girl while stationed in the French village of Champillon and went to great lengths, despite the language barrier, to prove his

[93] Melvyn Stokes, "Female Audiences of the 1920s and early 1930s," in Stokes and Maltby, 43-44.
[94] Ibid., 44.

devotion. Ultimately, after discharge, Jim traveled back to France and reunited with Melisandre. Romance helped drive the movie, but much of the film focused on the war. Rather than seeming to be about love, the time spent in Champillon became almost comedic-like, as if the soldiers used the background as a respite from the tensions of war.

Similarly, competition for a woman between actors Edmund Lowe and Victor McLaglen—First Sergeant Quirt and Captain Flagg, respectively—in *What Price Glory?* added a dimension of conflict between two Marines that nearly distracted them from conducting the war. In *Hell's Angels*, discord between James Hall's Roy Rutledge and his supposed girlfriend Helen, played by Jean Harlow, nearly caused Roy to go AWOL, rather than fulfill his role as heroic protagonist. Unfortunately, the relationship between these two characters again served to distract from the overall story. *New York Times* reviewer Hall criticized the character Helen in *Hell's Angels*; "In every instance so soon as the producer forgets Helen, the flaxen-haired creature, and takes to the war his film is absorbing and exciting. But while she is the centre [sic] of attention the picture is the most mediocre piece of work."[95] In this film, as in others, the female characters detracted from the main tale of war and served to create friction before the dramatic climax. Perhaps because producers recognized the value audiences placed on romance while wanting to focus on men at war they wrote romance into the stories.

Besides *Today We Live*, *AFI* did not classify any of these movies as a romance. They instead became dramas, or, in the case of *Hell's Angels*, melodrama. Helen served as femme fatale to Roy's hero, Melisandre's love became the final expression of war in *The Big Parade*, and a French barmaid acted as a point of competition between Quirt and Flagg.

[95] Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times Film Reviews,* August 16, 1930, vol. 1, 650.

While enjoyable romances make pleasant stories for audiences, it is such a small plot device in war films of this era that love's effects became almost negligible. As Leslie Midkiff DaBauche noted, "The love story, relegated to a subplot and set within the framing story…ensure[d] there were women in the audience."[96]

Instead, competition and comradery became one impetus behind movies such as *What Price Glory?* and *Wings* (1927), with the penultimate prize the affection of a woman. The real competition concerned male protagonists and their comrades, at least until they set aside their differences in the name of duty and fighting the enemy. The most logical competition audiences recognized is that between the Germans and the Allied nations. At heart, these movies fostered a sense of competition revolving around male protagonists and the war. Competitiveness became one of the primary traits of twentieth century masculinity and had a place in nearly every movie about WWI.

Although in the 1926 film they continually compete for the affection of various women, by the end of *What Price Glory?* Quirt and Flagg had cast aside their mutual distaste in service to each other and country. Listed among the top ten movies of the year by the *New York Times*, audiences appreciated the rivalry between the protagonists and the realistic battle scenes.[97] They also enjoyed the comedy-drama *What Price Glory?* represented. They found in Quirt and Flagg characters they could identify with. *New York Times* film reviewer Hall lauded Flagg and Quirt, "depicted as brothers in arms, as [M]arines who forget everything in loyalty to their flag, once they step out of their billet to

[96] DeBauche, 193.

[97] *New York Times Film Reviews*, vol. 6, 3867.

fight."[98] *Variety*'s film review praised everything from director Raoul Walsh to the humor found in the silent curse words, as well as admiring the final scene in which Flagg and Quirt marched off arm-in-arm.[99] *Variety*'s reviewer believed *What Price Glory?* could match the critical reception of 1925's *The Big Parade* and the *New York Times* listed it in the top ten films of the year.[100] It seems that by 1926 audiences still appreciated movies about war.

Hard on the heels of *The Big Parade*, the film *What Price Glory?* exhibited the adventure male audiences most craved. The film opened with Quirt and Flagg as sergeants in the Marine Corps before WWI, stationed first in Peking then in the Philippines. In both duty stations, they fought over women, trading blows and throwing expletives. While the film is silent, viewers can clearly read the lips of actors Lowe and McLaglen as they curse. Somehow, Quirt always came out on top of these confrontations with Flagg slinking away in defeat.

By the time the United States Marines were fighting in WWI, Flagg had received a promotion to captain charged with a company of raw recruits. He admonished the men about their behavior in the village, that there will be no "Running wild with these French dames, getting drunk, and fighting among yourselves." Here audiences met Charmaine de la Cognac, played by Dolores del Rio, a local barmaid. The intertitle card introducing Charmaine portrayed her as an object of desire, "Charmaine -- thrilled by war in her front yard - fascinated by the men who stop at her smile on their way to die." Hollywood

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[98] Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times Film Reviews*, November 24, 1926, vol. 1, 336.

[99] *Variety*, December 1, 1926, 10.

[100] Ibid.; *New York Times Film Reviews*, vol. 6, 3867.

portrayed the women in the movie as nothing more than objects of sexual conquest and competition for the men.

When his company billeted in the village wherein the lovely Charmaine resided, Flagg quickly took to his old womanizing ways. He delighted in Charmaine's coquettishness, and the two became inseparable. Following a battle at the front lines, Flagg returned to the village where Charmaine served him food and wine, but all he wanted were kisses, which she coyly bestowed.

After he received a communique from headquarters about impending leave to Bar-le-Duc, Flagg swiftly rebuffed Charmaine's attempts to accompany him by leading her to believe he was already married. All Flagg had to do was wait for the arrival of his newly assigned top sergeant before he left. The new sergeant is none other than Quirt, his once-bitter rival for female affection. Secure in the knowledge that Charmaine would wait for her captain, Flagg set off for a fun-filled liberty of drinking, carousing, and wild women. The writers portrayed Charmaine as a sexual entity without agency of her own.

Once again, Quirt's ruggedly handsome visage appealed to the woman Flagg believed was his and Quirt and Charmaine began socializing. Upon his return, Flagg and Quirt set aside their differences to join the fighting at the front, where Quirt received a heroic wound and left for the hospital. Their competition reached critical mass at the climax of the movie, following the final battle scene, when they fought over the right to Charmaine's affection. This is one of the few times Charmaine exhibited her agency. She declared her love belonged to "le Sergeant" rather than Flagg.

Even though they recently fought over the right to court Charmaine, Flagg gracefully bowed out in favor of Quirt. Although he wished he could avoid orders to return to the front,

Flagg nevertheless answered the call to arms, "Charmaine girl, this war and glory racket is sorta like religion…The bugle sounds an' we answer. We break every pledge but one. Somehow, that call finds the old Marines - always faithful--" For the first time in the film, Flagg places duty above ego and pleasure. Quirt's way to Charmaine's heart is evident, but instead, he limped after his company and Flagg, joining with his comrades in another fight. As Charmaine watched the men troop away, the final intertitle card read, "They are so young and beautiful. They are too young to die."

The entire film is about the rivalry between Flagg and Quirt, but a deeper look shows how the two characters became role models to audiences in search of that twentieth century idealized identity. Both characters were physically capable and manly, even after Quirt sustained wounds in combat. They both acted out heroic deeds as they faced down enemies and defended their nation. Their competition is nearly all in the name of fun as if audiences expected two alpha males to always fight over women, war, and booze. The protagonists are sexually vigorous, proud, and generally exude masculine traits. This is one example of the idealized masculinity of the twenties and thirties in popular culture.

Similar competitiveness existed in other films with the hero always on top. *The Road to Glory* (1936) had a love triangle similar to *Today We Live* and *What Price Glory?* with the male protagonists struggling against each other to win the woman's affection. One motivating factor at the beginning of *Sergeant York* is Alvin's desire to "get me a piece of bottomland." To do this he enters a shooting competition, proving himself an adept shot and better than the other men. The German schoolboys in *All Quiet* started the film with boasts about how brave and manly they would be. The success of *What Price Glory?*'s story and

the male characters was quickly followed by Paramount's *Wings* the next year, a film which won the first ever Oscar for Best Motion Picture.[101]

The plot of *Wings* resembles other films of this era to a certain extent. Two young men from the same town—Charles Rogers playing Jack Powell and Richard Arlen playing David Armstrong—compete for the affection of Jobyna Ralston's character Sylvia Lewis.[102] While the basis of this romantic triangle is a mistaken assumption by Powell, the two enlist in flight school together and form a rivalry that exists beyond the female character's influence. Their competitiveness leads to mishaps during training but they come out the other side fast friends and comrades-in-arms.

Narratives such as this reinforce the different roles of women and men in these films. Hall of the *New York Times* claimed, "The last chapter, that concerned with the return of Powell to his home in this country, is, like so many screen stories, much too sentimental, and there is far more of it than one wants." He did go on to say actress Clara Bow, "bright-eyed and attractive, does her bit to add to the interest of this photoplay."[103] Although, according to celebrity biographer Darwin Porter, Clara Bow hated her part, claiming it was a man's picture and she was merely the "whipped cream on top of the pie."[104] *The Film Daily* claimed it was a "truly the epic of aviation in the Great War" but lamented the dramatic

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[101] *New York Times Film Reviews*, vol. 6, 3872.

[102] Strangely enough, although he acted in many productions before this, Gary Cooper received one of his first credited roles as Cadet White in *Wings* where he had a two minute part before dying. Cooper later made himself a household name for his roles as The Virginian in *The Virginian* (1929), Alvin York in *Sergeant York*, and, perhaps his most famous role, Marshal Will Kane in *High Noon* (1953). Cooper won Oscars as Best Actor for both *Sergeant York* and *High Noon.*

[103] Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times Film Reviews,* August 13, 1927, vol. 1, 380-381.

[104] Darwin Porter, *Howard Hughes: Hell's Angel* (New York: Blood Mood Productions, Ltd., 2005), 147.

story, wishing it contributed more to the film.[105] The vivid air sequences, the realistic representation of war, and Powell's quest for vengeance after Armstrong died received the most acclaim from audiences and reviewers. It was the war and the manly protagonists that brought audiences to see the film, ultimately leading to *Wings*'s Academy Award for Best Picture.

Like the themes of comradery in *Wings*, *Dawn Patrol* carried its own version of idealized masculinity but focused more on heroism and sacrifice in aerial combat. Directed by Howard Hawks, the 1930 version of *Dawn Patrol* also carried a not-so-subtle undercurrent of fatalism and anti-war sentiment among its heroic exploits.[106] Two companions, Dick Courtney and Douglass Scott, fly as the leader and second-in-command of "A" flight, respectively. Their exploits in the air are quickly followed by drinking on the ground as a means to cope with the endless attrition of their fellow pilots. *Dawn Patrol* became the quintessential film about male bonding and courage in war.[107]

Hawks cast star Richard Barthelmess alongside a relatively unknown actor of great pedigree, Douglass Fairbanks, Jr.[108] These two as Courtney "Court" and Scott "Scotto" flew into combat at dawn in hellish conditions but always returned at dusk, toasting their fallen comrades and waiting for the next mission. Viewers can tell the loss of his squad mates

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[105] *The Film Daily*, August 21, 1927, 8.

[106] The *New York Times* film reviews wrote of the movie, "The picture has as an underlying motive…[of] the futility of war." *New York Times Film Reviews*, July 11, 1930, vol. 1, 642.

[107] Isenberg, 189.

[108] His father, Douglass Fairbanks, Sr., was one of the most influential actors of all time and credited, alongside wife Mary Pickford, as the root of the modern star system. Their films in the early silent era began to influence audiences as the actors proved film stars could help solve moral dilemmas. Audiences identified with the characters Fairbanks and Pickford portrayed. Mary Pickford became known as "America's Sweetheart" via her onscreen persona, although she had as many flaws as any human. For more see Lary May, *Screening out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), especially chapter 5.

wears Court down, but he assumed a brave face and valiantly soldiered on. One of the few times audiences see this mask slip is when Court confronted Major Brand, commander of the squadron, with the accusation that Brand was cruel for sending green recruits into combat against veteran German flyers. What Court did not see was the fatalism command brought Brand when he accepted orders from headquarters that he knew were impossible.

With the classic daring and élan of Hollywood aviators, Court and Scotto defy Brand (Neil Hamilton) in any way they can. For instance, after the feared German ace Von Richter decimated "B" Flight, he soared above squadron headquarters and dropped trench boots upon the runway with a note taunting the British pilots. Although Brand left strict orders against retaliation, Court and Scotto secretly acquired the boots and conducted their own private raid against the Germans. In what *Variety* reviewers described as "a boyish lark," the two pilots bombed and strafed the German field, destroying planes on takeoff, blowing up anti-aircraft guns, and leaving the boots behind in mocking fashion.[109] They displayed abundant courage and heroism during the raid, even as they were shot down upon return to their lines, laughing and saluting each other's bravery and audacity.

The climactic battle scene in which Court bombed a strategic ammunition dump concluded with a thrilling aerial battle with von Richter's forces. Court shot down two German pilots, one of whom was the dreaded von Richter, before succumbing to the third. He chivalrously saluted his killer as he crashed in flames, ending Dick Courtney's stint as commander and leaving Scotto in charge. One advertisement praised *Dawn Patrol* for its, "Tremendous air scenes! Crashing planes! Reckless sky fighting!"[110] Many reviewers noted

[109] *Variety*, July 16, 1930, 15.

[110] *Motion Picture News*, July 19, 1930, 12-13.

the lack of women in the film, but the realistic war scenes stole the show as melodrama.[111] As Isenberg put it, "The main implication to be drawn from this is that the American public…tended to regard duty and honor as essential and nonnegotiable virtues."[112]

Like *What Price Glory?*, *Wings*, and *Hell's Angels* before it, sacrifice, courage, comradery, and heroism drove *Dawn Patrol*'s success at the box office and made these films palatable to audiences. Part of *Wings*'s popularity came from the aerial achievements of Charles Lindbergh, fresh off his solo transatlantic flight and a hero to every American.[113] *New York Times*' Hall observed notable personages in the audience at *Wings*'s debut and remarked in his review, "Commander Richard E. Byrd was noticed in the lobby talking to Jesse L. Lasky and the words of the hero of the North Pole and transatlantic flights evidently pleased the producer. As the Commander turned to re-enter the theater he remarked: 'And I wouldn't say so if I didn't think it.'"[114] If real life heroes celebrated these films, then so should every red-blooded American male.

Battlefield heroism is the easiest subject to explore in films about war, because, realistically, every protagonist had to commit heroic acts for the film to reach climax. It was generally accepted in the interwar years that heroic deeds were those that happened in service to duty and country. These included sacrificing oneself for the good of the unit, committing acts that took great courage or daring or upholding the highest ideals of war's

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[111] *New York Times Film Reviews*, July 11, 1930, vol. 1, 642.

[112] Isenberg, 126.

[113] Opening title cards for the film had Lindbergh paying tribute to those who fell in the war. DeBauche, 180.

[114] Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times Film Reviews*, August 13, 1927, vol. 1, 380-381.

quest for democracy.[115] These acts came in the face of danger, facing down the enemy with a stoic expression or a half grin on their faces.

The film *Sergeant York* implied Alvin York captured 132 German soldiers nearly single-handily, thereby demonstrating the manly aspects of courage and valor for male audiences. A mission of daring and duty helped York to defeat overwhelming odds and receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for conspicuous gallantry and valor. Similarly, *The Fighting 69th* (1940), *The Big Parade*, and *The Road to Glory* displayed the protagonist heroically sacrificing his body for God, country, and comrades. The war films of the interwar years needed heroic acts for audiences to find them palatable. Suffice it to say that all these films exploited heroism in battle as the highest of male ideals.

Yet none of the films began and ended with glorious heroism throughout. For nearly all 101 minutes of *The Road to Glory*, Captain Paul la Roche (Warner Baxter) struggled with the burdens of command, giving little attention to heroic battlefield exploits. The only thing that helped him deal with the depression of command was the presence of Monique, a beautiful young villager whose family he saved before the start of the movie. Like Major Brand in *Dawn Patrol* and Colin Clive's Captain Stanhope in *Journey's End*, command isolated these men as they struggled with depression, anger, and despair. In war films, commanding young men in combat seemed to drag these men through hell. The younger protégées became the heroes, those who did not have to face the burden of command.

[115] Mosse, 109-110.

Another Howard Hawks film, *The Road to Glory* contained elements of previous Hawks films.[116] Sacrifice, duty, heroism, and a love triangle became part of this story about a French company on the front lines of WWI. By 1936, the year of its release, *The Road to Glory* portrayed the transitional masculinity so often seen in the interwar years. Top billing for *The Road to Glory* went to Frederick March, portraying a young, handsome Lieutenant Michel Denet. He became the hero of the film by virtue of his cumulative deeds rather than one specific act. Or, pessimistically, he had the greatest box office appeal. March, Baxter, and Lionel Barrymore—playing an elderly Private Moran, the Captain's father in disguise—all received billing before the title of the film, suggesting they appealed to audiences despite the film, not because of it. Monique served as a point of conflict between la Roche and Denet without contributing to the story about war.

Audiences met la Roche and Monique in the opening scene as la Roche received orders to move up to the front and relieve the company already there. During a German artillery barrage immediately after the first scene, Denet saved Monique and attempted to woo her, with dismal results. Denet joined la Roche's company as a replacement lieutenant and promptly proved his heroism as he frantically tried to save a wounded soldier after moving to the front. La Roche called Denet a brave fool for the attempted rescue. While Denet displayed heroic mannerisms, la Roche worried more about the mission.

Upon their return to the village where Monique worked as a nurse, Denet tracked her down at the hospital to continue his courting. She rebuffed him again but not as strongly as before, ultimately leading to a romantic interlude in the same bombed-out basement where

[116] Howard Hawks directed four of the films in this study, *Dawn Patrol* (1930), *Today We Live*, *The Road to Glory*, and *Sergeant York*. Of the four, *Sergeant York* is the only one without a sacrifice by the hero, although the argument can be made that York had to sacrifice his pacifist values in order to serve his country.

Denet serenaded her on a piano when first they met. While waiting to move to the front again, Denet and Monique continued their clandestine affair. Monique was torn between the two men, but Denet did not realize it had to be kept secret from la Roche.

While their relationship started out rocky, the captain and Denet eventually gained a mutual respect for each other. The lieutenant admired his patriotism and the men's adoration of Captain la Roche. The company's high regard for the captain began when la Roche addressed new recruits,

> Soldiers of France. You are now members of the 5th Company, 2nd Battalion, of the 39th Regiment of the line. This Regiment was created by General Bonaparte and served gloriously with him through many campaigns. Since November 1914, it has been fighting on this front. Its record of valor has not yet been damaged. I do not expect any man, or any platoon, or even an entire company to add stature to that record. But I do and will require that no man in it detract from that record. At midnight we move up to the front. Dismissed.

Audiences see worship on the faces of the new members of this proud company as they imagine the honors they could heap upon it.

One such recruit is the grizzled Private Moran, La Roche's father in disguise. During preparations to again move to the front, audiences discover one of Moran's most prized possessions is a trumpet he used as a bugler under General Bonaparte. However, the captain ordered his father, proud to once again fight for his country, away from the front. Moran was heartbroken when la Roche sent him away; all he wanted was a chance to serve his country in glorious battle again. Through cunning and deceit, Moran marched to the front with the company where he displayed bravery by jumping on a grenade to save his companions, which turned out to be a dud.

The love triangle between la Roche, Monique, and Denet served as a point of conflict between the two men, as it often did, with Monique playing the role of torn-between-two-men agonized female lead. When Denet realized that Monique was the

captain's girl, he broke things off with her, although she accidentally left behind in his room a crucifix la Roche gave her. The captain found the crucifix and turned cold towards Denet, confusing the lieutenant about the change in attitude. When the company received a suicidal mission to establish a forward observation post, la Roche looked to Denet to volunteer, which he gallantly did.

When the company received orders to staff the observation post, Captain la Roche exhibited the courage and heroism that his men most respected and audiences would have most admired. Although blinded in an earlier attack, la Roche could not order any of his men on the suicidal mission, which was bound to take heavy fire from his artillery. Instead, he ordered Denet to take command of the company, turned to his father, and, without words, they both limped into position at the front. During the barrage, Moran called out artillery strikes for his blinded son, and la Roche relayed the directions to headquarters via phone. Rounds struck the wall they hid behind, while Moran proudly trumpeted the same horn he carried decades before.

Captain la Roche appealed to audiences through his final act of heroism, redeeming the previous angst his character displayed, while Moran redressed his cowardice through his last act of defiance. Both men found redemption through the act of killing for the greater good. Idols became special in war films through heroic acts.[117] Nothing was more heroic than sacrificing yourself for one's country or taking the place of a treasured comrade.

Frank S. Nugent of the *New York Times* wrote in his review, "There is, during the swift chronicling of these disassociated events, an underlying theme: the glory of service, of regimental tradition, selfless discipline and sacrifice. …and here again we are persuaded that

[117] Isenberg, 127.

heroes die gloriously, with trumpets blowing a charge and with time for a pathetic last word."[118] The themes of *The Road to Glory* include heroism, courage, self-sacrifice, and patriotism, exhibiting the transitional masculine ideals of the 1930s.

La Roche displayed both anguish and heroism, giving audiences a redeeming act at the end to make up for his previous aloofness. Denet portrayed heroism in battle throughout the movie but still strove to possess Monique. Rather than trying to conquer her through his physical or sexual prowess, Denet used Victorian manly ideals to win her affection. Moran's former glory brought back nostalgia for the past; as a matter of fact, at one point in the film, he berated the soldiers for not knowing what war was really like; "You should've been there [Napoleon's war]…now there was a war." The characters demonstrated the shifting values of the interwar era while still presenting manly ideals for male and female audiences alike.

Journey's End is the one film that does not glorify any appreciation of heroism but still has its moments of bravery. First, stalwartly facing life in the trenches takes a tremendous amount of courage and that came across the screen to audiences. One lieutenant, Anthony Bushell's Lieutenant Hibbert, complained of pain behind his eyes and spoke of departing to the hospital. Captain Stanhope berated Hibbert for his cowardice and promptly turned to drink to bolster his own courage. A couple of characters die gloriously, and Stanhope grasped in vain at duty and alcohol. The British soldiers stoically did their duty in a hopeless task, achieving Victorian ideals. *Journey's End* is truly a denunciation of war,

[118] Frank S. Nugent, *New York Times Film Reviews,* August 6, 1936, vol. 2, 1307-8.

more so than any other film viewed, although Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet*, released the same year, overshadows it in popular memory.[119]

Like *Journey's End*, *All Quiet* was a bitter renunciation of WWI, with one reviewer noting, "The League of Nations could make no better investment than to buy the master print, reproduce it in every language for every nation to be shown every year until the word War shall have been taken out of the dictionaries."[120] Of *All Quiet,* much has already been written.[121] The film's protagonist, Paul Baumer, enlisted to "fight for the Fatherland" but quickly recognized fighting on the frontlines was hopeless. Due to a particularly gruesome scene in a shelled-out crater in the middle of a battlefield, historian Peter C. Rollins wrote of the film, "Baumer—and presumably the audience—comes to realize that the world's little people are victims of bureaucracy, the nation state, industrialism, and 'progress.'"[122] In other words, Rollins believed the film presented the complete opposite of ideal masculinity and exceptionalism. Aside from a few typically soldierly exploits of bravery and appeals to duty, as well as a comedic romantic interlude with three French women, the film is utterly devoid of heroic overtones. One comes away from the movie with the sense that death and fatalism are more important than duty to country.

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[119] The *New York Times* listed both *Journey's End* and *All Quiet* among the top ten movies of the year in 1930. *The Dawn Patrol* and *Hell's Angels* came out the same year, making it the most prolific year for war films in this study, and perhaps since before the end of WWI. *New York Times Film Reviews*, vol. 6, 3867.

[120] *Variety*, May 7, 1930, 21.

[121] For two especially provocative pieces see Andrew Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War* (New York, Routledge, 1997), 43-57; and John Whiteclay Chambers II, "'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1930): The antiwar film and the image of the First World War," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 14, no. 4 (October 1994): n.p.

[122] Peter C. Rollins, "World War I," in Peter C. Rollins, ed., *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 109-115.

These two films are the antithesis of heroic war narratives in the interwar years. While brief snippets of gallantry occurred, they became lost in the background noise of moral outrage and despair. These two films contributed depth and horror towards the war to an otherwise acquiescent spectatorship, or, in the words of *New York Times*' Hall, "In nearly all the sequences, fulsomeness is avoided. Truth comes to the fore, when the young soldiers are elated at the idea of joining up, when they are disillusioned, when they are hungry, when they are killing rats in a dugout, when they are shaken with fear." Additionally, "[*All Quiet*] tells the terrors of fighting better than anything so far."[123] However, the one thing they do have in common with other war movies, besides an overly fatalistic awareness of war, is the shared narrative of patriotism, nationalism, and, to a lesser extent, the moral right present in war films.

It is almost as if, by the mere expedient of accepting their fate and doing their duty, the characters in *All Quiet* and *Journey's End* became existential heroes, struggling against life's absurdity. Like Sisyphus in Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Baumer and Stanhope found honor and courage in their struggles, however futile it may be. They soldiered on and continued fighting, even in the depths of despair or hell. These movies do not necessarily fit the common definition of heroic or manly exploits, but they do find honor in duty to country and sacrifice for the nation. When audiences grappled with the question of war's moral right, they had the example of *All Quiet* and *Journey's End* to help sustain them.

Sergeant York is the preeminent war film justifying patriotism and the supposed moral right of WWI's fight for democracy. Yet, similar refrains run through other movies

[123] Mordaunt Hall, *New York Times Film Reviews*, April 30, 1930, vol. 1, 622-23.

such as Jim's decision to enlist when he saw a parade pass by in 1925's *The Big Parade*, Roy's desire to join the British Flying Corps to fight for his country in *Hell's Angels*, and the characters enlisting in *Wings* and *The Fighting 69th*, to name a few. *Sergeant York* detailed the exploits of America's most decorated hero in WWI, winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the French Croix de Guerre and Légion d'Honneur, all awarded for heroism in battle. Audiences had no greater role model that Alvin York—pacifist-turned-hero becoming an advocate for intervention against Nazi Germany.[124] With his ruggedly handsome good looks, Cooper epitomized a WWI "he-man."

When the film started, producers treated audiences to patriotic band music as the opening credits were shown across a simple rural backdrop of woodlands and rivers. The title card read, "We are proud to present this picture and are grateful to the many heroic figures, still living, who have generously consented to be portrayed in its story. To their faith and ours that a day will come when man will live in peace on earth, this picture is humbly dedicated." The first scenes showed audiences York's life before the war. He drank too much, fought in bars, skipped church, and made a nuisance of himself. At the same time, he was responsible for farming his family's land and supporting his mother and siblings. Hard work did not provide his family much, giving further impetus to his hell-raising and blowing off steam. Pastor Rossier Pile (Walter Brennan) tried to talk sense into York, to little avail. York continued working during the day and exploiting his manly passions at night.

When the war came to America and the Army drafted York, he registered as a conscientious objector. His pproscriptions against fighting later led to conflict with his

[124] Birdwell in Rollins and O' Connor, 135.

superiors during training camp, as they did not trust pacifists. When he proved himself a hard worker and adept at military skills, such as marksmanship—not much different from rural life in Tennessee—his commander offered York a promotion to corporal, which he promptly turned down due to his religious proscription against killing. So far through the movie, York displayed the transitional nature of Victorian values of hard work and self-reliance while he tried to embrace the manly passions and desires of modern era masculinity.

Major Buxton offered York a deal: take liberty and think over the meaning of American freedoms. In one of the most nationalistic scenes of the film, the major offered York an American history textbook and spoke of the great men that helped make America free. Captain Danforth, played by Harvey Stephens, made the argument that all men are required to defend the rights of people, and if a few have to die to secure the liberty of others, such is the sacrifice required. York traveled home to read and think about their words. The film offered a view of him sitting on a rock ledge with his faithful dog, lost in contemplation of the words in the book; when he finally came to the realization that he had to fight for God and country, a shaft of light illuminated his face in a touchingly divine moment.

His service to country manifested in a desire to fight the Germans rather than stay and teach recruits. His heroism is rampant; suffice it to say everything from then on in the film is in service to patriotism and moral right. The first battle scene happens approximately two-thirds of the way through the movie. Until then, it focuses more on the virtues of fighting and dying. After the scene in which York performs the acts that earned him the Medal of Honor, his commander asked why he changed his mind. York said he killed those

men to save lives. By killing twenty-two men—and capturing 132 more—he saved countless American lives.

In an atypical two-page review, the *New York Times* heaped praise upon the film. Bosley Crowther wrote, "It is an honest saga of a plain American who believed in fundamentals and acted with clean simplicity," and "the picture has all the flavor of true Americana."[125] The review continued with an addendum titled "Tennesseeans [sic] Hail York": "The real-life Alvin York attended the premiere, along with delegations from York's home state, York's commander Colonel George Buxton, and government and Army officials." The *New York Times* quoted York's words following the screening, "millions of Americans, like myself, must be facing the same questions, the same uncertainties which we faced and I believe resolved for the right some twenty-four years ago."[126]

All in all, the film became another resounding success for the war genre. Cooper won the 1941 Academy Award for Best Actor, and Birdwell believed it became the most important film focusing on the intervention debate.[127] Critics acclaimed the film, calling it, "A valiant testament to the American way of life," "Not only one of the best pictures of the year, but one of the greatest ever made in Hollywood," and "at times it achieves heroic proportions."[128] York's male role models convinced him to fight for America. Warner Bros. exploited changing sentiments in 1941 and brought a nationalistic film to American audiences. *Sergeant York* was not the first time audiences saw Cooper with a change of heart regarding fighting in the war. Cooper's character in *Today We Live* came to believe it was

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[125] Bosley Crowther, *New York Times Film Reviews*, July 3, 1941, vol. 3, 1796-7.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Birdwell in Rollins and O'Connor, 137.

[128] *Motion Picture Daily*, July 9, 1941, 5.

better to fight, even if it was as an American in British uniform, than to sit passively on the sideline. Both times Cooper raised the flag of patriotism and joined the war to fight for his country, no matter what the real reasons were behind WWI.

James Cagney's character Plunkett in *The Fighting 69th* underwent a similar conversion, this time from atheist coward to devout hero. He started the movie as a loud-mouthed braggart whom everyone disliked, claiming how brave he would be, "I'm gonna get me a whole chest full of medals!" Yet, by the climactic scene, he was under arrest for cowardice awaiting the firing squad. Plunkett had no concept of what war was like and saw it as an adventure. Reality struck him down.

Throughout the movie, Plunkett faced a crisis of consciousness. He was a coward in battle, constantly causing his regiment to come under attack. While waiting for his execution, during the climactic scene, Plunkett faced his fear and charged to the front to save his regiment. Father Duffy—he who became the real hero of the film through his calm demeanor and his faith in the Lord, as well as his stated belief in American ideals of freedom and liberty—convinced Plunkett to help his besieged troop. When Duffy discovered the regiment was making an attack without artillery support, he asked Plunkett's help to save them. Plunket single-handily blew a hole in the trench wire then covered a grenade with his helmet to save his comrades. He took a fatal wound, but Father Duffy comforted him as he lay dying.

Producers really wanted to hammer home the patriotic and heroic nature of Plunkett's change of heart. Men that used to hate Plunket for his cowardice now applauded his heroism, "From now on, every time I hear the name Plunket, I'll snap to attention and salute." A compelled gesture of respect normally reserved for superior officers was now

willingly bestowed on a no-name private for his transformative courage in battle. *The Fighting 69th* was a rousing tale of coward-turned-hero. Audiences had in Plunkett another example of idealized masculinity to follow.

The Film Daily called it an "outstanding, distinctive war picture" and *Motion Picture Herald* hailed it as "a preachment for patriotism…[with] scenes of drama and adventure."[129] Other critics said of it, "Warner Brothers have not made the error of glorifying war…Tells of service and courage," and "Stirring up all the latent patriotism which you might possess, and giving you the thrills that those war pictures have a way of doing."[130] Plunkett's sacrifice at the end left audiences with a heroic example of courage and masculinity, neatly fitting into the idealized identity of the interwar years.

Not everyone felt that way. Some reviewers took exception to the story. Frank S. Nugent of the *New York Times* thought as a tale of the 69th it was a satisfactory film, "but, as the personal history of Private Plunkett and how He Became a Hero it is embarrassingly unconvincing," and, one might add, rather abrupt.[131] It is true. Cagney as the hero fell flat. Father Francis Duffy became the real hero to audiences with his pious attitude and final appeal for restoring American ideals.[132] While Plunkett gave audiences heroic deeds in battle, the character of Father Duffy, based on a real person as were a few other characters, utilized the patriotism and interventionist opinions of 1940s Hollywood.

For men to accept the role of onscreen heroes, they had to accept the basic premise that their nation had a moral obligation or right to fight. This is one of the common threads

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[129] *The Film Daily*, January 5, 1940, 5; *Motion Picture Herald*, January 13, 1940, 36.

[130] *Motion Picture Daily*, February 1, 1940, 4.

[131] Frank S. Nugent, *New York Times Film Reviews*, January 27, 1940, vol. 3, 1678.

[132] Isenberg, 94.

running through the concept of American exceptionalism, from Puritan colonists to twentieth-century politicians. Here, what Leslie Midkiff DeBauche called Hollywood's "practical patriotism" comes into play—Hollywood films during and after WWI combined business and allegiance to the country to "benefit the film industry's long-term interests."[133] As long as war films continued to demonstrate this understanding, audiences accepted their validity as accurate representations of the past. They then used those values to construct their own identities in everyday life.

This theme is missing in *All Quiet* and *Journey's End*, which is why viewers commonly accepted them as anti-war. When films question the moral right to fight, they bring into question every man's motivations for joining the war. At the same time, "the antiwar First World War films of the 1930s may…actually have helped masses of people take the chaos and horror of the war and organize it in a more understandable and manageable way in their minds," as historian John Whiteclay Chambers II suggested.[134] Audiences experiencing "realistic" wars in theaters allowed them to absorb the attitudes of masculinity and exceptionalism in Hollywood films.

Conclusion

Taking advantage of a resurgence in wartime attitudes, Warner Bros. remade *Dawn Patrol* in 1938 with their typical flair of, at this time, interventionist rhetoric.[135] They bought

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[133] DeBauche, *xvi*,

[134] Chambers, "'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1930): The antiwar film and the image of the First World War," citing J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 349.

[135] For an understanding of Warner Bros.'s anti-Nazi rhetoric, see Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: The Warner Bros. Campaign against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). For an alternate interpretation of Hollywood's relationship with Nazi Germany, see Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013); then see Johannes von Moltke,

the rights to the first picture, renamed it *Flight Commander*, reused aerial sequences from the first movie to cut budget costs, and cast Errol Flynn and David Niven in the lead roles.[136] In the *New York Times* review, Nugent called it, "a thrilling, exciting and heroic film…[that] is pretending (never successfully) to be a denunciation of the stupidity of war." And, unlike the original, "[Errol] Flynn does well enough…when he is permitted to swashbuckle through the corps, but the closest he comes to registering a nervous breakdown is to appear poetically pensive."[137] This happened again with a re-released and edited version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1939 and a 1952 remake of *What Price Glory?* starring James Cagney in the lead role.[138]

World War I films represented visions of idealized masculinity for interwar men's use. They saw favorite actors face romance, competition, patriotism, duty, courage, and heroism in war, often all at the same time. Movies provided an outlet for men as they faced identity crises, or, in the words of Mellen, "When they were not attempting to distract audiences from their troubles with cathartic laughter, movies were to uphold the myths of the frontier and of individual achievement."[139] These war movies fit this pattern; romance,

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"Hollywood, Hitler, and Historiography: Film History as Cultural Critique," *Critical Critique* no. 91 (Fall 2015): 167-189.

[136] "The Dawn Patrol," *AFI: Catalogue of Feature Films*, accessed February, 22, 2017, http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=3653.

[137] Frank S. Nugent, *New York Times Film Reviews*, December 24, 1938,vol. 2, 1560.

[138] Chambers wrote of *All Quiet*'s remake, "With the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, Universal Pictures rushed the film into theatres in the fall of 1939. However, there were several significant additions in this version: an anti-Nazi commentary throughout the film and a semi-documentary preface and epilogue that featured newsreel material on the First World War and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Although the 1939 re-release was vigorously anti-Nazi, it was also strongly isolationist…" Chambers, "'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1930): The antiwar film and the image of the First World War," n.p.

[139] Mellen, 72.

comedy-drama, melodrama, and adventures all provided versions of transitional and idealized masculinity and exceptionalism for interwar men.

Some movies, such as *Journey's End* or *All Quiet*, allowed audiences to experience passionate manhood and let them give their emotions free rein. *Sergeant York* and *Dawn Patrol* focused more on heroism, patriotism, comradery, and courage. A few, namely *Today We Live* and *The Road to Glory*, wrote romance into a war story as a secondary conflict for male protagonists and audiences loved it. They all carried overtones of American exceptionalism, no matter which country the main characters hailed from. Even *All Quiet* showed young men initially joining the war in service to patriotic duty and displaying a national fortitude as they soldiered on. These films navigated the intersection of Victorian and modern era values, often to critical acclaim and financial success.

The best summation of the war genre came from Chamber's essay about *All Quiet*. War films have the "ability to project a perceived reality as a setting for their filmatic [sic] dramas." He goes on to say that films "have had such an important role in mobilizing the mass public to support armed conflict. Their portrayal of 'reality' together with their manipulation of symbols and emotions can generate intense nationalism, hostility towards national 'enemies', and bellicose sentiments."[140] Furthermore, beloved actors selling a specific role indicated to men how to act. Spectators gathered meaning from those films they loved the best, whether that was romance, *film noir*, adventure, or, in this case, war.

Mellen believed audiences "fearing that we can never be adequate men and women, we satisfy ourselves by applauding screen heroes…[and] conspire in our own impotence.

[140] Chambers, "'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1930): The antiwar film and the image of the First World War," n.p.

We people our films with men as unreal as Davy Crockett and place them in an America of legend."[141] Tennesseans hailed Alvin York as a modern version of Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and Abraham Lincoln.[142] In one scene of *Sergeant York*, the camera panned to a tree stump with the inscription, "D. Boon cilled a bar on the tree in year 1760." When Cooper/York returned to Tennessee, everyone acclaimed his heroism, calling him the greatest Tennessee hero since Daniel Boone and Andy Jackson. Nostalgia for American myths played a significant role in the films at this time, further evidenced by Father Duffy's character in *The Fighting 69th*.[143]

This is crucial during the interwar era because WWI was the first time when the American people could experience war without being directly involved, such as suffering life as a soldier or facing the aftermath of local battles. As movies became more popular, American society used these films in their everyday lives. They not only experienced the war vicariously, but movies began to shape the way they approached aspects of contemporary society. This is the result of a need to identify or define heroes for use in daily life.

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[141] Mellen, 26. Mellen describes the "Big Bad Wolves of Hollywood" as those stars that fall within the "stereotype of self-controlled, invulnerable, stoical hero who justifies the image of unfeeling masculinity" (5). She links masculinity with patriotism and Christianity while emphasizing the violent nature of on-screen heroes. Her work seems like a good resource, well written and easy to read, but the lack of notes and a bibliography seems to reduce the effectiveness of her argument. Mellen divides the chapters by decade with the book ending rather abruptly in the seventies. It is clear that she extensively studies the documents of the past, including necessary films and numerous primary sources, but once again, the lack of documented scholarly methodology diminishes the value by making it difficult in tracing her sources. It is important to note that despite the perceived shortcomings of her book, Mellen is cited by other authors in this study including Liz Clarke, "Ladies Last: Masculinization of the American War Film in the 1920s,"; Drew Todd, "Decadent Heroes: Dandyism and Masculinity in Art Deco Hollywood,"; and Leslie Kong, "Social Themes as Reflected in Film: Scholarship, Criticism, and Theory," *CHOICE: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries* 47, no. 11 (July 2010): 2047-2058.

[142] Birdwell in Rollins and O'Connor, 123.

[143] Producers added another real character in the movie, that of William "Wild Bill" Donovan. Wild Bill won the Medal of Honor in WWI while leading the real Fighting 69th. During WWII, he became the director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA, as he was a close friend to President Roosevelt.

These notions of masculinity and exceptionalism in Hollywood played out in a shifting cultural and political environment of the interwar years. Hollywood films became so influential that isolationist senators used Hollywood as a justification to censor Roosevelt's government. Films not only helped justify the need to participate in war—both WWI and later in WWII—but they spoke to the values of the American public during times of crisis and national consciousness. White American men evaluated Hollywood icons as a driving force in a changing cultural landscape that ultimately played out in the halls of American political power.

Chapter III
Who Wants to Fight? Isolation versus Intervention

> *Whereas the motion-picture screen and the radio are the most potent instruments of communication of ideas…charges have been made that the motion picture and the radio have been extensively used for propaganda purposes designed to influence the public mind in the direction of participation in the European war…this propaganda reaches weekly the eyes and ears of one hundred million people and is in the hands of groups interested in involving the United States in war…the Committee on Interstate Commerce…is authorized and directed to make…a thorough and complete investigation of any propaganda disseminated by motion pictures…*
>
> Senate Resolution 152, August 1, 1941[144]

> *[Propaganda] is an attempt to propagate an idea in the minds of the people or in the minds of any group of people.*
>
> *John T. Flynn*, Propaganda in Motion Pictures[145]

Government and Hollywood

On day three of the Senate's Hollywood hearings, the subcommittee invited journalist John T. Flynn to testify about alleged propaganda in the motion picture industry. Flynn had no history in Hollywood, he had no experience as a film critic or expertise about filmmaking, and he had no political background to lend his testimony weight. In fact, Flynn self-identified as a "newspaper and magazine writer" writing on "economics and social subjects."[146] What he also had were strong views regarding American isolation and the backing of Senator Gerald P. Nye, with whom he had a previous working relationship.[147] Flynn chaired the America First Committee in New York City and believed the motion

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[144] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce*, United States Senate, 77th Cong. 1st sess., September 9-26, 1941, 1-3.

[145] Ibid., 133.

[146] Ibid., 91.

[147] John E. Moser, "'Gigantic Engines of Propaganda': The 1941 Senate Investigation of Hollywood," *The Historian* 63, no. 4 (June 2001): 739.

picture industry abused its power when it presented war propaganda onscreen.[148] Flynn argued against the monopoly present in Hollywood "because the moving picture is a cultural instrument, an instrument capable of disseminating ideas and opinions, of shaping the public mind and public opinion."[149]

Flynn was not the only one who testified to Hollywood's cultural influence during the hearings. By 1941, political powerbrokers recognized the ability of the moving picture to affect social and political discourse. For the Senate investigation, this meant stifling the "warmongering" attitudes prevalent in many films about war. Whether or not they meant to, war films commented on the political and social situations of the history they showed. This investigation shows that movies began conversations relating to contemporary social and cultural issues, with audiences using the on-screen history as commentary in their everyday lives.

In the buildup to WWI, Hollywood tended to produce anti-war or non-intervention movies, while later they made films that advocated a larger US role in the war. These films, such as *Birth of a Nation*, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Little American* (1917), and *To Hell with the Kaiser!* (1918), showed a changing national consciousness and Hollywood's attempts to appease their audiences. As Andrew Kelly wrote in his 1997 book, *Cinema and the Great War*, "The cinema [in WWI] played a crucial role during the war, first in the debate for and against intervention; later as a propaganda tool."[150] During the hearings, Senator Nye asserted Great Britain alone spent $165,000,000 towards propaganda advocating US

[148] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 91-92.
[149] Ibid., 95.
[150] Kelly, 15.

intervention in WWI.[151] To this end, Hollywood allegedly allied with various governments to sway American minds one way or the other.

In 1941, the subcommittee professed Hollywood again used its cultural influence to poison the American mind against isolationism. Brandishing a list of more than 100 movies about war, the senators attacked Hollywood for taking an interventionist position by showing sensationalized accounts of the war in Europe.[152] Movies such as Charlie Chaplin's comedic spoof *The Great Dictator* (1940), Warner Brothers' blockbuster *Sergeant York* (1941), MGM's *Escape* (1940), and *Convoy* (1940) were among the movies most criticized by isolationists for being warmongering and interventionist.[153] Seen as pro-British, pro-war, or anti-German, Nye and Bennet Champ Clark of Missouri professed each movie could alienate large portions of Europe and incite anxiety among the US population. When Hollywood produced history about wars, they influenced audiences. The subcommittee attacked Hollywood films because they disagreed with the on-screen message.

More so than any other era, movies in the interwar years became a cultural icon that shaped how audiences perceived history. As a new medium of popular culture, movies became instruments to affect change and influence audiences.[154] This led to men accepting the themes in films and adopting them as part of their identity. They used film heroes to explain their attitudes and actions, helping them to construct their cultural hierarchy.

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[151] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures,* 22.

[152] Justus D. Doenecke, "American Isolationism, 1939-1941," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* VI, nos. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1982): 212.

[153] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures,* 35.

[154] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975), vi.

Moreover, this was not limited to one group of men. Intellectuals and politicians felt the same way, leading to the 1941 investigation.

Scholarship of the 1941 subcommittee has received little analysis, and much of that came in its relation to the HUAC hearings. John E. Moser—professor of history and author of one such study—claimed,

> While relatively few historians have written about the investigation, those who have tend to take a dim view of the whole affair. Historians of the film industry have portrayed it as an anti-Semitic "witch hunt," "a sorry example of congressional dimwittedness." On the other hand, U.S. diplomatic historians have treated it as a desperate act by an anti-interventionist movement that was rapidly losing its momentum.[155]

Moser's own assertion is that the investigation "fall[s] well within a tradition of American progressivism that resisted the increasing corporatization of society."[156] In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt alienated American elites and many members of Congress. The subcommittee pushed back against Roosevelt's government control and used Hollywood as the critical lever in the fight against intervention. At heart, the subcommittee

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[155] Moser, 732.

[156] Ibid.; Historian James E. McMillan stated that the hearings established a pattern of congressional distrust of the film industry, started in 1938 and continuing through the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings. James E. McMillan, "McFarland and the Movies: The 1941 Senate Motion Picture Hearings," *The Journal of Arizona History* 29, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988): 299; Steven Alan Carr's 2001 book, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, stressed that Roosevelt's policies increasingly alienated his one-time supporters, so they condemned his relationship with Hollywood as an "unparalleled abuse of presidential power" while at the same time sharply criticizing isolationists' anti-Semitic inclinations. Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 239; Colin Schindler claimed the investigation was meant to embarrass interventionists in Hollywood and the Roosevelt Administration. Colin Shindler, *Hollywood Goes to War: Films and American Society, 1939-1952* (Boston, MA: Routledge & Keagan Paul Ltd., 1979); while Robert Sklar alleges that the hearings were a reaction to the public's resentment of foreign-born and Jewish business leaders. Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*; other authors argue the committee became a failure of congressional power due to the ineptitude of the extreme isolationists on the committee. John Whiteclay Chambers, "The Movies and the Antiwar Debate in America, 1930-1941," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 36.1 (Fall 2006): 44-57; finally, Michael Birdwell postulates that the subcommittee was the result of lingering resentment of foreigners and Anglophobia. Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 154.

came down to seven senators and their support—or lack thereof—of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

From the Creel Commission during World War I to the HUAC inquiries and the Red Scare in the early fifties, the federal government sought ways to control, harness, or limit the power of a burgeoning Hollywood. As Moser suggested, "In the 1920s and 1930s the villains [of America] were 'corrupt trusts'; in the late 1940s they were 'subversives' and 'foreign agents.' In 1941 they were both."[157] The investigation admittedly had little impact on the movie industry. The subcommittee could not stifle creativity or censor any films, and no legislation followed the hearings. Yet the overall effect of government attempts to control Hollywood has far-reaching consequences, such as the HUAC hearings and McCarthyism.[158] While some producers, directors, and actors used their influence to advocate a stance one way or another, government officials sought ways to thwart or encourage certain positions.[159] Because of the popularity of feature films, Hollywood grew into a place to guide national politics, beliefs, and ideas. While they did not always succeed, their views often reflected the national consensus.

Until we understand the dynamic association between Hollywood and national politics, we cannot fully appreciate the significance of one of the most iconic spaces in America. Some magazines and newspapers of the day were certain that the investigation was

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[157] Moser, 733.

[158] Moser claimed this was the remnants of Progressive Era values. He goes on to state that some supporters of the subcommittee were later staunch supporters of McCarthy and HUAC. Moser, 733,750.

[159] A long list of producers, directors, and actors advocated for or against intervention. For example, Harry Warner, the president of Warner Bros. once bought Spitfire fighter planes for the RAF. Charley Chaplin was an outspoken advocate of intervention, which can be seen in the film he wrote, directed, and starred in, *The Great Dictator* (1940)—a comedic spoof about Hitler. At the same time, silent film star Lillian Gish was a member of the America First Committee and traveled the nation speaking against involvement in WWII. Birdwell, in Rollins and O'Conner, 123; *The Great Dictator,* Charlie Chaplin, Charles Chaplin Production, 1940; Doenecke, 212.

an anti-Roosevelt stratagem while others called it a racist attempt to limit free speech.[160] Isolationists on the 1941 Senate subcommittee worried that Roosevelt used Hollywood movies to sway the American public towards intervention.[161] In 1941, isolationists struggled to stifle Hollywood influence at the same time they condemned the president for encouraging American involvement in the European theater. The committee not only sought government-imposed isolationist versions of Hollywood films, but they rejected the power of Hollywood in the hands of a few. Although the subcommittee investigated Hollywood and its alleged monopolies, the deeper implication was trying to appropriate Hollywood messages for their own ends, using the war genre as their rallying cry.

The America First Committee and Isolation

Isolationism and interventionism were opposing beliefs of US foreign policy during the late thirties and early forties. While supporters of interventionism advocated US participation in the European war, isolationists sought strict non-involvement and adherence to the Neutrality Acts. The Neutrality Acts were a series of laws passed in 1935, 1937, and 1939 that restricted US involvement in another European war. Written with isolationist views in mind, the acts limited the amount of aid and money America could give to belligerents in the war, prevented US citizens from traveling on belligerent's ships, and forbade American merchant shipping from transporting war materials.

As the conflict in Europe expanded in the late thirties, Roosevelt and interventionist supporters attempted to limit the Neutrality Acts and enlarge the role of US involvement. Revisions in 1937 allowed nations at war to purchase non-war supplies from the US, known

[160] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 21.
[161] Ibid., 15.

as the "cash-and-carry" provision. The "destroyers for bases" agreement in September 1940 traded fifty obsolete destroyers to Britain in exchange for a ninety-nine year lease of British naval bases. The Lend-Lease Bill in December of 1940 modified cash-and-carry, going even further than Septembers' reforms. Lend-Lease allowed Great Britain to defer payment for war supplies until able to muster the resources, probably until after the war.[162]

In the spring of 1940, a group of students at Yale University met to discuss growing American involvement in the European conflict, including Lend-Lease and revisions to the Neutrality Acts. Participants in these discussions represented the foundation of the America First Committee, an organization dedicated to promoting both non-intervention in the European war and a strong defense at home. Supporters included bankers, attorneys, business executives, and politicians. The first presiding officer of the committee was General Robert E. Wood, head of the board of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Other influential proponents included Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh and Senators Burton K. Wheeler and Nye, Miriam Clark—wife of Senator Bennet Champ Clark, silent film actor Lillian Gish, and automotive tycoon Henry Ford.[163] Furthermore, future president Gerald R. Ford supported America First Committee policies while an assistant football coach at Yale

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[162] "The Neutrality Acts, 1930s," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, accessed December 2, 2015, http://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/neutrality-acts; "Lend-Lease and Military Aid to the Allies in the Early Years of World War II," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, accessed December 2, 2015, http://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/lend-lease.

[163] Wayne S. Cole, "The America First Committee," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (*1908-1984)* 44, no. 4 (Winter, 1951): 306-7. Variety reported that Lillian Gish resigned from the America First Committee in early September, 1941, stating, "she did not believe that the organization would function as it had when she joined" and she did not intend to be "used as a cat's-paw by it to testify against the motion picture industry." *Variety*, September 3, 1941, 4.

and donated money for isolationist causes.[164] Total membership was between 800,000 and 850,000 adherents in 450 chapters nationwide.[165]

Most of the executive committee believed that war in Europe would hurt America. They feared the loss of American life, the cost in taxes, and the destabilizing effects of war. The statement of principles released in March of 1941 by America First held,

> 1. Our first duty is to keep America out of foreign wars. Our entry would only destroy democracy, not save it. "The path to war is a false path to freedom."
> 2. Not by acts of war abroad but by preserving and extending democracy at home can we aid democracy and freedom in other lands.
> 3. In 1917 we sent our American ships into the war zone and this led us to war. In 1941 we must keep our naval convoys and merchant vessels on this side of the Atlantic.
> 4. We must build a defense, for our own shores, so strong that no foreign power or combination of powers can invade our country, by sea, air or land.
> 5. Humanitarian aid is the duty of a strong, free country at peace. With proper safeguard for the distribution of supplies, we should feed and clothe the suffering and needy people of England and the occupied countries and so keep alive their hope for the return of better days.[166]

According to historian Wayne S. Cole, the America First Committee was convinced that a "complete German victory would be less prejudicial to American welfare than intervention by the United States in the war."[167] The goals of the committee were to focus on US defense; a victorious Germany could not possibly attack American shores, nor could they economically harm the United States. Any intervention by the United States in the European war was folly and could only damage US security.

Participants of the America First Committee sponsored rallies, gave speeches, campaigned for office, gave radio addresses, raised funds for lobbying, and tried to

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[164] Doenecke, 212.

[165] Cole, 312.

[166] Quoted in Cole, 308.

[167] Cole, 309.

influence national policy. On June 20, 1941, the America First Committee held a rally at the famous Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles championing isolationism. Among the speakers were Charles Lindbergh, Lillian Gish, and D. Worth Clark of Idaho—all highly visible members of America First.[168] At rallies like these, America First adherents hoped to convince listeners that American neutrality was best for the country and Roosevelt's programs harmed American interests.

Thirty thousand people attended the rally, with many more packing the hills to listen to the speeches defending isolationism.[169] Numerous people wrote to Clark after the meeting to praise his remarks using words such as "true American," "Americanism," "noble," and "glorious," when describing his principles.[170] One responder named the world's three greatest evils: the Bank of England, the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, and House of Morgan and Wall Street. He thought Roosevelt needed impeachment to save the nation, and praised Clark's forward thinking in defending American isolation.[171] Vocal supporters advocating strict non-intervention reinforced these ideas in the minds of political isolationists.

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[168] Newspaper clipping, *D. Worth Clark Papers*, Box 2, scrapbook, Boise State University Special Collections and Archives.

[169] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 45.

[170] Vincent W. Brown to D. Worth Clark, June 21, 1941, D. Worth Clark Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, Boise State University Special Collections and Archives; F. J. Kulce to D. Worth Clark, June 21, 1941, D. Worth Clark Papers; C M. Shaw to D. Worth Clark, June 27, 1941, D. Worth Clark Papers; Evelyn Scott to D. Worth Clark, June 21, 1941, D. Worth Clark Papers.

[171] C M. Shaw to D. Worth Clark, June 27, 1941, D. Worth Clark Papers. After one of Lindbergh's earlier speeches—in which he claimed "the Jews" were pressing for American intervention—the national committee was forced to release the following statement: "Colonel Lindbergh and his fellow members of the America First Committee are not anti-Semitic. We deplore the injection of the race issue into the discussion of war or peace. It is the interventionists who have done this. America First, on the other hand, has invited men and women of every race, religion and national origin to join this committee, provided only that they are patriotic citizens who put the interests of their country ahead of those of any other nation. We repeat that invitation. . . . There is but one real issue - the issue of war. From this issue we will not be diverted." The speeches by Lindberg and Clark, among others, caused backlash among the population. Some considered the remarks in poor taste, and a few criticized the purpose of the rally. Quoted in Cole, 320.

The America First Committee only lasted fourteen months; it neither affected major policy change nor managed to halt an escalation of American involvement in the war. Four days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the national leadership voted to dissolve the America First Committee.[172] Although they failed in nearly every original goal, they released this statement at the time of their disbanding: "Our principles were right. Had they been followed war could have been avoided."[173] Activists in the America First Committee—such as other individuals who strove for isolation—were satisfied with their efforts towards non-intervention, believing they were in the best interests of America.[174]

Revisions of the Neutrality Acts were among the political provisions most attacked by isolationists. As the president sought ways to increase American involvement in WWII, isolationist groups such as America First and their congressional supporters condemned interventionist rhetoric, including Hollywood war films. These actions received some of the most vocal support among US citizens and drew some of the most vehement attacks from interventionists. As background for the subcommittee investigation, it is important to note that many scholars believe the America First Committee was a haven for anti-Semitics and used its stage to denounce the power held by Jewish people in America.[175] Into this racially charged atmosphere came the members of the Senate subcommittee and the isolationist faction, as well as their detractors.

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[172] Cole, 321.

[173] Quoted in Cole, 305.

[174] Doenecke, 214.

[175] Carr, 250.

Senate Subcommittee

When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, eighty-three percent of the population opposed intervention, receiving broad non-partisan support among politicians.[176] Isolationists' goals were twofold: avoid war in Europe and maintain the freedom to act in the best interests of the United States. This enhanced the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which could involve military and diplomatic action in the western hemisphere "for security reasons," but not in Europe. Historian Justus D. Doenecke proposed that isolationists were sympathetic towards the English and hoped Great Britain would hold off the Nazis while simultaneously hoping that Germany would be a bulwark against the threat presented by communism.[177]

Senators Nye, Bennet Champ Clark, and Burton K. Wheeler, among others, wanted to achieve stronger isolationism by investigating Hollywood studios and films. The co-authors of Senate Resolution 152, Nye and Bennet Champ Clark, were among the Senate's most anti-interventionist.[178] On August 1, 1941, Senator Nye gave a radio address in St. Louis encouraging an isolationist foreign policy. In the address, he accused the eight major studios of Hollywood as being "gigantic engines of propaganda," and called for an investigation of Hollywood.[179] Nye blamed the British, bankers, and the munitions industry for getting the United States involved in WWI, and thought they were doing much the same

[176] There were two types of isolationists: liberals were afraid of a return to the days of Coolidge and "armament economics." Conservatives were afraid of wartime socialism that would remain in effect after the war. In addition, "despite defections by presidential candidate Wendell Willkie and various prominent eastern Republicans, the preponderance of Republican party sentiment remained isolationist." Doenecke, 201, 209.

[177] Doenecke, 203.

[178] Moser, 739.

[179] Gerald P. Nye, "War Propaganda: Our Madness Increases as Our Emergency Shrinks," 15 September 1941, *Vital Speeches of the Day,* vol. 7, 721.

in WWII with the help of Hollywood feature films. Nye had a history of critiquing American involvement in WWI; he led the Nye Committee in the thirties that investigated the munitions industry's role in securing American participation.

As members of the America First Committee, Nye and Clark criticized the fact that Hollywood allegedly used film to promote interventionism, which daily reached millions, while people such as Lindbergh, Wood, and Senator Wheeler had difficulties reaching audiences of much smaller sizes.[180] In one speech, he questioned, "Who has brought us to the verge of war? Who are the men? Who is putting up the money for all this propaganda?" and promptly blamed Hollywood executives.[181] Nye compared the President's alliance with Hollywood to Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy—places where the government completely controlled the film industries. Then he claimed the government allowed studios to use war equipment for free to promote intervention. "What part the government has played in this [propaganda]…using the films to poison the minds of the American people against most of Europe to plunge us into the bloodiest war in history."[182] Nye wanted to expose Roosevelt and Hollywood for he seemed to feel Roosevelt was using the executive office as a tool to get the American public involved in the war.

Over seventeen days, encompassing some 450 pages of testimony and evidence, the subcommittee sought to define the goals of Hollywood producers and their choices to

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[180] Nye claimed that at most, supporters of isolationism could book a town meeting hall or similar venue where their message could only reach a few thousand people. At the same time, Hollywood movies reached nearly a hundred million people a week. Nye, "War Propaganda," 721. Some figures given by historian Terry A. Cooney showed that in the late thirties nearly twenty percent of all recreational money was spent in theaters, and by 1940 almost ninety million people attended the movies each week, up from sixty million at the beginning of the decade. Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930's* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 74.

[181] Nye, "War Propaganda," 721.

[182] Ibid.

generate propagandist warmongering. The subcommittee included Senators D. Worth Clark, Charles W. Tobey (R- N. Hampshire), C. Wayland Brooks (R- Illinois), Homer T. Bone (D-Washington), and Hollywood's only supporter on the committee, Ernest W. McFarland (D-Arizona).[183] The committee's goals were to determine if Hollywood made only pro-intervention feature films and if large Hollywood studios held a monopoly in the film industry.[184]

Wendell Willkie—counsel for the motion picture industry—wrote a letter in response to the accusations of the resolution. As well as his written riposte, the hearings brought together testimony from prominent senators, members of the press, and representatives of Hollywood studios. The president of Warner Brothers Pictures, Harry M. Warner, vice-president of production of the Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Darryl F. Zanuck, and president of Paramount Pictures, Barney Balaban, testified before the committee. The subcommittee even allowed correspondence with Fulton Cook—a theater owner in the small town of St. Maries, Idaho—in which Cook wholeheartedly agreed with the motives behind the subcommittee investigation.[185]

There was concern in some quarters that with the appointment of Willkie as legal council, the subcommittee would turn into a "battle royal" between Willkie and the isolationists on the committee due to his past political views.[186] Willkie vehemently denied

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[183] *Variety*, September 3, 1941, 4.

[184] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 2, 55. This question of monopolies was first raised in the 1930s and continued to plague Hollywood executives until the mid-50s. The eventual break-up of Hollywood monopolies can be further explored in numerous works including the premier text on film history: Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction.*

[185] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 135-137.

[186] *The Film Daily*, September 3, 1941, 7. Former presidential candidate Wendell Willkie represented the motion picture industry during the proceedings, hired by the law committee of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA). When he lost the 1940 presidential election, Willkie switched from advocating isolationism to supporting interventionism, returned to the practice of law, and was promptly hired

charges that Hollywood worked at the direction of the president and instead stated they were motivated purely by a patriotic sense of duty.[187] In his letter to Senator Clark, Willkie addressed his concerns about the intent of the committee. Willkie's letter said of the 1,100 pictures produced in the two years since the outbreak of war, only around fifty had anything to do with issues of war. He was willing to produce witnesses that lived under the Nazis, or in England, to prove the veracity of the movies and the truthfulness of Hollywood's portrayal.

Willkie specifically defended the movie *Escape*; an award-winning book turned into a financially successful feature film, which Nye claimed furthered pro-British intervention. He further stated that the "motion-picture business is guided by nothing more subversive than the hope to satisfy the prevailing taste of the American people."[188] Willkie argued it was only a short step from investigating the motion picture industry and radio to investigating all forms of media and infringing on First Amendment rights, thereby precipitating a Constitutional crisis. He further indicated that the committee operated under questionable legality and did not "establish the impression of impartiality."[189] Lastly, Willkie's nine-page letter attacked the senators from Missouri and North Dakota—as instigators of the investigation—expressing displeasure with the resolution.

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by the MPPDA for the hearing. Willkie's interventionist policies were well known, and having just come off a presidential campaign, he was a familiar figure to both the public and his former allies Nye and Clark of Missouri. While Willkie had a history as an isolationist, after his failed presidential bid he advocated interventionism, directly conflicting with the likes of Nye and Bennett Champ Clark.

[187] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures,* 19.

[188] Ibid., 21. Historian Terry A. Cooney wrote "Moviemaking was formed and reformed by audience reactions, by discoveries about the power of movies, by political developments inside and later outside the United States, by the ambitions and calculations of those who controlled the industry, by the individual vision of particular directors, by idealism, and by humbug." Cooney, 74.

[189] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures,* 21.

On the first day of testimony, the subcommittee called Senator Nye to explain Congress' position. Nye constantly defended himself against bigotry charges during his testimony. One newspaper, claiming the committee was an anti-Roosevelt program, denounced the subcommittee as "the most barefaced attempt at censorship and racial persecution which has ever been tried in this country."[190] Nye declared that when people accused him of racism, they were trying to hide the real motivation behind the resolution. Paper editors, university presidents, interventionist intellectuals, and radio hosts all accused Nye of anti-Semitism.

Nye was outraged when Dr. John H. Sherman, from Webber College in Florida, asserted the America First Committee was an anti-Semitic platform. Wrote Sherman, "[Nye's] principal effort of the night [in the St. Louis address] was a Hitleresque attack upon American Jews…Nye accused the motion picture industry of fostering pro-British sentiment, and then called a list of Jewish names associated with the motion-picture industry…with pauses to encourage his inflamed hearers to shout and hiss."[191] Nye expressed in his testimony that detractors used his remarks to deliberately mislead others, hoping to derail the purpose of the investigation. Pro-Hollywood newspapers and trade magazines vilified the subcommittee in Hollywood's defense. They attacked the senators, their policies, and past actions with vehemence and disgust.

Senator Nye firmly advocated his position, "It is my hope to accomplish, if necessary, a degree of legislation that will give American people a defense against what I

[190] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 15.

[191] Ibid., 9.

consider to be the most vicious propaganda…"[192] At the same time, Nye rejected any desire to legislate Hollywood. Nye believed Americans knew the bias of newspapers and magazines, while eighty million people a week paid to be entertained by movies. They let their guard down while exposed to propaganda.[193] Nye believed the movies were capable of evil in that they present one side of the debate for intervention and Hollywood used them to develop a hate for the German people portrayed.[194]

When asked if he had seen the movies he charged with propaganda, Nye admitted he could recall very few of them, "It is a terrible weakness of mine to go to a picture tonight and not be able to state the title of it tomorrow morning."[195] Senator McFarland accused Nye of letting others speak through him without proper regard for what the movies contained.[196] Nye claimed he opposed the feelings of hate injected into movies. This dichotomy—charging that movies were harmful to society without being able to pinpoint why—was common of isolationists on the subcommittee during the hearings. Isolationists used any and all means to drive their point, including strong rhetoric and attacks upon their critics.

Bennet Champ Clark and Nye both alleged that eight major studios held a monopoly in the motion picture industry, and provided a Department of Justice inquiry as proof. The Department of Justice amended charges filed against the Big Eight movie corporations on November 14, 1940, for Sherman Anti-Trust Act violations.[197] *The Film Daily* claimed over

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[192] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 6.

[193] Ibid., 24.

[194] Ibid., 8.

[195] Ibid., 57.

[196] Ibid., 60.

[197] The Big Eight corporations were Paramount Pictures, Loew's, Inc., Radio-Keith-Orpheum, Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Columbia Pictures Corporation, Universal Corporation, and United Artists Corporation. *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 26, 75.

sixty suits were pending against the eight corporations for holding a monopoly in the industry.[198] The subcommittee believed those corporations used their monopoly to force theaters to play pro-war propaganda. Because there was an official investigation into the studios, Senator Nye thought it stood to reason they had something to hide. He referenced a report by Goodbody and Co. in December 1940, which concluded that if Britain lost the war, the consequence would ruin a "number of the leading motion-picture companies." The report stated that Loew's alone stood to lose ten percent of its gross income, therefore wiping out all its net profit.[199]

Nye and Clark believed statistics such as these exposed Hollywood's desire to intervene in the war and ally with Roosevelt. Subcommittee members used this report and studio investigations to defend their position within the hearings. Furthermore, Nye claimed he always felt Hollywood's propaganda production came at the government's behest, specifically President Roosevelt.[200] He called for the committee to investigate government influence on motion picture production, as well as radio. These propaganda films created for the government were for the express purpose of American entry into the war. His argument's hypocrisy is that he attacked Hollywood collusion with the government while trying to use government legislation to control the industry.

Additionally, Nye claimed the "foreign-born producers in Hollywood" were more interested in the fate of their homelands than in America, and Hollywood's effect on foreign policy was a misguided attempt for American involvement in the war.[201] As Steven Allen

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[198] "60 Trust Cases Pending," *The Film Daily*, October 14, 1932, 1.

[199] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 38.

[200] Ibid., 42.

[201] Ibid., 47-48.

Carr argued, Nye specifically attacked Jews in the film industry, and the subcommittee wanted to reduce their influence.[202] Nye referenced the American Founding Fathers in his speech, stating their leadership freed America from becoming entangled in wars on the European continent.[203] Nye adopted Revolutionary fervor and patriotic sentiments to try to limit Hollywood's propaganda and attempts to sway foreign policy.

Nye's desire for an investigation into Hollywood monopolies stemmed from the fear that the presidents of the Big Eight could collude in what type of films they produced. Hollywood controlled the production, distribution, and exhibition of films, vertically integrating the industry; producers could inject their personal hates and fears into movies and force the American public to watch by not allowing them other options.[204] Nye thought Hollywood was too powerful in swaying the hearts and minds of the movie-going audience. He claimed he spoke with filmgoers who confessed "an influence, for a moment at least, upon them by these propaganda pictures."[205] If a monopoly existed, audiences had no choice in what movies to view and were exposed to too much propaganda.[206]

At the same time, Nye directed the committee's attention to the actors in these films. Not only the producers tried to sway the American public, but also their love for favorite actors helped propaganda efforts. Something as simple as a picture, a narrative, or a speech by a beloved actor could "pertain to causes which are obsessing so much of the world today, there is planted in the heart and in the mind a feeling…which is not easily eliminated."[207] He

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[202] Carr, 266-267.

[203] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 47.

[204] Ibid., 25.

[205] Ibid., 36-7.

[206] Ibid., 33.

[207] Ibid., 24.

said of Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*, "a great artist…could…build within the mind and heart of those who watched it something of hatred."[208] As audiences experienced Hollywood's subtle propaganda efforts, actors' very presence in the films reinforced those feelings.

By 1941, Nye judged the film industry had grown so vast and powerful that it was capable of influencing American audiences. It became a purveyor of American culture. That is one reason why he resisted charges of racism and bigotry. Accusations merely served to detract from what he saw as his real goal, which was to protect the American public from unfair Hollywood propaganda. Hollywood producers, by virtue of their monopoly, could persuade the public in any direction they liked.

Clark of Missouri supported Nye's testimony and shared his fears. He was also deeply concerned that newspapers, as well as Willkie's letter, tried to demonstrate "racial prejudice" prompted the investigation.[209] He refuted this statement, defending himself against these accusations by saying, "speech is free so long as political authority, particularly the government, does not shackle it."[210] He went on to say that speech could not be free, so long as a small group of men was able to use the movies to reach such a broad audience. In this way, Clark couched the reason behind the investigation as one of freedom and liberty, as well as the analysis of monopolistic practices, for the good of the country. He neatly avoided the question of racial prejudice and hatemongering by appealing to nationalistic matters.

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[208] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures,* 60.

[209] Ibid., 80.

[210] Ibid., 69.

Bennett Champ Clark ostensibly protested the control of an agency of propaganda the size of Hollywood in the hands of a few. He had submitted an earlier resolution in 1938 calling for an inquiry of Hollywood propaganda, yet it lacked an exploration of Hollywood monopolies. It was not until Nye and Wheeler's support in Congress that the investigation of Hollywood included an examination of monopolistic practices, thereby garnering more support from his fellow senators and leading to the subcommittee. One of his apparently greatest concerns during the hearings was the fact that the propaganda movies contain "little to no truth in them."[211]

In this regard, McFarland and Willkie asked Clark and Nye if they would object to the films if the makers proved the films contained truth. They both offered to provide verifiable facts supporting the history onscreen. However, every time McFarland asked Nye and Clark about the veracity of the movies, they skated the question. This tactic seems to suggest an ulterior motive for the subcommittee beyond the "facts" or Hollywood monopolies. They cared little about the movies themselves aside from the influence presented by Hollywood filmmakers.

When Flynn testified in front of the committee, he held there was a conspiracy in Hollywood to promote the British cause in America. While he did not object to the idea of propaganda, he thought it was the responsibility of Hollywood to inform their audience about any overt messages in the films and present both sides.[212] Like Nye, Flynn also believed films became instruments of American culture, "capable of disseminating ideas and

[211] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 79-81.

[212] Ibid., 92.

opinions, of shaping the public mind…"[213] His objections came due to monopolies controlling the messages, presenting or keeping off the screen any idea they wanted.[214]

Flynn testified that Hollywood movies attempted to twist or manipulate facts.[215] He recounted an instance when his news editor wanted to sell copy; by manipulating every petty crime in the city and presenting that news on the front page, the news editor concocted a crime wave, scaring the city's citizens.[216] Hollywood did the same thing when they showed biased depictions of the war in Europe. He conceded that Hollywood movies were fictional accounts, but movies lied about the past and twisted current events.[217] While it was easy to guard against a few of these films, the cumulative effect of every war film produced incited hate in the movie-going population.

In a letter to the chair of the America First Committee, Flynn wrote, "There is plenty of evidence of collaboration between the film magnates and the government to whip up [war] hysteria," without going into greater detail.[218] Flynn worked as a journalist in New York City, wrote Nye's "War Propaganda" speech, and is believed to be the driving force behind Nye's desire for the investigation.[219] He appeared before the committee "as a complainant…against what I believe to be the propaganda abuses of the moving-picture industry."[220] Most of the committee warmly welcomed him and his testimony.[221] He

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[213] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 95.
[214] Ibid., 98.
[215] Ibid., 106-107.
[216] Ibid., 107.
[217] Ibid., 106.
[218] Quoted in Moser, 738.
[219] Moser, 738-739.
[220] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 92.
[221] Ibid., 90-91.

supported government regulation of Hollywood and propaganda, while at the same time denying a desire for censorship, much like his benefactor, Senator Nye.

As the originators of the investigation, Nye and Clark's testimony carried the greatest weight before the pro-isolation subcommittee. However, the testimony of Hollywood executives refuted accusations that they produced pro-war propaganda. Harry Warner denied all charges against himself and Warner Bros. and testified under oath that the charges were either based on a lack of information or "concocted from pure fancy."[222] He denied any collusion with other studio heads or with mysterious forces in the government.[223] Warner Bros. made pictures based on true accounts—such as the widely acclaimed *Sergeant York*—merely for entertainment purposes. While Warner agreed with Roosevelt's foreign policy, he did not actively try to convince audiences to support the war.[224]

Darryl Zanuck of Twentieth Century-Fox was another Hollywood producer Nye claimed dominated the film industry and drove war propaganda, while also one of the "foreign-born executives" attacked in his earlier speech.[225] Zanuck opened his testimony with a brief biography; born in Wahoo, Nebraska, in 1902 to two American citizens, he fought as a private in WWI. He believed it was the duty of every American to give their support to the President and Congress, but denied any representative of the government asked him to "make pictures for the purpose of getting this country into war."[226] While Twentieth Century-Fox made training pictures for the United States Army, there were

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[222] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 338.

[223] Ibid., 340.

[224] Ibid., 339.

[225] Nye, "War Propaganda," 721.

[226] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures,* 410-411.

strictly for educational purposes.[227] He also felt it was his duty to offer the president the same support as any other citizen would.

Zanuck objected to charges of propaganda in Hollywood by saying, "I usually find that when someone produces something that you do not like, you call it propaganda." The crowd applauded his statement.[228] Another senator, this one from California, testified before the subcommittee three days before the end of the hearings. Sheridan Downey (D-California) worried that the investigation wrongly attacked one of California's greatest industries and that a "combing of films distributed in recent years" failed to find any propaganda for war. He believed film producers made what they thought the public wanted to see.[229] Both Zanuck and Downey accepted Hollywood's influence with the American public but disagreed with the subcommittee's motives.

Supporters of isolation on the subcommittee were dismissive of pro-Hollywood witnesses. Committee members treated them with contempt or cold formality. Historically, Hollywood's greatest fear was of government censorship of films. Hollywood executives, and the public at large, saw the subcommittee as a blatant attempt to control the motion picture industry. Anyone who failed to agree with pro-isolationists became a hindrance to the committee, including Senator McFarland.

Flynn's testimony, along with the testimonies of Gerald Nye and Bennet Champ Clark, occupied a significant portion of the hearings. However, the vast majority of witnesses advocated for Hollywood or supported Roosevelt. It was this testimony that the committee most dismissed. The hearings ended on September 26, 1941, subject to the call of

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[227] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 411.
[228] Ibid., 421.
[229] Ibid., 207, 208.

the chair. Although Senators Nye, Clark of Missouri, D. Worth Clark, and Tobey tried, the subcommittee failed to demonstrate the existence of any definitive proof of Hollywood collusion with the government in producing war propaganda.

Most of the representatives of the subcommittee, as well as Wheeler and other isolationists, broke with Roosevelt's policies for various reasons. D. Worth Clark withdrew his support from Roosevelt due to his court-packing plan and later supported Wheeler's 1940 bid for the presidential nomination.[230] As isolationists, Wheeler, Nye, Bennett Champ Clark, and D. Worth Clark fundamentally opposed Roosevelt's interventionist policies. They used the subcommittee as a starting point to attack Roosevelt and the war in Europe. Nye was particularly worried that Hollywood had a symbiotic relationship with a Roosevelt administration that advocated intervention.

During testimony, Bennett Champ Clark said, "The President was greatly pleased with the fine assistance which the movies gave in explaining the Lend-Lease bill to the Nation, and he publicly thanked them,"[231] further suggesting he believed Roosevelt and Hollywood collaborated to promote war. The senators—from Nye and Missouri's Clark to Wheeler and D. Worth Clark—emphatically asserted that monopolies in Hollywood led to pro-war propaganda. Yet their most substantial objections came when they discussed the relationship between Hollywood and the government. Although Nye and Wheeler later denied they held any special animus towards FDR, Wheeler thought it was a matter of not trusting any man with a concentrated power which *could* be used.[232] That power was the

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[230] Newspaper clipping, D. Worth Clark Papers.

[231] *Propaganda in Motion Pictures*, 77.

[232] Quoted in Thomas N. Guinsburg, "Ebb Tide of American Isolationism: The Senate Debate on the Arms Embargo, 1937-1939," *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1972): 330, n. 31.

cultural influence of Hollywood controlled by their adversaries in the government. This demonstrates a willingness to use the subcommittee as a platform to attack Roosevelt and interventionists but especially exposed an awareness of Hollywood's impact on the nation.

The subcommittee professed to believe Hollywood failed to meet certain standards of decency and fairness. As a place that helped guide American culture, Moser claimed, "the 1941 investigation of the film industry gave voice to those who resented the advance of Hollywood's 'cultural imperialism.'"[233] The subcommittee was composed of Democrats and Republicans, but with the exception of McFarland, they were all intensely isolationist. These isolationists in pre-WWII America attacked Hollywood and Roosevelt for their warmongering attitudes.

The culture of the 1930s was one of competing ideals and identity.[234] On the one hand, there was a desire for traditional and permanent values, stability, and moderation following the Crash of 1929. On the other hand, a new longing for change, transformation, and modernization gripped the nation, idealized by Hollywood, Roosevelt's New Deal, and internationalism. The cooperation between Hollywood and the president worried certain senators, and they used the subcommittee hearings in an attempt to harness Hollywood's message for themselves.

[233] Moser, 751.

[234] Cooney, 8-9.

Conclusion

> *Movies and movie-going, stars, stories, and showmanship all jostled other manifestations of the Great War in our popular culture to shape an abiding memory of World War I.*
>
> *Leslie Midkiff DeBauche*, Practical Patriotism[235]

There was a particular loss of self following WWI in American culture. This came at the same time as men confronted anxiety about white masculinity in the face of immigration, war, depression, and women's suffrage. The war was a resounding success for American exceptionalism and identity, but there was a longing for a return to the way America "used to be," as evidenced in the 1920s political campaigns for a "Return to Normalcy" and the era of plenty. This quickly turned to dismay as the stock market crashed and the Great Depression set in. Although the Hollywood industry took a hit like most others, they managed to come through the struggles much more intact than others did. As people sought an escape from their daily lives, movies became the medium by which they avoided their problems. The plots of these movies varied depending on the goals of producers, but there was still the ability to speak to the hearts and minds of viewers. Comedies let audiences forget, however briefly, about their lives—let them laugh and helped them make jokes during a time of crisis. War movies spoke to the masculinity of white American men and the desire to overcome obstacles.

A few years ago the world celebrated a momentous event. I say momentous, but perhaps I would better serve you by declaring it dark, tragic, and horrific. In 2014, the world celebrated (mourned? grieved? lamented?) the 100th anniversary of the start of World War

[235] DeBauche, 198.

I. On July 28, 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia, thereby setting off the largest conflict ever seen. One hundred years later, we look back at the causes and effects of what contemporaries called the Great War or *the world war*. During this centennial, I had the chance to hear retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers lecture as the keynote speaker for the University of Idaho Borah Symposium titled, "The Legacy of WWI: The Making of the Modern World." One specific portion of his speech stuck with me for the next few years. Myers talked about the cultural legacy of WWI. He gave examples of how WWI still influences, intuitively perhaps, the American people. Among these remnants are the phrases "in the trenches" and "over the top," Burberry trench coats, and even the character of Snoopy from the popular comic strip Peanuts, by Charles M. Schulz, frequently daydreamed of flying against the Red Baron as a WWI fighter ace.

WWI remains the forgotten war in America because Americans hardly felt the same effects as their allies.[236] According to historian David Reynolds, Serbia lost nearly a quarter of their males between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine; France lost 1.3 million men, 13 percent of males in the same age range; British and Irish losses totaled 723,000 men between fifteen and forty-nine, or roughly 6 percent. However, in six months of fighting, American loses, reached only 116,516 men, of which 63,114 died from the post-war influenza outbreak. Total American losses were less than 1 percent of American males (0.4 percent, to be exact).[237] Unlike WWII, America did not experience the tragic losses of Pearl

[236] Reynolds, xvii.

[237] Ibid., 34-35.

Harbor or the hundreds of thousands dead. The war became much more detached than any other conflict in American history.

Many Americans find they have little to no recollection of the causes or outcomes of WWI. For most Americans, WWI takes place in dusty textbooks or boring high school lectures. There is not the overriding need to study the Great War as there is World War II, possibly due to the temporal distance from contemporary life or the ethereal effects of the conflict. What students do know about WWI comes from on-screen images; Americans recognize the importance of the conflict from movies and television programming.[238] Since the inception of the cinema as a leisure activity, movies reach millions of viewers a week. The history shown on-screen plays a significant role in shaping their views of the past, sometimes their only understanding.

The value of Hollywood war films comes when we consider them as cultural documents rather than strictly as purveyors of historical facts. If audiences found entertainment in a popular culture staple such as feature films and see how those movies construe the past, they then have a starting point to learn about history. They also have visual stimuli that cause them to think critically about their role in society and take action. Often, Hollywood war films and military recruitment went hand in hand. Recruiters used the popularity of some Hollywood films to bolster their numbers.[239] Military recruiters took advantage, much the same way politicians and male audience members did, of patriotic sentiment present in war films.

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[238] For instance, Steven Spielberg recently directed the movie *War Horse* about a young boy and his horse during WWI. The film starred Benedict Cumberbatch and Tom Hiddleston. "War Horse," *AFI Catalogue of Feature Films*, http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=68299.

[239] DeBauche, 21.

As white American men faced World War I, Depression, and modernity, they sought a new mode of identity. American men found this in tales of the frontier and the myth of frontier heroes. Hollywood translated these themes into Westerns and war for all to see. War films are a small total output of films produced, but they are uniquely suited to describe the themes of heroism and patriotism that form the core identity of ideal masculinity. Even those films with an antiwar message have overtones of masculinity coursing throughout, though they may degrade these themes as the movie goes on. Movies helped define popular culture in the interwar years, which in turn helped establish a white male national identity, using much the same rhetoric as the Ku Klux Klan's efforts to recruit members in the early 1920s. War movies, therefore, helped drive white male American culture during these years, often at the expense of non-Angle-Saxon ethnic groups and women.

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