Glory, Resistance and Reality:
The Ever-Changing Perspective on War and Film

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Film creates a screen through which others can see the world. Film has taken viewers to outer space, the ocean, and the past. War films are a staple in the world of film. They take the crowd to the harsh nature of war, and place them on the battlefield through the eyes and ears of those who lived through the battle. However, an era's worldview has a direct impact on the way war is viewed in film. Acclaimed film historian Jeanine Basinger states that "In taking the time to screen so very many (war) films, I observed an evolutionary process in which the genre was defined, and then repeated, and then shaded to fit changing times."[I] American war films certainly reflected changing times. American war films present an intriguing and varied perspective on war. In the 1940s-60s, films reflected heroism, sacrifice and a strong moral code. In the 1970s-80s, the post-Vietnam era resulted in a period of depression and the questioning of the moral reprehension of war. From the 1980s-Now, films have replaced emotional impact with visual cues, driving stories through a graphic interpretation of war.

Directly after World War II and prior to the Vietnam War, a highly optimistic, honor-oriented soldier was shown. Actors such as John Wayne led the proud movement into team-centered, honorable soldiers, and through films such as *The Longest Day, Sands of Iwo Jima* and *Bataan* indicated how soldiers were able and willing to lay down their lives for their squad mates. The "Golden Age" of World War II films, taking place from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s, features films such as *Battleground* and *Twelve O'Clock High*, and are another strong facet in this era.

I   Basinger. *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. Pg. 2

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During the Vietnam War, the rapid evolution of media placed the public into the war, experiencing the atrocities and graphic nature of war through their television sets. As a result of this, a rapidly growing negative perspective towards war created negative tenancies in war films. Vietnam War films such as *Full Metal Jacket, Hamburger Hill*, and *Platoon* depict an anti-war message, taking radical views of the military and transcending them into statements on the current negative state of the military during Vietnam.

The final era of film is the current era of reality, individualistic films. Recent war films such as *Saving Private Ryan, Glory, Black Hawk Down*, and *The Hurt Locker* all focus on the individual's experience through war, and portray a much more realistic version of war. The D-Day scene in *Saving Private Ryan* represents one of the game-changers in the war of film, a fantastically chilling scene of the brutality of World War II. Because media's desensitization of violence requires escalation, viewers now feel like they are in the war instead of standing on the sidelines.

In this paper, the three eras of film will be addressed by viewing copious amounts of war films and digesting the concurrent themes within the films. The three eras are set by "bookend films", a movie that is a game-changer, shifting the eras or being a clearly defined end of an era. Other films will be used to compliment the standard theories of the era.   *Sands of Iwo Jima* is a war classic, as is *Platoon*, and both will be used in this paper as bookends of their respective eras. For the eras, several films serve as "bookends" for their respective era. The meaning

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behind these "bookends" is to note the beginning and end of the certain frame of thinking throughout that specific era. However, it must be noted that films are always unpredictable, and although the eras may be defined within a specific amount of time, there are always films that overlay the specifics of that era, either taking ideals from past eras or attempting to distinguish the subsequent era. By complimenting the films themselves with articles reviewing or analyzing film, a solidified, concrete idea of the three theories can be clearly formed.

The result of the study originated with the hypothetical interpretation of how war is perceived through film. From the beginning of the 20th century, film quickly became the most important way to communicate news and information between one individual to another. From news reels during World War I to the propaganda films made by Frank Capra in the 1940s, war has been visual to Americans for almost 125 years. As can be expected, once Hollywood became involved with film, war films were the first type of the films on the docket to be produced. While watching movies from the 1940s compared with films such as *Saving Private Ryan*, a huge disconnect was discovered by how the films handled death, violence and honor. The initial objective was to track how improving technology creates a new style of film. However, once the films were being watched and broader generalizations of film were able to be defined, a group of theories emerged, linking the overlying themes of the films to the themes of the time that the films are made in.

Many war films are made by international directors and studios which follow different

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cultural patterns. As a result, in order to focus on the American trend of films, only films created by American directors or achieved massive success in the United States. An American focus provides several benefits, one being that regardless of the highest attempted intent, any film directed by a European director would be effected directly by the events that occurred either at or around their homes during the 1940s[II]. Also, there has always been a much more homogenous and popular tones to American films opposed to the more independent and diffuse films of Europe.

Although films from several conflicts are used in the research, one specific genre of film seems to have drawn a heavy focus for the entire genre of war films. That is the World War II film. Many film critics agree that filmmakers are obsessed with re-creating World War II for several reasons. Firstly, since the war genre essentially began with the World War II films of the 1940s, it only seems right that those films are the gold standard for war films. Secondly, World War II is a war that spanned multiple continents and the most cut-and-dry example of a consensual good vs. evil battle. Thirdly, many of the premiere directors that have come to define the most modern era of film were children during the World War II era, both during and directly after the conflict[III]. Lastly, since the generation that experienced World War II is quickly gaining

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[II] One poignant example of this is the 1930 American War Film *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Although mentioned as one of the greatest war films of all time, not only is the film influenced by the depression-laden society of the Great depression, but it was also directed by Lewis Milestone, a Russian-American director. *All Quiet on the Western Front* was left out of the study because the film provided too many questions towards its validity and assumption of American standards in the study.

[III] Directors such as Stephen Spielberg (Born in 1946), Terrence Malick (1943) were at the forefront of the post-conflict era of American foreign policy and historical interpretation following World War II.

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in age, some World War II veterans are currently starting to give more information about their

experiences, many of which have been created into recent, contemporary films. What began in

1943 has been revived, and in the history of film, no war has been as highly re-created as World

War II.

Another factor that leads to the high number of war films is essentially a slippery slope

that viewers get from watching conflict and war films. World War II films usually come out in

plentiful amounts, but not because they are attempting to establish a certain theme, instead, they

are cashing in on the popular interest in World War II. Historical blockbusters are mainly World

War II films, and with every subsequent big World War II release, fans are, according to historian

Paul B. Weinstein, excited for the history behind the story. Weinstein states "We've all seen

students brimming with questions about the accuracy of the newest historical blockbuster and

eager to find out more on the subject.[IV]" Of course, the primary and most recent example of this

is *Saving Private Ryan* and the D-Day invasion, a battle that has been further examined on

television on shows such as *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* and video games, *Medal of Honor:*

Allied Assaul[V]t and Call of Duty 2[VI].

IV Weinstein, Paul B.. "Movies as the Gateway to History: The History and Film Project."
V   See Appendix Fig. 1.1
VI *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* was released in 2001 for PC Windows-Enabled systems. It was the first game to ever feature a D-Day sequence. The player was placed into a boat and released onto the beach, where his entire squad was deceminated by machine gun fire. After making his way onto the beach using the beach obstacles as cover, he single handedly took out both major MG-42 nests. One special note to place into this game, as well as *Call of Duty 2*, which had a similar level is that it did not have the high amount of graphic violence that was prevalent in *Saving Private Ryan*. Any soldier that was shot and killed dropped to the ground without losing limbs or without any splatter of blood.

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The first section of this investigation will focus on the World War II films from 1945-1970, focusing on the trends of individual-heroism.   Although many films were viewed for this project, only a few can ideally define the period. The primary films in this category include *Twelve O'clock High, Battleground, Bataan, Sands of Iwo Jima*, and *The Longest Day*. Some of the common trends that will be discussed are; honor, pessimism and the ultimate conquest for glory among soldiers involved in the conflict.

Films focusing on the Vietnam Era between the years 1970-1989 are the primary focus of the second era of film. In the late 1960s, International media was changed based on the introduction of live war coverage, and as a result the mass public saw a new side of war that had never been seen before. This combined with an already unpopular war led to a drastic streak of hatred towards armed conflict in Vietnam. This disdain not only showed through the massive public protests during this time period, but also through the films that were made in this period. Films such as *Platoon, Full Metal Jacket, Hamburger Hill, Apocalypse Now*, and *The Deer Hunter* embody these ideals through films that were released during this era. The films saw war as a crime, an unfair distortion of reality, and a horrible piece of humanity that either killed a man or made him into a monster.

Assisted by the drastic improvements of technology over the last fifteen years, the final era of films combine the first two eras and add an extra spin on war films. Beginning with Edward Zwick's *Glory* in 1989, films took a more realistic look at war, placing the viewer in the

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middle of the battlefield. All of the gory undertones and the rapid breakdown of a soldier's composure are two of the surface indicators of this last era of film. Historical accuracy, an improving drive of technology and an improved, realistic image of a soldier were the monikers of the new era. Stephen Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* was a massive game-changer in the history of film, using a chilling opening sequence that improved on *Glory's* graphic nature. Whereas in the first era of film, soldiers seemed concerned with the success of their squad and the proposition of glory and honor on the battlefield, soldiers in *Saving Private Ryan* are much more concerned with the personal battles they are facing during the conflict. Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* perfects these themes with a concurrent, contemporary example of modern warfare. Other films, such *as The Thin Red Line, The Alamo, Pearl Harbor, Letters from Iwo Jima* and *The Hurt Locker* all add their own advancement to the new era of film.

While researching the various perspectives on the last seventy-five years of war films, the genres of the first defined eras are very well researched, but although many film reviewers and scholars begin to identify specific pieces o f this newest era of film, it has never been scholarly defined. Through viewings of many war films between the years of 1989-2011, this paper pioneers a definition of the genre and era. 1989 was a generation ago, and it is time for the history of this era to be written.

World War II films naturally dominate the era of the 1940s to the early 1970s. When looking and researching World War II films, it is evident that there are in fact two mini-eras that

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are prevalent in World War II films. The two are divided between conflict films and post-conflict films. The two eras are similar but emphasize different themes.

The first primary theme of the World War II era is heroism. Throughout the first era of war films, there was a drastic need for optimism and hope during the war period of the 1940s. In America, the only way those individuals saw the battlefield and the war was through the news reels in theaters, which were heavily censored by the United States Government in order to ensure that no harrowing images that could cause negative emotions from the public were seen. As a result, the films that were shown during World War II had to also encompass these same themes. As a result, heroism was a common theme in films, with soldiers sacrificing their lives in order to protect the lives of their comrades in battle.

With heroism comes a high degree of sacrifice, which is the second most important theme inherent in World War II movies. However, the two eras differ in how they highlight the idea of sacrifice. Films such as *Bataan* show sacrifice in the final scene of the film, when a soldier digs his own grave and shoots down incoming waves of soldiers. That is the conflict-oriented piece, showing the sacrifice of one to inadvertently save many. In the post-conflict film, it seems that the sacrifice is highlighted through the selfless acts that one squadmate places on another instead of a drastic last stand or heroic stance against the enemy. In the post-conflict era, the watching eye was focused on the squad rather than the man himself.

Bataan powerfully illustrates the differentiation between the conflict and post-conflict

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eras. Directed by Tay Garnett and released in 1943, *Bataan* provides a good starting point for the overall emotions during wartime, and the nation's emotions towards soldiers during World War II. The underlying theme in *Bataan* as well as many other World War II – era films is honor. Sergeant Bill Dane, played by Robert Taylor in the film, is the quintessential soldier, following orders, providing a positive example for his men and creating an overall image of honor and decency that helps exemplify his military. Throughout the film, as the time in Bataan becomes more intense and the outlook bleak, Dane still stands by his convictions and the military.

The squad consists of a diverse cast, including African-American, Hispanic and Asian soldiers. Even a young seaman is placed into the squad and is surprised when he is faced with the drastic and completely different situation than what he is used to in the Navy. The squad is also comprised of individuals who are of varying race and color, which creates an image of a racially and ethnically equal squad. This showed that men that would not otherwise get along in America were rallying together in order to fight a common enemy[VII]. Although the squad is filled of soldiers that are of different racial and ethnic origins, the intent of having a racially equal squad did not equal a racially equal script or characterization to work through. The lone black man on the squad, Private Wesley Epps has a moment that can be seen as possible stereotyping after the commander of the squad; Cavalry Captain Henry Lassiter is killed by a sniper. He delivers a proper eulogy to his dead commander, stating the following at the dead Captain's grave:

VII See Figure 1.2 in the Appendix

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"Heavenly father, Captain Lassiter was our captain, and he was a good captain.

He did his job and kept on doing It as long as he could. He died a long ways from

home.. His folks probably won't even know where we buried him, but I reckon he

was prepared for that. As long as we know what comes out of grave is the best

part of what goes into them, we know he's alright. 'Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they shall see God'."[VIII]

Epps cooks for the squad, as well as the explosion expert and the chaplain. By the end of the

film, Epps is a victim of the most brutal death in the film. Epps dies while repelling a massive

frontal assault, when he is beheaded by a samurai sword[IX]. All of the soldiers in the squad die

during the Battle of Bataan. Even with the sacrifice of the soldiers throughout the film, the

common themes of heroism prevail.

The primary theme of <u>Bataan</u> is the essence and importance of squad mentality. The

primary character through which this can be flushed through is through Seaman Leonard

Purckett. In the beginning of the film, Purckett is a soldier who is simply eager to get into the

war effort from the Navy into the Army. However, as time goes on, Purckett not only begins to

see the mental wear that comes as part of being in a squad, but also the physical cost.

Eventually, Purckett is killed by Japanese soldiers that feigned death[X].

[VIII]   <u>Bataan</u>, 00:29:00
[IX] Ibid
[X] This was a practice customary in all World War II-era films. With the knowledge possessed on specific actions of soldiers on the battlefield, the films interpreted all soldiers in the perspective created by other forms of media.

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The end of the film is where the most drastic and important meaning comes in *Bataan*.

Dane is faced with a seemingly unending line of Japanese soldiers advancing on his position. In

order to ensure that he goes down in a blaze of glory, Dane goes into a hole that his squad dug,

creates his own marked grave, and begins to hold off the increasingly advancing Japanese

forces[XI]. Once he runs out of ammunition with his Thompson Machine Gun, Dane resorts to

using the mounted machine gun on the top of the hill to fend off the warriors. The film ends with

Dane looking down the edge of his gun, with the barrel flashing at the screen[XII]. This final scene

with Dane was seen nation-wide as a hero's last-stand effort to protect the cause. Dane knows

the situation is helpless, but elects not to retreat, rather fending off as many enemies as possible

in order to protect the rest of his soldiers that will come as reinforcements come to the island[XIII].

By his sacrifice at the end of the film, which, as far as the audience is concerned he never died,

the tide of the battle is turned towards the Americans.

The final scene in *Bataan* was reminiscent of many films of the conflict era. Films such

as *Sahara* embody similar themes highlighting heroism and the squad[XIV]. The common themes

of optimism, finding glory in death, and honor rang true throughout the films of the conflict era.

As a result, all Japanese Soldiers were enticed to sacrifice themselves in any way possible to rid themselves of the "American Menace"

XI See Appendix- Fig 1.3

XII This is a scene that was used in the trailer for *Bataan*. One specific point to be made on the trailer may enlighten why the movie was put together the way it was. The film seems to be more of a recruitment video and uplifitting piece of propaganda rather than an advertisement for a film. Patriotic music, messages and actions are shown throughout the trailer, with a quote at the end of the trailer by General Marshall stating "We're going Back to Bataan!".

XIII   *Bataan.* Tay Garrett.

XIV   *Sahara.* Zoltan Korda

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Although the world was at war, the American filmmakers wanted those watching movies back in

America that what the soldiers overseas were doing was the right thing. In *Cinema Journal*,

Slocum sees Dane's sacrifice as "noteworthy not only because the hero's death is denied but also

because the instant before his death remains frozen for the viewer."[XV]

At the end of the Second World War, a lapse in World War II films occurred. The war

was still fresh in people's minds, and film had not become as intrusive and as politically charged

as it is today. A high amount of social shock remained from the losses encountered in World War

II. After the terrible things about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, many citizens wished to erase World

War II from memory, and begin anew. Although the primary objective of film was to provide

entertainment, and at the time the World War II film represented a negative time in history to

investigate fully, at least for the several years after its ultimate conclusion.

However, in the late 1940s, the genre encountered its own renaissance. The recovery was

headlined by three films, *Battleground, Twelve O'clock High* and *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Whereas

films during the war took a very libertarian look at the war, focusing on the objectives defined by

the war front. In the post-war films, directors were able to look at films that had overlying

themes of leadership, bravery, and honor. These themes helped the nation heal from the wounds

of the war, giving somewhat of a realistic perspective on war, detailing what the soldiers went

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XV   Cinema Journal – Pg. 48. *Bataan* was one of the few films to not only have a heavy amount of subject
matter, but also to have a drastic amount of violence off camera. Killing a major protagonist in a film is a major
plot device, and having the leader of a squad die in the film would not only create a high level of pessimism
during an already pessimistic time, but also likely cause psychological and emotional disarray among viewers,
especially those who have family overseas.

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through throughout their ordeal overseas, but also acquiring overlying themes that encompassed optimism towards war.

1949's *Battleground* is widely regarded as one of the significant films to be made after the war, embracing similar but more serious overtones. *Battleground* focuses on the story of the 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon of Item Company, 327th Glider Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division during the Siege of Bastogne during World War II. *Battleground* is one of the first films to take deep and intense looks at soldiers as vulnerable people who had the high possibility of breaking down over the immense pressure of conflict[XVI]. The main protagonist in the film, Holley opens the film by returning to the battlefield after an injury[XVII]. Holley quickly becomes the second-in-command to Sergeant Wolowicz, a newspaper columnist. In the beginning of *Battleground*, Holley embraces optimism early, finding the good in life by wandering around Bastogne, becoming massively involved with a woman in the town. After taking eggs from the woman's chicken coop, Holley walks around the camp and through the battle with eggs in tow, ready to cook and eat them[XVIII]. Once Wolowicz is injured, Holley is forced into his new honorable role as the squad leader. Holley shifts at this point from a joker of the group to the dead-set, hardened

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XVI   Filmsite.org. *War and Anti-War Film.* According to the website *filmsite.org*, *Battleground* is "…notable for portraying American soldiers as vulnerable and human, as opposed to just inspirational and gung-ho. While there is no question about their courage and steadfastness, each soldier has at least one moment in the film when he seriously considers running away, schemes to get sent away from the front line, slacks off, or complains about the situation he is in. *Battleground* is considered to be the first significant film about World War II to be made and released after the end of the war."

XVII   See Appendix Fig. 1.4

XVIII   A rarity in World War II-era films, Holley provides a substantial amount of humor with his sub-plot involving the eggs. At various points, Holley protects the eggs first during an artillery strike, but eventually puts his helmet on, allowing the eggs to spill all over his head.

veteran.

One character who begins to create a shift towards another era was Roderigues. Roderigues, a man of Hispanic origin, dies when he is left behind under a jeep after being injured during the battle. The rest of his squad attempts to rescue Roderigues, but are unable to after being placed under heavy fire by the Germans. His death gives the viewers a lesson in the harsh realities of war. During the conflict-era, this would not be a piece that would be seen, Roderigues would have likely have been killed prior to going underneath the Jeep, and would be given a quick death rather than a brutal, painful and slow death[XIX]. *Battleground* investigates the dark-seeded pessimism within soldiers that fought during the war. Before being injured, Wolowicz reads Holley a letter written by his wife:

> "I wrote a piece about the real meaning of the war...the fight against Fascism, why every American had to get in there and pitch in. The logic was magnificent. You couldn't resist it. The next thing I knew, I was in a troop train, waving bye-bye to my wife."[XX]

Sentimentality and mentioning the absence of family did not become a common factor during World War II films, as families were typically left out of conflict-era films. While there was no doubt that the soldiers overseas all had families, a soldier's personal home life never came into the light until *Battleground*

XIX   This scene is rumored to actually be truthful. A similar event occurs in an episode of the acclaimed HBO series *Band of Brothers*, further leading to the speculation that an event happened during the Battle of the Bulge.
XX   *Battleground*. William Wellman. 1949.

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[XXI]. At that point, the audiences were allowed to have more of an individual and personal connection with the soldiers.

The most important part of <u>Battleground</u> comes when the soldiers are preparing for their final defense against the Germans. A chaplain holds a Christmas service for the soldiers, and attempts to deliver a message suited for the Christmas. The chaplain instead dives into an inspirational speech targeting the reason why the soldiers are engaging in the way, providing the answer to the "$64 Question":

"Was this trip necessary? Let's look at the facts. Nobody wanted this war but the Nazis. A great many people tried to deal with them, and a lot of them are dead. Millions have died, for no reason except that the Nazis wanted them dead. So in the final showdown, there was nothing left to do except fight. There's a great lesson in this, and those of us who have learned it the hard way aren't going to forget it. We must never again let any force dedicated to a super-race, or super-idea or super-anything become strong enough to impose itself in a free world. We must be strong enough and tough enough in the beginning to put out the fire before it starts spreading...don't let anyone tell you that you were a sucker for fighting the war against fascism."[XXII]

XXI   After *Battleground*, studios started to realize that it was becoming allowable to talk about families in conflict films. Films such as *Battle Cry* and *Sands of Iwo Jima* begin the increasing trend to mention the particulars of family in the persona of the characters.

XXII   *Battleground*, William Wellman. 1949

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In this quote, the chaplain not only attempts to make sense of the graphic and depressing nature of war, but also gives the soldiers confidence and reason in their mission. It also speaks to the audience, who are still attempting to find reason behind the madness of the conflict. *Battleground* takes the plot progression of war films during the 1940s and improves upon the foundation, creating an atmosphere that transition from optimistic to disastrous by the end of the film. The woman that Holley meets in Bastogne dies when the city is bombed by the Germans[XXIII]. In the films made during the war, there would be no way that a civilian would have such a death when he or she would be publicized in the beginning of the film. A massive step towards the maturation of war films and the line between reality and Hollywood was taken by a scene such as the death of the woman in Bastogne.

The cast's interaction during the film also drastically shifts from the beginning to the climax of the film. In the beginning and throughout the time that the soldiers are in the winter, the soldiers laugh with one another, share stories, and pull jokes on one another. However, as time goes on and the conflict grows more intense, the soldiers suffer a drastic shift in their persona. Holley is the quintessential window through which this shift can be seen. In the beginning of the film he is happy to be in the squad. By the end he is a hardened veteran, not even able to crack a smile at the end of the film due to pure exhaustion and depression[XXIV].

XXIII   She dies off-screen, as Wellman used two separate film techniques to plot out her death. She is shown inside her beauty boutique, followed by a quick cut outside and an ear-piercing death scream.

XXIV   At the end of the film, Holley's exhausted squad is relieved by an airdrop of supplies. It is the first time from the middle of the film to the end that the squad has a glimmer of optimism and hope. Perhaps this was a

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While *Battleground* provides a strong look at squad mentality and the subsequent squad psychological breakdown, no film does a better job at looking at the individual breakdown than 1949's *Twelve O'clock High*, directed by Henry King. This classic war film resembles the themes inherent in the era. *Twelve O'clock High* embodies the dark tones seen throughout the film, only keeps the themes strong from the outset of the film[XXV]. One of the major themes of the film is death, and the soldier's ability to embrace death. The film focuses on the struggle of Brigadier General Savage[XXVI] (Gregory Peck), who is given command of the 918th B-17 Bomber Squadron after their previous commander dies, and his quest to raise his soldier's morale and make the 918th invincible on the battlefield[XXVII].

The center piece of *Twelve O'clock High* is pride. Pride in oneself, pride in one's colleagues, and pride in one's cause. The facts of the film center on Savage as he comes into command of a group that is still reeling from the loss of a major component of their squadron. Savage is harsh once he becomes the commander of the squadron, moving from a desk job to near the front lines. However, this does not last for Savage, as over time he becomes a victim of his own creation, and he is drastically effected by the roughness of war. However, the pride within the soldiers throughout the film is undeniable.

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primary way to have those watching the film realize that there was no proverbial "rock bottom", and that the American military would always pull through for their soldiers. The soldiers receive Spam, Fruit, and plentiful amounts of ammunition in the supply drop.

XXV   Director Henry King did not work in conflict during World War II, so an argument can be made that a high degree of the pessimism comes from outside sources. King was a deputy commander of the Civil Air Patrol base in Brownsville Texas, where he was a captain. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_King_%28director%29)

XXVI   See Appendix 1.5

XXVII   *Twelve O'clock High*. Henry King. 1949.

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Once the 918th begins to go on successful missions, Savage's demeanor begins to lighten, and he shows the leadership and honor code of his command. However, he continually holds strong with his feverous campaign to make the soldiers believe in honor and leadership. In his first address to his soldiers, he combats their lack of morale in battle. Savage dictates to a hall full of soldiers that his men's minds are set back at home and on returning from war alive. In this first meeting, Savage asserts his dedication to assisting the group:

> "We're in a war, a shooting war. We've got to fight, and some of us have
>
> to die. Now I'm not telling you to be afraid, fear is normal. But stop
>
> worrying about it, and about yourselves. Stop making plans, forget about
>
> going home. Consider yourselves already dead."[XXVIII]

This harsh internment of his soldiers leads into Savage's constant reminders to his soldiers that they are men of war, and should act accordingly. Savage offers the men in the squad a chance to leave if they do not agree with the strict notions of his command[XXIX]. He sees that any soldier unfit to perform the duties he expects will not only weigh down the rest of the squad but also get squad mates killed in battle. After addressing the pilots, Savage is approached by Lieutenant Jesse Bishop, who is also a nominee for the Medal of Honor[XXX]. This particular scene marks the pessimism seen throughout the era after the war. In this scene, director Henry King chose to

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XXVIII Ibid
XXIX   Ibid
XXX   Robert Patten plays Bishop. One of the primary plots in the film is Bishop's transition from leaving the
    squad to returning as a primary proponent of Savage's regime and devout believer in the commander's
    proposition.

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make a drastic and implied underlying theme by having a Medal of Honor nominee refuse an

opportunity at glory. The pessimism and fear of one nearing his own death led to the actions

taken by Bishop. Ultimately, Bishop decides to remain with the 918th, knowing that his honor

will be restored. Bishop's story ends when he is killed during one of the air raids[XXXI]. King

makes another implied theme that although Bishop used the opportunity to engage in the battle

after initially deciding to leave, destiny did not decide for him to live. The death of Bishop is the

beginning of several events that break down Savage, resulting in one of the defining moments for

the era's overlying themes; the price of honor during World War II.

Savage's character from the beginning of the film maintains control and pride. Savage is

not a man who seems to be shaken by anything; he takes news about losing men and planes as

nothing more than the inevitability of war. In many ways, Savage is seen in this film as the

perfect soldier, dedicated in his unwavering truth and dedication for the cause. Although many

of his men do not share the same level of dedication that he does towards the war effort, Savage

dedicates his time working with the 918th to creating a better unit and helping to win the war

against the Germans[XXXII].

However, *Twelve O'clock High* differentiates itself from the majority of war films made

during this era. The breakdown of Savage throughout the film takes point late in the film to

show the emotional impact on soldiers. Seen as unwavering in the beginning of the film, in time

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XXXI   Bishop's death happens off-camera. Once again, *Twelve O'clock High* takes the same road as *Battleground* in not showing the deaths of primary characters on-screen.
XXXII   *Twelve O'clock High.* Henry King. 1949

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Savage begins to break down due to the fact that he loses many of his men, including his second in command during a series of difficult missions. The reality of war hits Savage, and soon becomes catatonic, breaking down due to the harshness and grittiness of war. When Savage attempts to climb into a B-17 for a mission after losing several of his closest companions, he loses the usage of his legs and cannot get into the plane. He is removed by the medical staff and nearly becomes catatonic. The first time viewing the film, it seems impossible that Savage will break. However, it is he that breaks the hardest at the most improper time.

Savage's facial expressions during his breakdown make the scene important. He looks confused, lost, and infuriated. Savage has the strong persona of a man of war, rendered incapable by the restrictions of his status as a human. Through this scene, King implies that although men of war are generally seen as invincible men without any flaws, reality could not be any further from the truth.

Twelve O'clock High can be interpreted in many ways. 1949 was few years since the end of World War II, and the entire world was at peace, still reeling from the devastation of the Second Great War but not yet fully involved in the suspense of the cold war. For Americans, there was a question as to how they should feel about the war. *Twelve O'clock High* shows that questioning, and is a major reason the film is seen as an American classic.

The third of the "Big Three" Post-Conflict films is *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Sergeant John Stryker is disliked by the men of his squad, who he gives a strict directive and harsh training.

Throughout the film, Stryker pushes his squad to the limit, and although they are immediately

hesitant towards the idea of Stryker leading them into battle, they manage to come together as a

squad. Stryker loses several soldiers during the invasion of Tarawa, infuriated by the loss of

several of his men; Stryker shows that he is a dominating figure by challenging the man

responsible for the Tarawa incident to a fistfight.

Stryker's persona throughout the movie is that of the perfect soldier. Unwavering in his

execution of his mission and the drive to help in the war effort, Stryker keeps his personal life in

the dark for his soldiers, not revealing anything about himself. The first human notion we see

from Stryker is when he takes home a woman from the bar. He discovers that she is a widow of

a marine and has to take care of a child without a father. Stryker leaves the woman all his money

and leaves.

At the end of the film, Stryker is killed after his squad takes Mount Siribachi. The sudden

death of the main protagonist of the film was a reeling moment, as it seemed that the battle was

finally over. In a celebratory show of affection for his squad mates, Stryker offers one of his men

a cigarette before being shot through the chest in the back[XXXIII]. As Stryker lies dead on the

ground, one of his men retrieves a letter from Stryker's pocket addressed to his son. An excerpt

from the letter is as follows:

"Dear son, I guess none of my letters have reached you, but I thought I better try

again, since I have a feeling this might be last time that I can write you. For a

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[XXXIII] Appendix. See Fig. 1.6

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long time I have wanted to tell you many things…You've gotta take care of your

mother…never hurt her or anyone like I did. Always do what your heart tells you

is right, maybe someone will write you someday and tell you about me. I want

you to be like me in some ways, but not like me in others…this isn't what I

wanted, things just turned out that way."[XXXIV]

This monologue is remembered as a "real" moment to audiences all around the world. Through

news reels and family interaction involving veterans, the mass public who remained home during

the war found that they could not fully connect with those that fought overseas. This monologue

was a direct line to the hardships, the heartbreak, and the painful realities of war.

Battle-era films such as *Bataan* embraced heroism and acted more as recruitment

entertainment than actual pieces of Hollywood. In comparison, the "big three" post-conflict

films, *Battleground*, *Twelve O'clock High* and *Sands of Iwo Jima* embraced the flaws of man,

and attempted to define and create reasoning behind some of the human flaws seen throughout

the Second World War. These late films created the foundation for the next era of film, which

took a much wider look at the psychological flaws in men of war.

The shift from the first era of film to the second was caused mainly by a rapid and sudden

shift of how war was viewed to the public. Starting with The Vietnam War, television cameras

were able to get closer to the action of war than ever before. As a result, the graphic and

disturbing elements of war were visible the public through the intrusive media of television. As

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[XXXIV] *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Allan Dwan. 1949.

a result of the depressing and angering images, many individuals quickly became anti-war, focusing on the terrible aspect of war. Although many of the Vietnam War films highlight the emotional detachment that nearly all soldiers had from the home front, a majority of films started what became a solid trend for war films. Vietnam War films closely followed the extreme psychological hardships in training. The soldiers who survived training were thrown into a chaotic environment of war, where reality proved to be overwhelming for many. According to these films, nearly every soldier at the conclusion of the Vietnam War era is suffering from some version of traumatic and psychological damage.

Some films during the World War II era of films highlighted training[XXXV], but the Vietnam War films not only did this to build connections between the viewers and the priority characters, but also to give the viewers a look into the training that transformed and even distorted ordinary individuals into top-quality soldiers. This individualistic focus is only furthered by the intricate pieces of information that viewers learn frequently about each individual character in the films. History, a love interest back at home, or dreams after the war are all factors that play a part in how the character is perceived during the film.

Apocalypse Now has been written about more than any other Vietnam War film in history. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola and released in 1979, Coppola looks at various angles of the

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[XXXV]   Films such as *Sands from Iwo Jima* and *Twelve O'clock High* placed the viewer into training, although in many of the World War II films, the training sequences were focused on the strengths that each soldier had during their training, instead of the various amounts of dysfunctions and issues that soldiers had, which became a strong trend during Vietnam War Films.

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Vietnam War, including the psychological breakdown of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon

Brando), who is an AWOL member of the Special Forces[XXXVI]. Captain Benjamin L. Willard

(Martin Sheen) is sent after Kurtz, given the order to dispose of the Colonel by any means

necessary. In this first scene of the film, the cycle of circumstantial agreement between soldiers

is already broken, as Willard is essentially asked to kill one of his own countrymen in order to

complete his mission.

Willard is a character who seems to be addicted to the war. Through Willard's character,

Coppola shows how men turn into monsters as a result of the Vietnam war, something that is

obvious and prevalent through the actions made by Willard. In the beginning of the film, Willard

is troubled, living in Saigon and yearning for the next time that he can get into action against the

enemy. In one scene he strips naked and punches a mirror, then sits next to his bed, weeping an

clutching his bleeding knuckles. He remains in this state for several days, leading to a group of

soldiers attempting to retrieve him for the next mission to find him covered in blood by his

bedside. For Willard, the resistance is made by not wanting to return to regular life, he has been

essentially poisoned by warfare, and will only return to war, electing conflict instead of a

peaceful existence on the home front.

The first battle scene of the film highlights the broken non-sensorial actions taken by

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XXXVI *Apocalypse Now* is famous for its controversial and troubled production. Coppola was very set on creating the quintessential Vietnam War film, attempting to create the themes that he thought belonged in a Vietnam War film. As a result, the film was heavily edited, previewed, then re-cut in accordance to distinguishing a film that would have a positive reaction from viewers. (Cowie, Peter. *The Apocalypse Now Book*. 128.)

soldiers in war. There are few of the main characters in this battle sequence, instead allowing the scope of the battle and the actions taken by few to stand out. This battle scene is well known in film history due to the infamous line spoken by Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall) "I love the smell of napalm in the morning…the smell, you know that gasoline smell…smells like…victory."[XXXVII] The mission never truly seems right or made for the right reasons. Kilgore does not go into the battle with a good reason, attacking an innocent village due to the fact that he wants to go surfing by the beach in which the village is located. With this resolve, Kilgore leads a force to the village with helicopters, blowing up everything in sight[XXXVIII]. It is a truly chaotic scene, only added to by the playing of Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries".

Apocalypse Now never truly seems to be a movie that embraces realism. In many ways, Coppola's epic film takes the themes seen in later films such as *Platoon, Full Metal Jacket* and *The Deer Hunter* and sets a unique standard for subsequent films. As the first film of the Vietnam War Era, *Apocalypse Now* sets the tone for the era. Although the film has many connections to the Joseph Conrad novella *Heart of Darkness*, the insanely drastic differences between the interpretations of the war from the first era to this film are enough to mark that this is the benchmark for the second era of film.

Apocalypse Now differentiated itself from the World War II films for several reasons. The general breakdown of social construction inside of the military during the Vietnam War era

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XXXVII   Francis Coppola. *Apocalypse Now.* 1979.
XXXVIII See Appendix Fig 1.7

films drastically differed than the squad interaction of World War II films. Characters such as

Kilgore seem to be only concerned with bloodlust. By making fantastical claims that create an

excuse to shoot-up an entire village, Kilgore struggles to find meaning within conflict. During

World War II era films, there never had to be reasoning behind the battle, the status of the

conflict spoke volumes, defining the classic battle of good vs. evil in the battle of democracy vs.

fascism. In Vietnam, questions remain as to who the real protagonists are. Are the Viet Cong the

antagonists of the film, or are the antagonists in *Apocalypse Now* inside the United States

Military? That questioning never existed during the World War II films, but became a major

piece of the history of the Vietnam War film.

The characterization seen in *Apocalypse Now* also created a drastic separation between

films made during the Vietnam Era and the World War II film. Every character in *Apocalypse*

Now has a major psychological issue. Willard is manic depressive, consumed and addicted to

war like it is a drug. Kurtz has completely lost his mind, hiding in a fortress and bent on

murdering anyone who gets in his way. Kilgore's intricate dedication to finding a surfing spot

and forcing soldiers to surf amidst cannon fire shows complete psychosis. No character in

Apocalypse Now has their head on their shoulders, which shows throughout the film.

The intricate maneuverings and themes of a film as complicated as *Apocalypse Now* are

enough so that an entirely different study can be conducted on the interpretation of war by

Coppola. However, only the overlying themes are mentioned in this study. The film places a

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group of men together that seem chucked in at the last second, none of which seem to be useful as soldiers. GM3 Lance B. Johnson, GM3 Tyrone Miller and EN3 Jay "Chef" Hicks are all parts of Willard's unit. Johnson is a professional surfer, Miller is a young soldier who misses his mother, and Hicks has a psychological breakdown after facing a tiger in the jungle.

The 1978 film *The Deer Hunter* is another film that shows the resistance and the metaphoric protest against the Vietnam War. The film looks at three different kinds of men, all of which have different character traits and different ways of dealing with life. Sergeant Michael Vronsky (Robert DeNiro), is the main protagonist of the film is a leader with the personal aptitude to lead. Nick (Christopher Walken) represents the introspective perspective of Vietnam War soldiers, and as a result becomes the most vulnerable to coercion. Throughout the film, Nick and Mike are subjected to psychological punishment by the Viet Cong, and are forced into actions that lead to their ultimate breakdown as human beings.

The most controversial and prevalent image throughout *The Deer Hunter* is Russian roulette. These highly-controversial scenes have drastic inner meanings to the soldiers in the film, and in that same regard, are concrete examples of the resistance seen in the second era of film[XXXIX]. With a drastic shift and resistance to fighting in the war, the three characters are forced to play Russian roulette several times, with their lives on the line. The imagery of Russian roulette shows the complete breakdown of the soldier's resolve, allowing their lives to

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[XXXIX] A high amount of controversy came from various sources, claiming that the depiction of Russian Roulette enticed children to follow what they saw on screen and killed themselves while playing Russian Roulette.

be decided by luck in an environment that has no resolve or reservation for sympathy[XL]. The

game is a complete breakdown of moral sensibility and self-preservation. Having the loss of

care for oneself to put a gun to your head with a bullet possibly in the chamber and pulling the

trigger leads to a loss of psychological balance, which shows in *The Deer Hunter*[XLI]. The end of

the film embodies the same crazed psychological disdain for the war as seen in *Apocalypse Now*.

Nick, after a period of drug abuse, is in Saigon when Mike comes to visit him. Mike tries to

install reality back into Nick, but to no avail. The two participate in a game of roulette, when

Nick shoots and kills himself. The scene is graphic, as blood pours all over Nick after he kills

himself[XLII]. At the end of the film, directly after Nick dies, the film shows that out of complete

tragedy comes no resolve, since the end of the Vietnam War and the withdrawal of the troops

happen after Nick's death. *The Deer Hunter* is a compliment piece to *Apocalypse Now*, as it

shows a complete distortion of human form caused by the Vietnam War, and the two go hand-in-

hand promoting themes of resistance and hopelessness, stating that the war in Vietnam was an

awful and terrible conflict to enter. Both films also highlight the insanity of war and those who

participate in it.

While *The Deer Hunter* personified a game of death, a film such as *Platoon* looked at war

in the perspective of a sarcastic and menacing game. The 1986 film *Platoon*, directed by Oliver

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XL *The Deer Hunter*. Directed by Michael Cimino. 1978.

XLI   The first scene was divulged under a high amount of pressure by those that captured Mike and Nick. The
    separation between the first and second Russian Roulette scenes were a signal of the desensitization of violence
    between the two men.

XLII See Appendix 1.8

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Stone, created around Stone's own experiences during the Vietnam War[XLIII]. was one of the

highest-publicized films regarding the highly controversial war. Major film critics consider it

one of the most influential war films of all time, and one of the films that defined the culture of

the Vietnam War[XLIV].

The most interesting factor of the film is how it shows that the battle is not necessarily

between the ideologies of the American soldiers and Vietnam guerilla warriors, but between the

ideologies of the two Sergeants in the protagonists unit. Sergeant Barnes is an image of the

soldier that the United States Army hoped to promote, a hardened veteran that wanted to fight to

not only give glory to his cause, but to erase any threat that he faces. Essentially, Barnes is a G.I.

Joe-esque character that seems to have no flaws in his execution in battle. However, Barnes in

several scenes completely loses his moral compass, and becomes the anti-hero and ultimate

antagonist of the film. From a super-soldier and squad leader, Barnes quickly asserts his position

as the dominating figure in the unit, unafraid to use a dictator-like power brought on by his

frequent conquest for power and satisfaction of control.

In comparison, Sergeant Elias is an image of the stereotypical Vietnam soldier, an

individual who believed strongly in the men that they fought with, and found various coping

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XLIII   Stone was a member of the 25th Infantry division during Vietnam, enlisting in 1967. He was discharged
          after 15 months, earning a bronze star and purple heart during his time with the First Calvalry division.
          (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Stone#Early_life_and_career)
XLIV   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AFI%27s_100_Years..._100_Movies_(10th_Anniversary_Edition)

mechanisms for war[XLV]. For example, Elias leads a group of men in the platoon named "The

Heads" that spends time during the squad's off hours drinking beer and smoking marijuana. This

care-free, "carpe-diem" perspective on war only gives Elias a softer edge in the eye of Barnes,

and leads to a consistent and increasingly violent conflict between the two.

The true power of *Platoon* lies in the conflict between Barnes and Elias. The two men

are   constantly at odds with one another, and is a conflict between the traditionalist perspective

on two different stereotypes of characters, the soldier during the World War II era against the

newest soldier of the Vietnam War. Another shift from World War II films in *Platoon* is the

emphasis on individualistic thinking rather than squad-oriented thinking. *Platoon* marked one of

the first times that family became a major part of the war film in a way rarely seen during the

World War II era. Whereas during the first subjected era a man dying in the squad was seen as a

terrible thing, in *Platoon*, when a new recruit, simply named Gardner is killed, he has a fiance

back at home. Gardner connects with Taylor by showing a picture of his girl and talks about

him. In many ways, this gives Gardner a special connection with the audience, one that is

suddenly cut off by his death in the most major skirmish of the film. What makes this scene,

however, is what Barnes says of Gardner after he dies: "You all take a good look at this lump of

shit. Remember what it looks like. You fuck up in a firefight and I god-damn guarantee you a

trip out of the bush...in a body bag!"[XLVI] That line is being said about a character that the

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XLV See Appendix. 1.9.
XLVI   Olver Stone, Platoon. 1986

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audience identified with, and now has to part with, realizing the harshness and suddenness of

war. What is created in *Platoon* is a depressive feel that once a connection is made and a

background is known of the character, he is killed and the audience is left with a sickening and

"why him?" feeling throughout.

Chris Taylor is a character in the film that does not belong in the big picture of the

Vietnam War. An intelligent individual who dropped out of school and joined the army for the

thrill of adventure and the intention to do good things in the military, Taylor soon finds his

character and intuition to be diminished throughout the film. His relationship with Elias is one of

compliance and acceptance of the war, as Taylor ventures into drug abuse while his increasing

personal rivalry with Barnes goes from initial paranoia to homicidal intent. Taylor's breaking

point comes after Elias is killed, with the fault falling with Barnes. After Barnes dies, the

depreciating effects of Vietnam wear on Taylor, and the last time we see the protagonist, he is

sobbing, covered in blood, on a helicopter. To compare the difference between Taylor's entrance

into the war with when he leaves the war, one must look at how he has changed as a person.

Entering with the intent of helping his country, Taylor leaves by killing another man. Taylor's

resistance to his goals coming into the war and his distortion created by his final act provide

further evidence of the second era.

Platoon fortifies the arguments made about the Vietnam War through the other films in

the era. Highlighting the individual's tolerance of harsh events, especially through the eyes of

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Taylor, create an environment in which the viewer becomes uncomfortable. Much as the case in the other eras, a separate film builds upon the foundation built by early films during the era. *Platoon* takes the constant feeling of psychosis seen in *Apocalypse Now*, although in many ways the severity of that psychosis is reduced. Stone uses a great deal of Dutch-angle shots and transitional pieces to create a blanket of uncertainty, which results in the desired effect of placing the viewer into a dream. Especially during the scenes when Taylor abuses drugs, these techniques are used well. In regards to *The Deer Hunter*, *Platoon* looks at the individual breakdown as well as the breakdown of the squad. Placed in the crosshairs of the war throughout the entire film, Taylor has to deal with the ramifications of war. As mentioned, the transition of Taylor's entry into the war to Taylor's exit marks how much he has dealt with while in Vietnam, and how the war has changed him physically, psychologically and mentally.

Platoon continues the pattern of Vietnam Films focusing almost exclusively on combat. Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* exemplifies the helplessness the public felt when the Vietnam War became public through the media. The film opens with the narration of Private James T. Davis, nicknamed "Joker" by his squad mates. Davis enters the war to see combat, but soon he is engulfed in a case of social breakdown. His squad's rough Drill Sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, who targets Leonard Lawrence, an overweight, and taunts him to the point where Lawrence loses control. Lawrence suffers a mental breakdown at the end of boot camp, killing himself and Hartman.

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Lawrence's death fits with the era because it is the story of a soldier who dies before he is ever involved with the conflict. During the 1960s and 70s, notions towards war, especially any notion that had to do with the Russians, meant that nuclear war was on the horizon. *Full Metal Jacket* does its best to take that sense of pain and impending death and condensing it in the perspective of a soldier in boot camp. Lawrence is a loner in boot camp, hated by his squad mates and constantly mocked by his Drill Sergeant, and eventually strikes out by killing the persona that caused so much hatred and pain. One night, Pyle snaps after gaining a very close relationship with his rifle, and kills Hartman after Joker discovers Pyle in the bathroom having a complete psychological breakdown[XLVII]. After shooting Hartman through the chest, Pyle places the gun in his mouth and shoots himself in the head.[XLVIII] The initial scene involving Hartman, the squad and boot camp is one of the most famous in the history of film, but it is in the Pyle degradation that the film makes one of the thematic statements in the first half of the film.

Later in the film, *Full Metal Jacket* places the squad into the battlefield, in which several members of the squad are killed by a hiding sniper. Once Joker is able to locate the sniper, he and the squad discover that it is in fact a young girl. In a normal war film, according to those seen during the World War II era, this would be a situation unheard of. Wars are fought by men, and men that have either graduated from High School or are past the age minimum to enroll in the military. Having a young woman not only fight in a war, but kill American men drastically

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XLVIII   Stanley Kubrick. *Full Metal Jacket*. 1987.

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altered the perception of conflict, especially in Vietnam Era films.

*Full Metal Jacket'*s strength in providing a concise argument for the second era of film is its constant and consistent display of psychosis within its cast members. Throughout watching the film, none of the characters seem to be completely sane, and in fact the films seem like a distortion of the actual military. For example, Sergeant Hartman's opening monologue is one of the most famous in the history of cinema, but by using close-up camera angles and other clever shooting techniques, Stanley Kubrick manages to create a strong distortion of truth, toeing the line between war drama and humor. This distortion leads to a hazy view of war, focusing instead of the close-up oriented characters instead of the wide-spectrum issue of war. As the last film in the Vietnam War era, *Full Metal Jacket* provides a positive bookend for the rampant dissolution of common sense and dignity seen during the Vietnam War era.

The transition from the Vietnam War films to the most recent era of films began after the Cold War entered the 1980s. The civil unrest and constant badgering of government started to fade by the 1980s into a period of embracing reality. The Cold War was still around, but no nuclear weapons had been fired, and the war looked to be entering its final stages. Now those intrusive forms of media such as television were a cultural norm. People started to pay less attention to the subject of the media as, since the media was now becoming old, it was becoming easy to ignore or not take as seriously as earlier time periods. In many ways, the psychological reality of Vietnam with the historic realism of the World War Ii era presented a wholly new and

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realistic depiction of combat.

Also, the fact that no major conflict occurred after the Vietnam War caused a high degree of interest to rise about the heroism during armed conflict, a study that was lacking in the current storyline of the planet. As is the case of many eras of film, the perspective of war by the public is directly related to the perspective of the contemporary society. Writer James Jones states "If our war films are any indication of our social maturity in an age when we have the capacity of destroying ourselves, there is little hope for us."[XLIX] The evolution of war films from the end of the Vietnam War until the current time is a product of drastically improving technology, a time without major conflict and a period of drastic film experimentation using different technological advancements for making film. Using portable, handheld cameras, a massive new possibility was made available for war films; creating a realistic battlefield for the viewer to see as they go through the adventures of the soldiers in the film. Also, the opening traumatic scene was debuted with a higher realization of realistic depictions of war. Opening a film with a graphic, realistic and disturbing battle scene set the stage for the rest of the film and the central plot to help set the tone.

The final class of film emerges in the late 1980s with the Civil War epic *Glory*. The factors that fill the final and most recent era of film are individualistic focus, gritty and graphic battles, and a focus on the family rather than the squad. Although several exceptions are made to these three core rules throughout the last twenty years, the overall position of the era's

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restrictions have not shifted. *Glory* is one of the first films that were able to define this era

through its graphic nature, the history of the characters, and the interaction experienced between

the main characters in the film. This era launched a much more intricate, individual-focused view

of war. Sparing the specifics of battle and, these films instead focus on the grittiness and graphic

nature often experienced in war. Films such as *Saving Private Ryan, Flags of Our Fathers,*

Letters from Iwo Jima, and *The Hurt Locker* provide excellent examples of this class of film.

Two films initiated the new-age perspective of war in film. Two directors that helped these

transitions were Edward Zwick and Stephen Spielberg. Zwick, who directed the film *Glory* in

1989, helped set the stage for Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. After both *Glory* and *Saving*

Private Ryan, a high number of films have come into theaters over the past twenty-one years that

favor individualistic, powerful stores instead of political messages, for or against the war.

　　　Glory was a genre-shifting film. Despite being one of the few Civil War films, *Glory*

raised eyebrows with its gritty realism and individualism. Although *Glory* might not be the first

film to have this extreme degree of realistic violence, but it is one of the first films to have that

violence subjected to a wide cinematic audience. Due to that fact, *Glory* is the beginning of the

most recent era of film. The first scene of the film, taking place during the Battle of Antietam,

has a radical amount of graphic violence. In this scene, one of Captain Robert Gould Shaw's

(Matthew Broderick) soldiers is decapitated by a cannonball round, as the concussion force and

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shrapnel of another round incapacitates Shaw after impacting the ground next to him[L]. Once

being taken care of by military medics, Shaw is revealed to have bits of bone in his neck from

the man next to him that was killed by the cannon shot. The first scene, full of violence and

graphic malice, was something not many individuals saw prior to *Glory*.

The characters played by Broderick and Denzel Washington (Tripp) exemplify the

individualistic characteristics characterized in this era. Shaw is a traditionalist. Throughout the

film, he addresses letters home telling his mother about the honor he will return to the family.

This expansion of his patriotic ideals subjugated to his mother at home shows that the

individualistic traditionalism inherent in soldiers during the first era was still being pushed

through. However, instead of acting like this throughout the film, Shaw changes by the end of

the movie, showing that this traditionalism was a negative and incapacitating value.

During the film, when a recently promoted and reluctant Shaw receives command of the

52nd Massachusetts, many codes of honor and a misled value-set show through to the audience.

Feeling that commanding a group of former slaves will not lead to the glory that he desires,

Shaw does not believe that receiving command will result in his honor or his survival of the war.

In addition to his paranoia, Shaw finds a heavy amount of resistance from the men that enter his

squadron. No soldier gives Shaw more resistance than Tripp (Denzel Washington). Both Shaw

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L   Throughout the scene, Shaw 3xhibits a high amount of fear. Throughout the World War II films, soldiers would
    run directly through the battlefield, not flinching at the sound and force of exploding shells and mortar rounds.
    However, Shaw never shows a level of supportability with the carnage around him. He is constantly using his
    sword to defend his face, and moves in angled lines in order to avoid the fire from the cannons.

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and Tripp have drastic changes throughout the film, and both focus entirely on the individual[LI].

What *Glory* shows is that the individual has to be completely happy with one before the idea of

the squad can be idealized[LII]. At the end of the film, both Shaw and Tripp die attempting to

attack a Confederate base, a suicide mission that the squad took on in order to define their worth

to the army[LIII].

Glory became showered with acclaim and accolades when it was released into theaters.

However, much like the World War II period, there was a lull in films between the time that

Glory was released, and the time that *Saving Private Ryan* entered theaters. Although films such

as *Schindler's List*[LIV] were set during a time of conflict, a heavy amount of films stayed away

from past historical conflicts[LV]. However, *Glory* remained a staple of a new-era of war films,

and a foundation that was built upon by director Steven Spielberg, resulting in perhaps the

greatest war film of all time.

1998's *Saving Private Ryan* defined the modern age of war films, and remains the

cornerstone to judging the current genre of war films. The Steven Spielberg-directed drama took

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LI   Edward Zwick. *Glory*. 1989.
LII See Appendix. Fig. 1.10.
LIII   In a visual motif, both Tripp and Shaw die next to one another. When Shaw dies first, he is shot in the
     chest, falls back and lands onto the dirt. Once Tripp is shot, he lays with his head on Shaw's chest. The visual
     cue of the two characters dead next to one another not only provided a bookend to the relationship between the
     two characters, but also made a very patriotic message of how the Union transcended race for a greater cause
     during the Civil War.
LIV   Steven Spielberg. *Schindler's List.* 1994.
LV Schindler's list never showed direct armed conflict. Only during the raid of the Jewish Village was there a high
     amount of armed conflict, specifically showing the mass executions of the Jews who attempted to escape. The
     absence of armed conflict led to the realization and overly dark tone of the film, focusing exclusively on the
     horrid events taking place in eastern Europe during the 1940s.

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the lessons in hard drama learned in his academy award-winning film *Schindler's List* and applied them to World War II. In the article *Saving Private Ryan and Post-War Memory in America* , John Bodnar states "As many reviewers have suggested, the movie counters images of heroic warriors by disclosing the real terror of combat and is in many ways an antiwar story."[LVI]

Spielberg used a high number of new filming techniques in order to capture a realistic form of war in *Saving Private Ryan.* Using cameras with documentary style techniques, Spielber was able to achieve the tone he wanted the film to have. Taking viewers into the trenches with shaky shots instead of cinematic, sprawling shots, Spielberg centered his story on Chaos. "I used the kind of mind-set that the combat camera crew used in WWII and the Korean War," Said Spielberg of his shooting, "That is, get the footage the best you can and try to get out of there with your life intact.[LVII]"

The story of *Saving Private Ryan* focuses on Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks), a leader of a squad of Army Rangers who are first thrust into action during the D-Day Campaign. After finding success in Normandy, the squad is sent behind enemy lines to rescue Private James Ryan (Matt Damon), who is being sent back home after his three brothers have died in combat. Ryan is a member of the 101st airborne, who were dropped behind enemy lines rather disjointedly during the D-Day invasion of June, 1944. Miller and his squad consisting of Sargent Michael Horvath (Tom Sizemore), Private Daniel Jackson (Barry Pepper), Private First Class Richard

LVI   Bodnar, 805
LVII   http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9807/23/private.ryan/index.html

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Reiben (Edward Burns), Technician Fifth Grade Timothy E. Upham (Jeremy Davies), Private

Stan Melish (Adam Goldberg), PFC Adrian Caparzo (Vin Disel) and Technician Fourth Grade

Irwin Wade (Giovanni Ribinisi) enter the enemy lines in hopes of finding Ryan and send him

home.

The opening twenty minutes of the film fully embody the harsh realities of war. In

comparison, one can look at how *The Longest Day*[LVIII] depicted the Normandy D-Day

Invasion[LIX]. In *Saving Private Rya*n, Captain Miller loses half of his squad within the first

several seconds of the landing, as a German machine gun entrenched in a bunker opens fire on

his battalion[LX]. Miller's second-in-command is blown in half by a mortar round[LXI]. A third

member of his squad dies when he takes off his helmet while attempting to place explosive

bangalores underneath the sand bunker. The sheer reality and the body count in the first twenty

minutes of *Saving Private Ryan* created a massive buzz in the media and through the public

perception of war.

LVIII   Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki, Gerd Oswald, Derryl F. Zanuck, John Wayne. *The Longest Day*. 1962.

LIX   Spielberg showed the level of psychotic imbalance inherent in soldiers during the first several minutes of the film. While the transport is approaching the beaches of Normandy, men are vomiting inside of the boat while they cannot see any beach in front of them. Not knowing what to expect and the insanity conditions rendered in these opening minutes led to a realistic persona early in the film that continued throughout.

LX In the first few minutes of the film, the main characters in the film are shown as Jackson, Mellish, Miller and Horvath all have screen time prior to the gate dropping in the transport. However, there are also several soldiers who die within the first few seconds of the invasion who are seen. This created a sense of uncertainty and doubt towards who would live and die throughout the remainder of the picture.

LXI   The death of Miller's second-in command is one of many overly graphic deaths on the beaches in Normandy. One soldier cries out for his mother while his innards lay on the dirt. Another walks around the beach while bullets bounce around him, looking for his detached arm. A group of men are killed when a bullet detonates the backpack of a soldier with a flamethrower, the subsequent explosion splashing blood on Miller's face while he takes in the graphic details on the beachfront.

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The eyes of *Saving Private Ryan*, Miller represents a modern soldier placed in a past conflict. Acting apart from the soldiers seen in *Sands from Iwo Jima* and *The Longest Day*, Miller's motivation for fighting does not come through glory. Doing his rightful duty as an American, Miller wants nothing more than to go home to his wife.

In three powerful scenes, Spielberg allows the audience to see into the eyes of the individual during World War II. The first scene involves the breaking point for his squad. Two drastic scenes come from an assault on a grounded machine gun position. Throughout the process, the squad loses one of their own[LXII]. Captain Miller struggles to find reasoning in his decision. While the squad buries their dead, Miller takes a moment to himself. Miller, throughout the film a stoic, strong and controlled soldier, completely breaks down[LXIII]. That short moment showed more raw human emotion in a soldier than what was normally seen in film. It also took a great deal away from the American soldier that audiences were accustomed to seeing. In this scene "The war was savage; the average American GI who fought it was not."[LXIV]

Immediately following his breakdown, Miller addresses his squad when they are

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[LXII]   Wade dies after being hit in the chest by shrapnel from a grenade. During the scene before Wade's death – he foreshadows his own demise with his comments about his interaction with his mother. Adding a major and depressing sub-plot to the story, Wade expresses much regret over not spending time with his mother when she would return home early from work just to see him. Wade's moment of reconciliation marks a shift in film from one in which soldiers only had drastically optimistic thoughts about their family to a heavy amount of regret and even shame in their interaction with close family members.

[LXIII]   One motif in the film is Miller's left hand. It constantly shakes, an outlet for shell shock. The spark that sets off Miller's emotional breakdown is the fact that he cannot stop his hand from shaking.

[LXIV]   Bodnar, 805

completely falling apart[LXV]. With his good friend and second-in-command Sergeant Gus Hovath

pointing a pistol at loud-mouth Private Rieben, Miller tells the squad his past, something so

mysterious in the Army Rangers Corps that a money pool has been made. Miller tells the

soldiers that he is from Pennsylvania, and is a school teacher.

> "Mike, what's the pool on me up to right now? What's it up to? What is it? Three
>
> hundred dollars? Is that it? Three hundred? I'm a schoolteacher. I teach English
>
> Composition in this little town called Addley, Pennsylvania. The last eleven
>
> years I've been at Thomas Alva Edison High School. I was a coach of the
>
> baseball team in the springtime. Back home, I tell people what I do for a living
>
> and they think, well, now that figures. But over here, it's a big, big mystery. So I
>
> guess I've changed some. Sometimes I wonder if I've changed so much my wife
>
> is even gonna recognize me whenever it is I get back to her. And how I'll ever be
>
> able to tell her about days like today. Ah, Ryan...I don't know anything about
>
> Ryan, I don't care. The man means nothing to me, he's just a name. But if, you
>
> know, if going to Ramelle and finding him so he can go home...if that earns me
>
> the right to back to my wife, well then...that's my mission."[LXVI]

The revelation of Miller's past surprises the squad and the audience, as prior, sarcastic thought

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LXV See Appendix 1.11
LXVI   Steven Spielberg. *Saving Private Ryan*. 1998.

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claimed that Miller was "Patched together from the parts of dead G.I.s"[LXVII]. What Spielberg

seemingly aims for with this revelation is the fact that a hero in World War II could be fashioned

out of absolutely nowhere.

In *Saving Private Ryan*, the youthful spirit embodied in the classic films are exemplified

through several other soldiers. Private James Ryan, a soldier in the 101st airborne, relies on his

squad and becomes resilient to leave when he learns his three brothers have been killed in

combat at Omaha Beach, Utah Beach and Italy, stating that now the men that he fought with are

his only family[LXVIII]. Where the viewer might perceive Ryan would immediately elect a return

home, his response is surprisingly traditionalist in nature. According to the theory created by the

World War II films, the standard procedure of honorable traditionalism states that men will

always put themselves ahead of the squad. However, when the squad is decimated by the

German offensive and pinned down, the emergency objective is to blow the bridge that Miller's

squad is defending. In a sequence, Ryan is seen in the corner, cowering and screaming. In the

traditionalist view, this is seen as cowardice. However, in the modern, individualistic view, this

can be defined as simply self-preservation of character.

Saving Private Ryan is the defining film of the current era of movies. The power behind

Saving Private Ryan is how it combines the previous two eras, then expands upon the foundation

that *Glory* set nearly ten years prior. Having the heroism shown through psychologically

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LXVII   Steven Spielberg. *Saving Private Ryan*. 1998
LXVIII   Stephen Spielberg. *Saving Private Ryan*. 1998

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imbalanced and imperfect individuals gave the film a humanistic perspective, resulting in a high

rate of compassion for the individual characters. *Saving Private* Ryan received a high amount of

attention when first released, and the subsequent reactions audiences and veterans alike had

when watching the movie[LXIX]. The D-Day scene alone is used when talking about the newest era

of film. *Saving Private Ryan* is still seen as the benchmark for war films, in regards to

storytelling, character development, and pure realism.

In *The Thin Red Line*, all the elements of *Saving Private Ryan, Glory* and even *Platoon*

are present in Terrrence Malick's adaption of the James Jones novel. There is a drastic need in

the film for moral and ecstatic leadership, as well as any level of optimism among the soldiers.

In the beginning of the film, Private Robert Witt (Jim Caviezel) is AWOL in the Phillipenes,

taking swims in the ocean and engaging in friendly relations with the indigenous population.

However, once his squad comes back for him, he is thrust back into the war[LXX]. This

introduction to Witt shows a hint to the resistance era, but soon these transitions into the newest

era, although *The Thin Red Line* does not take the same drastic measures as *Saving Private Ryan*

when dealing with warfare.

The battle sequences are an anomaly in regards to this genre of war films, as the majority

of the battle scenes do not seem to focus on the graphic nature of war, but rather the implied

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LXIX   Especially during the first scene during the Normandy landing, veterans of World War II that watched the
     film were emotionally impacted by the graphic nature of the film. Some veterans experienced shock while
     watching the movie, others had to leave the theater.
LXX   Terrence Malick. *The Thin Red Line*. 1998

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graphic nature of imagery. There are no graphic images seen in this film, as the soldiers are shot but without copious amounts of blood flowing from their bodies. One incident shown in the film involves Sergeant Keck. While entrenched at Guadalcanal, Keck reaches down to grab a clip for his rifle. In doing so, he accidentally pulls the pin on one of his grenades. The subsequent explosion is enough to mortally wound Keck, but does nothing like blow his lower section off. Instead, a flash is seen, Keck goes flying through the air and lands on the rising dirt of the bunker, screaming "I blew my ass off![LXXI]" The entire film encompasses this mental and psychological breakdown over violence all throughout the film.

The methodology started in *Saving Private Ryan* has carried over to a number of films throughout the 21st century. What makes *Saving Private Ryan* such an important benchmark of film is how it combined the reality of war with aspects of the previous two eras defined previously. However, once the film was over, the audience is only dependent on the individual, the lone man looking at the grave markers of his former squad at the cemeteries in Normandy. Once *Saving Private Ryan* finished its box-office run, becoming the most-talked about and highest grossing domestic film in 1999, soon Hollywood attempted to replicate what made the film so special[LXXII]. What resulted was a line of films that not only replicated *Saving Private Ryan*'s visual style, but also the focus on the individual instead of the group.

One such film was 2000's *Black Hawk Down*, directed by Ridley Scott. This film looks

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[LXXI] Ibid
[LXXII] Despite its wild popularity, *Saving Private Ryan* did not win the Best Picture Award for 1999. The academy decided that the award would be given to *Shakespeare in Love*.

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reminiscent of films such as *The Longest Day* and *Full Metal Jacket*, where a group of actors play a squad. Whereas the films representing the previous two eras several of the films most of the squads are simply fillers looking to supplement the leads, *Black Hawk Down* brings a high amount of individuality into all of the characters.

The "main characters" of the film are Staff Sergeant Matt Eversmann (Josh Hartnett), Specialist John Grimes (Ewan McGreggor), Lieutenant Colonel Danny McKnight (Tom Sizemore), Sergeant First Class Jeff Sanderson (William Fichtner) and Sergeant First Class Norm "Hoot" Hooten (Eric Bana). Although these characters get the most screen time, the embodiment of their characters are made through their commitment to their squad mates. The specifics of the story that created *Black Hawk Down* are all true, and are one primary reason why the film constantly has more of a real feel to it.

Once the firing starts in Mogadishu, the film quickly shifts from one of heroism to one of gritty reality[LXXIII]. The convoy lead by McKnight, the commander of the 3rd Ranger Battalion, leads to the deaths of many of his men, but in this motorcade, the individuals in the squad show high amounts of bravery when dealing with the graphic nature of the battle. The first major casualty of the battle, Dominic Pilla, is killed when he is shot through the neck by an insurgent's AK-47[LXXIV]. A mission that was being circulated throughout the base as a cloak and dagger, scoop and grab routine quickly shifts to one of frantic survival.

LXXIII See Appendix 1.12
LXXIV Ridley Scott. *Black Hawk Down*. 2002.

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There were several major pieces of *Black Hawk Down* that improve and mature upon the standards set by *Saving Private Ryan*. *Black Hawk Down* is an extremely graphic and realistic film. Director Ridley Scott not only set out to make a war films that would be dedicated and reminiscent of the contemporary warfare experienced in the last decade, but also show the adverse effects of war[LXXV]. Although the scenes involving the soldiers are deeply involved in war, the scenes including civilians are the most chilling, and show the drastic realism of war and the true costs.

In one scene in the film, a one of Eversmann's troops, Staff Sergeant Ed Yurek, is evading the insurgent militia. He sneaks through a residential area, being followed by two soldiers, supposedly a father and his son, both carrying AK-47 Assault Rifles. As the two insurgents prepare to ambush the soldier outside of the residential area, the US Soldier opens the door, slips and falls. The young boy opens fire on the soldier, only to shoot his father six times in his chest. A scene that started as a moment of survival for an American soldier turns into a horrific scene as a son kills his father by accident. The last shot the viewer sees of the two is the son cradling his father, who is bleeding profusely, spitting out blood and gritting his teeth, attempting to stay alive when his fate has been decided.

LXXV   Two scenes in the film caught a heavy amount of controversy upon its release. The death of Master Sergeant Tim "Griz" Martin (Kim Coates) shows the Delta Operative blown in two pieces after his convoy is hit by an RPG. He grabs the hand of McKnight, delivering one final message to his daughters before dying. In the same scene, a member of McKnight's convoy discovers a disembodied hand lying in the sand. He picks up the hand and places it into the pouch meant for canteens. These two scenes were a depiction of the graphic nature of war by Scott.

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A scene such as the one between the father and son would never had occurred during the previous two eras of film, and is one of the defining elements of the new era of films. Usually, sequences dealing with the deaths of the insurgents are never shown on screen, or in as much detail as the death of the father. The son killing his father, as a result becomes a massively tragic piece of drama that touches the viewer on an emotional level. Perhaps one way to realize how *Black Hawk Down* is different war film is by looking at the signifier between the protagonists and antagonists. The antagonists are not a massive army fighting with an overly negative underlying theme in mind, they are refugee civilians, fighting who they believe are insurgents. It's a massive question of looking at both sides of the story, and instead of hating the enemy, the audience finds themselves sympathetic towards their suffering and current conditions. Another scene in the film takes place near the end of the movie. While the soldiers of Chalk Four are following the United Nations convoy to a safe-zone, the squad sees a many carry a dead child through a hazy background. As is the common case among media, dead children never becomes accepted as a social norm. Having a dead child on screen gives the viewer an idea about the death and destruction experienced, and the harsh realities that there are no winners in conflict.

Scott investigated the theory of inevitability and the unfairness of war in *Black Hawk Down*. Throughout the movie, there is no rhyme or reason between those who live and those who die throughout the battle. Sergeant Griz Martin, who has two girls back at home that he is writing a children's book for, is blown in half after a RPG strike on his convoy. Corporal Jamie

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Smith, a young soldier eager for the next mission, is shot in the leg, which ruptures his femoral artery, and he dies from his injuries after an unsuccessful surgery. The various deaths in the film are unfortunate and tragic, but were meant in many ways by Scott to be a lesson on the rules of war.

Two monologues describe this view of war through the eyes of those that were in the battle. First, Hoot talks to Eversmann after the two of them return to the home base. Hoot begins to resupply and prepare to go back out into the battle. He says to Eversmann:

> "When I go home, people ask me, 'hey Hoot, why do you do it, man? Why? You
>
> some kind of war junkie?' I won't say a goddamn word. Why? They won't
>
> understand. They won't understand why we do it. They won't understand it's
>
> about the men next to you…and that's it. That's all it is."[LXXVI]

This first monologue states to Eversmann that the reality of war is that there is no tighter group than the men who go to war with one another. However, that does not heal the wounds that Eversmann suffers after losing Smith. The most emotional speech comes at the end of the film, as Eversmann says his final goodbyes to his deceased friend:

> "I was talking to Blackburn[LXXVII] the other day…and he asked me, you
>
> know…what changed? Why are we going home? And I said, 'nothing'. That's
>
> not true, you know. I think everything has changed. I know I've changed. You

---

[LXXVI] Ridley Scott. *Black Hawk Down*. 2002.
[LXXVII] Soldier played by Orlando Bloom. Falls out of helicopter of Eversmann's chalk after the pilot dodges an RPG from insurgents. Is taken away from the battlefield and does not become a part of the battle.

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know, a friend of mine asked me, before I got here, just right when we were all

shipping out, he asked me 'why are you going to fight somebody else's war?

What, do you think you're heroes?' I didn't know what to say at the time. But…if

he asked me again, I'd say no. I'd say there's no way in hell. Because nobody

asks to be a hero…it just sometimes turns out that way."[LXXVIII]

The monologue from Eversmann shows the psychological breakdown embraced and

encompassed by all of the soldiers that were part of the conflict. Unable to embrace the

unfairness of war, they resort to the fact that those who die are heroes, and the rest of the

soldiers are little more than just soldiers. Eversmann changes throughout the film from a

pacifist to a man of war and back to an optimistic individual hoping for an end to armed

conflict.

Black Hawk Down is a film that matures upon Saving Private Ryan because not only are

there more characters with individualistic tendencies, Black Hawk Down expands on an

individual's family more than any other war film seen before it. At several parts of the film,

Marines call their families prior to heading out to battle or look at pictures of their children[LXXIX].

One of the characters portrayed in the film, Robert Durant, is overwhelmed by insurgents after

his helicopter crashes. As the crowd bears down upon him, he takes out a picture of his wife and

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LXXVIII Ridley Scott. *Black Hawk Down*. 2002.
LXXIX Sergeant First Class Randy Shughart, a Delta Force Sniper, attempts to call his wife before leaving on the
 mission. He just misses her, hanging up the phone as she picks it up. He later dies in the film. (In real life,
 Shughart was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Mogadishu)

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child before being captured[LXXX].

The squad relations, the graphic nature and the importance of family relations in *Black Hawk Down* are differentiating pieces that lead to a much larger overlying theory. In *Black Hawk Down*, there are presumed leaders throughout the film, as Eversmann is the commander of his small squad, but all characters create their own stories in way that has rarely been seen before. The primary example of this is through Jamie Smith, John Grimes, a delta soldier named Hoot, and Durant. Durant is captured by the forces in Mogadishu, and over the sky that night a small chopper flies over, declaring "Mike Durant! We will *not* leave you behind!"[LXXXI]

Although not set in World War II, the themes inherent in the films prior to *Black Hawk Down* are also present in Scot's modern war epic. *Black Hawk Down* has become the gold standard for modern war conflict films, as well as he new era of film. In many ways, the procedure begun by *Saving Private Ryan* was perfected by *Black Hawk Down. Black Hawk Down* is one of the few films that have depicted a real conflict during the same time frame that a similar conflict was taking place. The actual event took place in 1993. Although the Vietnam One point of note for *Black Hawk Down* is the theatrical release date of the film.

Black Hawk Down is an oft overlooked film that helped piece together the framework of the new style of war films. As a real story, Ridley Scott fully embodies the gritty nature of urban

---

[LXXX] In this scene, there is a heavy about of savageness in the natives. Scott shows the frustration and anger the natives have towards the Americans in this scene. A close shot is made of Durant as he stretches for his wife's picture, only to get his hand stepped on. When he finally grasps the picture, it is ripped out of his hand and thrown to the ground.
[LXXXI] Ridley Scott. *Black Hawk Down*. 2002.

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warfare, combined with the terrifying and oft depressing story of war and the cost is has on all involved. From late 2001 on, all war films took the realistic notions taken from *Saving Private Ryan* and combined the emotional convictions seen in *Black Hawk Down* to help concrete the new era of film. The twenty-first century has witnessed a drastic shift in how it perceives war, embracing the chaos and questionable result of war, which has been shown through nearly all of the war films in the twenty-first century.

Marking a transition into the 21st century, the 2001 film *Pearl Harbor* became more of a romantic form of individualism. Both the characters of Rafe (Ben Affleck) and Danny (Josh Hartnett) fell for the same woman, Evelyn (Kate Beckinsale). When Pearl Harbor is attacked by the Japanese, however, all romantic tendencies are dropped in favor of self-preservation. While Evelyn puts her life on the line and even loses friends while attempting to get to the hospital and save soldiers, the men are attempting to fight off the Japanese. Petty Officer 2nd Class Dorie Miller, An African-American Cook played by Cuba Gooding Jr., is placed in a position where racial boundaries are superseded and he shoots down several Japanese planes by using an Anti-Aircraft gun[LXXXII]. Although heroism can be seen in all of these scenes, there is no real aspect of teamwork, such as what was seen in *Black Hawk Down*. With Rafe, Danny and Miller, their individual actions are what result in heroism. Even at the end of the film when Rafe, Danny assigned to Major Jimmy Doolittle's raid on Tokyo, Danny is killed taking two bullets through the chest for Rafe, and dies in his friend's arms. At this part of the film, none of Rafe or Danny's

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LXXXII See Appendix. 1.13.

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squad assists Rafe or Danny until Danny has already been shot.

Where *Pearl Harbor* shows the realism of war is very similar to *Black Hawk Down's*

unfair selection of those who would not survive the film. Although *Pearl Harbor* is a very

Hollywood-ized and critically panned interpretation of war, it holds true to the evident themes in

the new era of film. Characters such as Danny, who is expecting his first child, is killed overseas,

and characters such as Betty Bayer (Jamie King), who is a nurse working in Pearl Harbor, is

killed running to the hospital to help take care of the countless injured men.

The 2004 re-make of *The Alamo* showed how not only World War II films were affected

by the new era of self-inspiration. Focusing on Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett and William Travis,

all three characters have constant contact with one another, all embodying different aspects of

late 19th century culture[LXXXIII]. The film has a massively graphic battle scene at its conclusion.

Travis is shot in the head by a young Mexican soldier, and is shown the next morning with a hole

blown through his head, and the gritty blow back on the rock behind him. Bowie is shown with

holes blown through him and bayonet marks in a blood-soaked bed[LXXXIV].

Bowie is the home-grown traditionalist, knowing the land, the people and acting as the

self-imposed leader of the naturalists in the area. Crockett is the new entrepreneur into the area,

attempting to get his piece of Texas, continue his attempted rise in government, and further his

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LXXXIII See Appendix 1.14.
LXXXIV At the end of the film, Davy Crockett is killed when he does submit to Santa Anna. His death is off-
   screen, which is different than the other characters. However, he is killed when Santa Anna orders his men to
   skewer him with their bayonettes.

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internal reputation. William Travis is a northern apologetic traditionalist, bringing the same

unionized perspective into an environment in Texas that does not accept or condone what he

wants from this unclaimed property[LXXXV]. The three individualistic perspectives clash often,

with none of the three men wanting to give any ground in order to keep their own perspectives

alive.

What is interesting in this era is how ratings from the Motion Picture Association of

America (MPAA) seem to have very little to no impact on the graphic nature of the film.

Regardless of whether a film has a high amount of graphic content, the MPAA judges by the

overall power of the subject matter, taking into consideration sexual, vocal and plot details.

While both *Pearl Harbor* and *The Alamo* were PG-13 rated films, they still had their fair share of

gritty violence. As time went on, the intensity and grittiness of the graphic nature, even for R-

rated films diminished, although the intensity did not.

Letters from Iwo Jima and *Flags of Our Fathers* offer another unique perspective on the

individual's experience in war. Director Clint Eastwood took two perspectives of the Battle of

Iwo Jima and combined them into one large story. However, in both films, the stories focus on

specific individuals rather than the actual battle. Specifically in *Flags of Our Fathers*, the story

focuses on the soldiers that raised the flag on Mount Suribachi. *Letters from Iwo Jima* focuses

on the defenders of the island, and the difficulties that they go through as they prepare for the

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LXXXV Throughout the film, Crockett speaks of his desire to build a future empire in Texas. He mentions how he
    turned down a run at the presidency in order to build property and ultimately run for President in the new country
    of Texas.

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Allied Siege on the mountain. Whereas prior to this newest era no director would even *touch*

looking at a different culture except for the American perspective of war, Eastwood not only

looks at the conflict from the alleged enemy's perspective, but also looks at it as part of a series

with the American perspective. What results is a solid film that investigates all aspects of the

Japanese culture, and completely destroys the image of the savage Japanese soldier whose only

concern is killing Americans. In *Letters from Iwo Jima*, we are introduced to characters such as

Private First Class Saigo (Kazunari Ninomiya)[LXXXVI], who is against the war and the Japanese

need for soldiers[LXXXVII].

During the battle of Iwo Jima, Saigo watches as his countrymen commit suicide by hara-

kiri, make useless charges into battle against better-rested and armed American soldiers, while he

sits as more of a narrator, watching the chaos unfold around him.   Saigo is not the soldier that

Americans have seen in film over the last seventy years. He is a scared Japanese soldier not

dedicated to eradicating American influence. He is the "anti-Jap", which shows that in the new

era, a higher focus is paid to the pain of war suffered on all sides[LXXXVIII].

The newest iteration of film's perception of war is *The Hurt Locker*, directed by Kathryn

Bigelow. The film that focuses on the life of an Iraq War bomb technician does not rely on the

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LXXXVI See Appendix. 1.15
LXXXVII Throughout the film, Saigo does not hide his criticism of the Japanese military. This gets him in trouble constantly with his superior officers.
LXXXVIII One of the most prevalent scenes in the film is when all of the men in Saigo's unit kill themselves with their own grenades. *Letters From Iwo Jima* is a film where the rightful depiction of glory are mixed with the fear of one's own morality, as was the case with this scene, where men would cry upon killing themselves.

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graphic nature, replacing it with intensity and reality. The opening scene of the film depicts a

fellow bomb technician that dies while attempting to disarm a bomb. When the bomb in the

ground explodes, there is no massive explosion filled with fire and flames, rather depicting a

much more realistic blast. The blast is a concussive force that instantly kills the bomb

technician[LXXXIX]. Director Kathryn Bigelow elects to hold off on the gore, but rather let the

force of the explosion describe the scene. It is a mind-numbing experience seeing the

devastation that a car bomb can do, and a very realistic moment to experience.

The main character of the film Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner) is an

example of the most modernistic individually centered soldier. James is not a man who loves the

benefits of war or the benefits of squad behavior; instead, James focuses on the adrenaline rush

of being a bomb technician and a war-enthusiast. He is all about the adrenaline, shown in a

scene where a bomb is placed in the back of a car. James takes off all of his equipment and says

to the man spotting him that the amount of ordinance in the trunk is enough to kill them all, and

says "If I'm going to die, at least I'm going to die comfortably."[XC]

The squad in *The Hurt Locker* is comprised of three men, James, Sergeant J.T. Sanborn

(Anthony Mackie) and Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty). All three soldiers go through

their own level of psychosis and destabilization during the film, as Eldridge is injured during a

firefight, an injury that he blames on James' inability to care about his squad mates. Sanborn

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[LXXXIX] See Appendix 1.16
[XC] Kathryn Bigelow. *The Hurt Locker*. 2009.

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breaks down after a civilian is used by insurgents as a bomb, one that James cannot disarm

before it explodes[XCI]. On the way back to base, Sanborn beings to cry and say that he wants to

return to the United States, get away from the war and start a family[XCII]. He then leaves at the

end of their tour of duty[XCIII].

The military style of filming has even transcended genres, as has the personality of the

soldiers in this newest style of war film. The 2011 science-fiction action film *Battle: Los*

Angeles (Jonathan Libersman) also embodies the realistic form of film. By using handheld

cameras, individualized soldiers and a realistic, gritty narrative, *Battle: Los Angeles* is able to

place the viewer into a supposed contemporary alien invasion[XCIV]. The style of the film makes

the events seen concurrent with current events. *Battle: Los Angeles* embodies all the

individualistic pieces of modern war films, from the family-oriented individuals that sacrifice for

the good of the squad to the graphic nature and realism through how the film sounds and feels

throughout. Not only is the genre transcending to war films, but also genre-crossing films such as

Battle: Los Angeles.

One can only begin to imagine what could be next in regards to war films. Obviously,

rapidly improving technology is a major factor to the cinema, and the capabilities of the

technology are surely able to improve the overall viewer's immersion into war. *Jarhead* looks at

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XCI Ibid
XCII This is a result of a series of traumatic event. Earlier in the film, the group is forced into a standoff that lasts
    for several hours against a group of insurgents with sniper rifles.
XCIII   Ibid
XCIV See Appendix 1.17

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a Marine in a completely different environment and viewpoint, taking a look at the anticipation

of combat rather than the actual thrill and fear of being in combat[XCV]. There have been several

documentaries that place the viewer literally into the field, as well as films that have placed the

viewer on the home front dealing with issues stemming from conflicts overseas. Films such as

In the Valley of Elah[XCVI] takes a look from the home front and the costs that are paid in that

regard. Other films such as *Stop-Loss*[XCVII], *Home of the Brave*[XCVIII] and *Brothers*[XCIX] look at the

psychological progression of troops that return home. In the most recent era, the focus has

shifted to the home front instead of the warfront.

Brothers exemplifies of how the new era film is still writing its own rules on where and

how it could possibly examine the rules of war. Captain Sam Cahill (Tobey Maguire) comes

home after undergoing an experience in Afghanistan as a prisoner of war and a prisoner who is

forced to kill his squad mate in order to survive. Once he returns home, he explodes in a shower

of violence that is as intense as any of the war scenes seen during conflict films[C]. *Brothers* takes

a look at the post-conflict psychological disorders seen among soldiers, highlighted by an

interview by Maguire on why he joined the project:

"I thought it was very powerful and that our take on it could highlight an issue

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XCV Sam Mendes. *Jarhead*. 2005
XCVI Paul Haggis. *In the Valley of Elah*. 2007
XCVII Kimberly Peirce. *Stop-Loss*. 2008
XCVIII Irwin Winkler. Home of the Brave. 2006.
XCIX Jim Sheridan. 2008.
C See Appendix.

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that doesn't get as much attention as I would like to see it get, and in that way it

was a great opportunity that could do something in an area that could do some

good in terms of spreading some awareness or to get people to notice or listen or

pay attention.[CI]"

The perspective of Hollywood as well as the American people is to highlight the issues still

going on the home front, and to address the problems within the military for soldiers that are

returning from war with post-traumatic stress syndrome. The films look to follow suit, which is

possibly where the next era of war could possibly lead to.

One interesting point to be investigated when looking at this recent trend is simply how it

is during conflict that the points are being made about the safety of soldiers returning from war.

Currently, America has seen recent trends of constant warfare, and as will be soon discussed, it is

only during times of peace that true conflict movies are made that help define a specific era.

What may happen instead of conflict films for at least a few years is a focus on the soldiers that

are returning from war.

The question is, with the increased technology present in our rapidly evolving culture,

creating the battlefield is very simple to do, and a desensitized culture can handle the intense

realities of war. One can argue that the United States on the verge of yet another large World

War II or possibly even Korean War films. The Korean War is the gold-mine for filmmakers, as

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CI   Interview – *Tobey Maguire Loses it in Brother*s
        http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltZtg9wHA3Q&feature=related

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there has yet to be a major film made about that war. *Pork Chop Hill* automatically comes to

mind as one of the few Korean War films, and as the newest generation of filmmakers were born

and raised during the Korean/Vietnam War eras, it can be hypothesized that more of those films

are on the horizon[CII].

In regards to technology, one can venture that soon cinematic war will become an overly

immersive experience. 3D technology has erupted in Hollywood, and is immersing itself in

nearly every facet of cinematic entertainment. It will likely not be long until 3D Technology is

placed onto the battlefield. The rapidly improving state of the cinema continually blurs the line

between reality and fantasy, a gap that will be closed with the soon to be anticipated inclusion of

new technology.

What has been found by the viewings of the film is that Hollywood does a consistent job

attempting to release films that are concurrent with the nation's emotions during an era. For

example, when *Bataan, The Longest Day* and *Sands of Iwo Jima* were released, World War II

was still a present situation, and had to be dealt with in the most care. In that regard, films

during that time period had to be optimistic towards the war effort and the overall objective the

government wanted to convey upon the public, which was essentially heroism trumps all evil.

Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* propaganda series were fully conveyed into film though the movies

of the era, and overall created a succinct and definable rush of Americanism and confidence in

the American Armed Forces.

CII Lewis Milestone. *Pork Chop Hill.* 1959

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However, when the Vietnam War began, and the drastic and constant media attention surrounding it caused a negative effect upon the public, the films made during that period monitor and honor that drastic shift in national conscience. Films such as *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket* show this through the complete pessimism towards war, describing visually that no good can come of war, and that all war is absolutely meaningless. In *Apocalypse Now*, that same ideal is enforced through the psychosis of the men involved. In the eyes of those that made the Vietnam Era films, even as late as 1987 with *Full Metal Jacket*, the time period between World War II and the Iraq War in the early 1990s was a very anti-war period, as the inclusion of televised war turned many viewers off of the reality of armed conflict.

For the newest era, the timing came through the feeling that World War II was quickly fading away from memory. In the 1990s, African-Americans were rapidly continuing their march for recognition in the world, and *Glory* helped remember that there were men that fought for the United States during the Civil War that were not white. For Spielberg, he saw that there was a reason to help re-install the image of World War II for a new generation. In a CNN article published directly after the release of the film, Spielberg is quoted as saying "I wasn't going to add my film to a long list of pictures that make World War II 'the glamorous war', 'the romantic war'.[CIII]" War films have become an important part of our entertainment world. However, war films have a drastic secondary plan, to create and ultimate subject the mass public to varying propaganda and underlying dramatic undertones.

CIII   http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9807/23/private.ryan/index.html

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There is a major differentiation between three eras of film, but to what should this be attributed? With the drastic shift from the heroism and sacrifice of the first era to the depression-ladent second, there is only one clear result; the improvements in technology have a much more drastic effect than initially created.

In the first era of film, those that went to the theaters were treated with the newest updates from the battlefield in a censored, U.S. Army covered fashion. Since the first era relates directly to whichever current conflict was ongoing at the time, there should be no surprise that these films nearly go hand in hand with what the Government was attempting to place upon the public. Optimism during World War II, especially after the disaster that was World War II, would have a massive impact upon the public and their interpretations of the war overseas. As a result, the films focused on the core value of World War II, defeating evil. Using a classic example of dramatic structure, the never ending battle against good and evil, World War II films gave the public audience something to cheer for as they were completely shut out from what was actually happening overseas.

The second era of film was effected by the drastic and unexpected effects of the media on the Vietnam War. From the psychosis of Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* to Russian roulette in *The Deer Hunter* to Pyle's shutdown in *Full Metal Jacket*, the persona is subjected to complete psychological breakdown, pain and death. The resistance in the Vietnam War era comes from how the films showed the public what the effects of the war could be, and why they should be

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against the conflicts as they became prevalent in society.

The third era focuses on reality and how the grittiness of war could be subjected in film. This paper attempts to define this new era in film. Although the history has been written about both the World War II era as well as the Vietnam-era films, little to no historical or scholarly articles have focused on the importance of the new eras in film. According to the thesis developed by this picture, these films embrace individualism, while still embracing the brotherhood of combatants. What results is a hybrid of the first two eras. There is still a high amount of dysfunction in the military, although nowhere near as heavy as what was seen during the Vietnam Era. As time progressed, films used increasing technology to improve on what they had already learned. *Glory* created the system with a strong story that bypassed not only racial but standard filmmaking procedures. *Saving Private Ryan* added the technology and the story, using a strong cast and even stronger director to create one of the most important war films of all time. *Black Hawk Down* perfected it with a modern interpretation of the evils of war. Since then, other films have been able to follow in the footsteps of the newest era's big three films. In many ways, the conservative shift in values and patriotism in the post-1980s world fed and were fed by these films. *Saving Private Ryan* made D-Day an honorable American tradition once again, following the rest of the films in honoring battles in which Americans showed drastic amounts of courage. This new era is one of reflection, honor, and remembrance.

From the battlegrounds of World War II to the streets of Afghanistan, war films will

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continue to be a forefront for societal comments along with statements that must be made about

current conflicts. There is nothing to do than to sit back, relax, and watch history repeat itself, or

unfold right in front of our eyes as we stare into the magic of film.

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Appendix

Fig 1.1

Fig 1.4

Fig 1.2

Fig 1.5

Fig 1.3

Fig 1.6

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Fig 1.7

Fig. 1. 10

Fig 1.8

Fig 1.11

Fig 1.9

Fig 1.12

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Fig. 1.13

Fig. 1. 16

Fig 1.14

Fig 1.17

Fig 1.15

Fig1.18