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**Changing Representations of the Second World War:
*Why We Fight, Victory at Sea, and The World at War***

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Defense: May 11, 2021

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Introduction

Every documentary presents a message, something that its creators want the audience to understand and believe. This message is influenced by myriad factors outside of a documentary's source material. This is especially true for historical documentaries which often attempt to present the past with the illusion of objectivity. There will always be factors that lead to different interpretations or presentations of the historical past. The script writer, the director, the researchers, and others all make decisions which influence how their audience interacts with the history being presented. If every documentary presented the same information in the same exact way, then there would be no need or want for the hundreds of documentaries made on the same topics and events. World War II, for instance, is a conflict which has been covered in every form of media by almost every nation since its beginning in 1939. And yet, a documentary made seventy-five years after its end can still present a new perspective or narrative on the war and its belligerents. Rarely do the basic facts of such a major event like the Second World War change dramatically. The history does not change—the war ended in 1945 and historians have had almost a century to analyze it—but those who construct the narratives of the war and the world around them do. Culture changes, sentiments change, beliefs change and as a result so does the media revolving around major historical moments.

How can one see these changes? The place to begin is the documentaries themselves. By comparing a set of documentaries on the same topic made at different times, one can make conclusions about the creators and their motivations based on what changes and what does not. For my research, I have done just that. I watched three documentary series which focus on World War II: *Why We Fight* (1942-1945), *Victory at Sea* (1952-1953), and *The World at War* (1973-1974). The three series have a temporal range of almost thirty years. Over this period, the core

events of the Second World War remained unchanged, but the way the war and its belligerents were represented in the media did not. These changes in the representation of World War II are a result of shifts in societal views on the war. For documentaries, these developments are also influenced by their creators, the documentary's purpose, and the time and context around the documentary

Central to the discussion of these documentaries is an understanding of propaganda. In modern times, many view the word "propaganda" with the implication of something evil and sinister. It is associated with the enemy—the other—not one's own nation. In *Munitions of the Mind*, Philip M. Taylor defines propaganda as an inherently neutral concept: "a process for the sowing, germination, and cultivation of ideas."¹ Taylor believes that the advent of atrocity propaganda in World War I contributed to the "pejorative connotations" the word took on in the twentieth century and its association with lying.² He also discusses the inextricable connection between propaganda and power, and by extension its connection to war. In war, propaganda proves itself a weapon of "no less significance than swords or guns or bombs."³ It persuades people to do that which benefits the persuader. During a conflict, an essential aspect of a nation's fight is convincing its citizens to sacrifice and die for its cause. It is with this conception of propaganda in mind, that one must analyze the historical documentary. Propaganda does not equate to complete falsehoods or deception. It is a form of persuasion and the truth is often persuasive on its own. *Why We Fight* is undoubtedly propaganda. It was created by the government during the war to educate and persuade soldiers and later factory workers and the

¹ Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda*. (Manchester; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2003), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

public. The series is a cut and dry example of government-created propaganda. Out of the three series, *Why We Fight* simplifies the war by emphasizing the heroism of the Allies and the villainy of the Axis. *Victory at Sea* was not produced directly by the government, but it had close associations with the United States Navy. Like its predecessor, *Victory at Sea* lacks nuance in its representation of the war. The series also omits the truth and avoids discussions of the more controversial subjects from the war. *Victory at Sea* also contains the rhapsodic music and tone present in *Why We Fight* and other World War II propaganda pieces. The series has a distinct Cold War narrative that espouses the grandness of the cause of the United States and the other Allied Powers. Lastly, *The World at War* has the least in common with the popular conception of wartime propaganda. This does not mean that the series does not present a particular message. Rather than broadcasting the greatness of the war, *The World at War* presents the grimness of World War II and war in general. In comparison to *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, it gives the most honest portrayal of the war.

Before discussing the background of each documentary series, it is important to understand film as a historical source and presentation of information. In the historical community, the role of film and its relationship to history is often controversial. Traditional views hold monographs and articles as the standard form of historical documentation; since film is a relatively new medium, that is not surprising. In the last few decades, however, other forms of historical representation, such as museum exhibits, film, art, and even video games have gained increased prominence.⁴ Despite this change, most of the discourse around historical films has focused on their inaccuracies rather than what these films contribute to historical discourse

⁴ Jeremy D. Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net: The Story of Historiography* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 181.

and the public's understanding of history. Historians such as Robert A. Rosenstone, a post-modernist, argue that the history on the page and the history on the screen have key similarities: they both refer to the actual events of the past and take part in the unreal or fictional.⁵ To many, this comes across as a bold assertion. Rosenstone, however, is not saying that historians invent or use fictional details. He believes that historians create an argument and a narrative with the "traces of the past" that they have discovered through their research.⁶ It takes more than just a list of facts and events to contribute to the historical discourse. These "traces" need to be analyzed, interpreted, and given meaning. Fictional films can and have done the same, bringing the past to life on the screen through narrative, plot, and characters.

Amongst the public, there is the perception that documentaries have a direct connection to reality. It is a mistake, however, to take a documentary at face value and believe that it is an unbiased re-telling of events. A documentary often presents the actual historical past through footage and other sources, but at the same time it can be ideological, biased, and even commercial, depending upon who makes it and why.⁷ Comparing documentaries on the same topic demonstrates this. In theory, they are all based upon the same information and focusing on the same events and yet, they can be vastly different. What images and symbols do they use? How do they refer to certain figures and nations? Do they use real footage or staged situations? Down to the music and language used in the narration, a documentary is presenting its narrative of the past. In most cases, the base facts being presented have not changed, but many other things—the time, the culture, the audience—have. A documentary made during the 1940s is going to be different than one made in the 1950s and very different than one made in the 1970s.

⁵ Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film/ Film on History* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

It is for these reasons, that it is essential to watch documentaries with a critical eye and contemplate their influences and potential ideology. Documentaries are consumed regularly by a public interested in the past. A medium with such a large influence requires examination.

Historical Contexts

It is important to understand the time periods in which these documentaries were made. This background allows one to better analyze the choices the creators of the documentaries made. Any creator is influenced by the time and climate in which they work; the world around them can impact the information they present, how they present it, and their main goals for the work. In the case of *Why We Fight*, the war was the catalyst for the film's creation and informed its presentation. American policy and sentiment during the interwar period also influenced the series. In the wake of World War I, American foreign policy became increasingly, although not completely, isolationist. American isolationism and anti-war sentiments stemmed from the disavowing of America's involvement in the European conflict. Woodrow Wilson had led the United States into the Great War under the banner of making the world "safe for democracy." After the war, however, the American public and much of the world became disillusioned with Wilson's ideals.⁸ The Nye Committee's investigation in the 1930s cemented the view that the American public had been tricked by bankers and arms manufacturers who wished to profit off the war.⁹ Now, as the United States entered another global conflict, the American government not only would have to fight against isolationism and work to uphold the war effort, but also would need to prove to the American public that it was trustworthy. Not only the trust, but also the morale of the public, was key in a war the size of World War II.

⁸ David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War*, (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 27-28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

To support this grand war effort, new government agencies worked closely with Hollywood and other media industries to create widespread propaganda. One of the most successful examples of this collaboration was the *Why We Fight* series directed by Frank Capra. The series was meant to educate troops on their cause, allies, and enemies in the war, as well as raise their morale. Later in the war, the films would be released to war factory workers as well. *Why We Fight* aimed to maintain the war effort by drawing parallels between the Allies and the American war cause, as well as contrasting the Axis to American ideals and values. There were seven episodes in total: *Prelude to War* (1942), *The Nazis Strike* (1943), *Divide and Conquer* (1943), *The Battle of Britain* (1943), *The Battle of Russia* (1943), *The Battle of China* (1944), and *War Comes to America* (1945).¹⁰ *Why We Fight* and its producer, the War Department, had to overcome the isolationist undercurrents in American discourse.

To achieve this goal, the War Department worked closely with celebrities the American public would recognize. Actors such as James Stewart participated in recruitment films. Frank Capra, one of the most famous and successful directors at the time, put his Hollywood career on hold to create films for the government. Days after Pearl Harbor, Capra left California and voluntarily enlisted in the United States Army as a Major in the Signal Corps, a section within the War Department. By February 1942, he was given his first assignment: *Why We Fight*.¹¹ The series was groundbreaking in its extensive use of news reels and footage from both the Axis and the Allies. Capra and his team had to convince American soldiers that the enemy was an existential threat that endangered them and their families. To accomplish this job, each episode

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis, I will be referencing the separate *Why We Fight* films, which could be viewed as episodes in the larger series, in italics, as other historians do.

¹¹ Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2014), 111-13.

of the series wields startling images of enemy film reels, moving narration from Walter Huston—an academy award-winning actor and father of actress Anjelica Huston, intricately animated graphics, a familiar and at times sinister score, and distinctly American symbols and ideals to ensure appeals to audiences using emotions as well as facts.¹² Unlike *Victory at Sea* and *The World at War*—which will be discussed later, *Why We Fight* had an urgent purpose. It was not a retrospective on the war, but a series of contemporary propaganda films which had an essential role to play in the war effort. *Why We Fight* was originally meant just for the education of enlisted troops, but two of the films, *Prelude to War* and *The Battle of Russia* were released to be shown to the public at the special request of Franklin Roosevelt. After viewing *Prelude to War*, Roosevelt was struck by its power and said that “every man, woman, and child in the world must see this film.”¹³ By the end of the war, approximately fifty-four million Americans had seen the series and the films had also been released for international viewing in Allied countries.¹⁴

A decade after the release of the first *Why We Fight* film, another American documentary series chronicled the Second World War. *Victory at Sea* was a twenty-six-episode program broadcasted by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in collaboration with the U.S Navy.¹⁵ The series aired on television in 1952-1953, in the middle of America’s first Cold War conflict: the Korean War. As the title suggests, *Victory at Sea* focused mainly on the naval battles of the

¹² David Culbert, “‘Why We Fight’: Social Engineering for a Democratic Society at War,” in *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II*, ed. K.R.M. Short, 173-191 (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 181-182.

¹³ Kathleen M. German, “Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* Series and the American Audience.” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* WJSC 54, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 237–48, 237.

¹⁴ Peter C. Rollins, “Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Film Series and our American Dream.” *Journal of American Culture* (19, no. 4 Winter, 1996: 81-86), 84.

¹⁵ Nuclear Vault, “*Victory at Sea – Design for War – Episode 1*,” YouTube Video, 26:30, March 31, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSCWi0ivx9w>, 00:14.

war. Each episode features grand naval battle scenes set to a grandiose score created by Richard Rodgers, famously part of the Broadway duo Rodgers and Hammerstein. Some of these complex film sequences are real but others have been “re-created” for the documentary; no indication is given to distinguish the real from the reproduced. Like *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea* was released at a nationalistic and patriotic time in American history. It was also, however, a scary time for Americans. The early 1950s was the beginning of the Cold War which would dominate U.S policy and the public. The Red Scare led to violations of citizens’ rights across the country. The arms race and threat of nuclear weapons also created great fear in the nation. The United States ended World War II as a global superpower. The nation had never been more powerful or had more influence. American policy makers had grand aspirations for a post-war world with the United States at the helm. These aspirations were quickly checked as the Soviet Union rose to challenge the western superpower and its vision.¹⁶

In many ways, *Victory at Sea* reflects this American vision and the need to overcome its new enemy. Each episode leaves no doubts for the audience that the Allied Powers were the heroes of the war; almost any mistakes made by the allies are glossed over or omitted. It is not hard to see the Cold War influence on the series. Like *Why We Fight*, the series presents a black and white picture of the conflict while touting the righteousness of the American cause. What is the purpose or motivation behind this depiction? Unlike its predecessor, *Victory at Sea* was not a purely government-sponsored production. It did not have just a propaganda purpose inherent in its creation, but also a commercial one. The originator of the series, Henry Salomon, served in the public relations division of the Navy during the war. In 1942, Salomon was selected by his

¹⁶ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War: 1945-1992*, 7th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1993), 28.

former Harvard tutor, Samuel Eliot Morison, to work on a naval history project. President Roosevelt had chosen Morison to work on a “living history of naval operations.”¹⁷ Roosevelt envisioned Morison and his team witnessing and writing the history as it happened. After the war, Salomon wanted to use Morison’s material to create a television series. Salomon worked with NBC and, through his close connections to the military, gained access to twelve hundred miles of film from the war.¹⁸ Salomon had a dramatic arts background; he and the other primary creators of *Victory at Sea* aimed to concentrate on the drama of the war rather than the details of the events.¹⁹ Given these origins, it is easy to see why the series was grand and entertaining, but also took liberties with the actual history of World War II through the omission of important material and emphasis on the drama of the war rather than the costs.

The World at War, unlike *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, is from the perspective of the British. Produced by ITV and released in 1973-1974, *The World at War* presents a dramatically different picture of the Second World War. The British experience in World War II was vastly different from that of the United States. While, of course, the story is not that simple, the superficial narrative is that the U.S was able to swoop in two years into the war and leave the conflict with fewer casualties than their European and Asian allies, a booming economy, and superpower status. Britain, on the other hand, had been bombed relentlessly and lived under the threat of German invasion for much of the war. May 1945 did not mark a great change for Great Britain, with many of the conditions of the war such as rationing continuing into the early 1950s.

¹⁷ Peter C. Rollins, "Victory at Sea: Cold War Epic." In *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, ed. Peter C. Rollins and Gary R. Edgerton, 103-22. (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 105.

¹⁸ Ibid., 106.

¹⁹ Ibid., 106.

The consequences of the war dominated the lives of the British people for over a decade.²⁰ The biggest changes for Great Britain were the shifting of its social hierarchy and the slow collapse of its overseas empire as many Asian nations called for freedom and self-determination. This process was slow, but over the next decades of the twentieth century Britain would lose the territories that before had made it the leading world power, like India, the jewel in the British crown, in 1947. Now the United States succeeded it as one of the world's leading nations. Furthermore, Britain soon also found itself, like most of the world, in the middle of the Cold War. With this context, it is reasonable that the British have a grimmer view of the war than Americans. All the way across the Atlantic, the United States was able to avoid the worst of the war and benefit greatly in its aftermath. Also contributing to the tone of *The World at War* was the changing perception of war in the 1960-70s. By 1973, the Vietnam War was in its final days. Like most Western nations, Great Britain remained on the sidelines and joined a chorus of voices asking the United States to negotiate and avoid further losses on both sides.²¹ Even without the conflict in Vietnam, Great Britain had its own myriad problems. At home, Britain had conflict and class war in its industry, a sharp downturn in the economy, extremism in political life, and a rise in public violence.²² *The World at War* reflects these factors and circumstances.

Also influencing creation and message of *The World at War* were shifts in historical discourse on World War II. In the ensuing decade between the airing of *Victory at Sea* and *The World at War*, a revisionist movement challenged the orthodox view that had dominated the

²⁰ Arthur Marwick. *British Society Since 1945*. 2nd ed. (London, UK: Penguin, 1990), 18.

²¹ Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008.), 78, 84, 93, 111.

²² Kenneth O. Morgan, "Britain in the Seventies – Our Unfinest Hour?," *Revue Française De Civilisation Britannique* 22, no. hors-série (December 13, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.1662>, 2.

post-war conversation on the causes, belligerents, and events of the Second World War. In this orthodox view, historians widely regarded Adolf Hitler as a mastermind, a “uniquely evil tyrant who held his people in a mesmeric trance.”²³ The Allied nations had come together against totalitarianism and fought with noble purpose and principle.²⁴ By the early 1970s—the time of *The World at War*’s creation—revisionism had transformed this historical discourse. In 1961, the release of *The Origins of the Second World War* by historian A.J.P Taylor created a storm of controversy not only in the historical profession, but also amongst the British public.²⁵ Taylor confronted the interpretation of World War II that had suited the needs of the postwar world. He took a contrary view on almost every point of the orthodox view: Hitler had not planned the outbreak of the war from the start, the war had not been fought over high principles, Neville Chamberlain—associated by many with appeasement—had not been a coward, but a skilled politician, *et cetera*.²⁶ While Taylor did not exonerate Hitler, he challenged common conceptions of the war and its actors on their head, facilitating extensive debate. *The Origins of the Second World War* was by no means a perfect work, but it began a revisionist movement and has endured as a landmark historical monograph.

It is under this culture of historical revisionism initiated by Taylor that the creators of *The World at War* worked. A direct antecedent of *The World at War* was the BBC’s World War I

²³ Richard Overy, “Misjudging Hitler: A.J.P Taylor and the Third Reich” in *Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, Gordon Martel ed. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999,) 93-115. ProQuest Ebook Central, 93.

²⁴ Gordon Martel, “The Revisionist as Moralizer: A.J.P Taylor and the Lessons of European History” in *Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, Gordon Martel ed. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), 1-12. ProQuest Ebook Central, 2-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

documentary *The Great War*; a twenty-six-episode series released in 1964.²⁷ *The Great War*, like *The World at War* ten years later, utilized unedited film from the Imperial War Museum's archives supplemented by interviews with surviving participants and other figures. Unlike *The Great War*, however, the BBC did not produce *The World at War*. It was Thames Television, part of the private company ITV (in contrast to the government-sponsored BBC) that broadcast the series. Both documentaries had the same chief historical advisor, Noble Frankland. The production team of the series, however, consisted mostly of television professionals, not historians, although individual historians were consulted for some of the episodes. For example, historian Louis de Jong—a specialist on the Netherlands and the Dutch resistance during the war—consulted on the eighteenth episode, “Occupation: Holland 1940 – 1944.”²⁸ Jeremy Isaacs, the director of features at Thames, oversaw the production. Isaacs mapped out the overall content and structure of *The World at War*. He insisted that the series “include, as well as the military events, the social and political experiences of the countries involved.”²⁹ Many of the episodes focused on conventional military histories. Other episodes, however, reflected the growing interests of historians in the social effects and consequences of World War II and war in general. Individual episodes had different producers and illustrated their personal historical interests and style.³⁰ The associate producer of the series, Jerome Kuehl, held a microscope to each episode, assessing content, tone, and accuracy of the archival footage used. Kuehl pushed for the series to not follow the path of its predecessors that had used triumphant music which he felt was

²⁷ James Chapman, “Television and History: The World at War.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31 (2011): 247–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2011.572608>, 248.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 249-251.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

inappropriate in a presentation of the death and destruction of World War II.³¹ Breaking away from *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, the series extensively utilized oral history through interviews. Through this eye-witness testimony of the war, *The World at War* aimed to present the war from the “bottom up” rather than from the traditional “top down” view.³² The creators of *The World at War* believed that in war there were no victors, only victims.³³ This sentiment is reiterated throughout *The World at War*’s twenty-six episodes, separating the series from the World War II documentaries before it.

Conclusion

With my analysis, I hope to fill this gap in both the analysis of documentaries as historical sources and the comparison of *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea*, and *The World at War*. For my thesis, I was particularly inspired by *War Without Mercy* (1986) by historian John W. Dower. Dower analyzes the role of race on both sides of the war in the Pacific Theater. It is from Dower’s book that I discovered the *Why We Fight* series. I was also inspired by the historiographical monograph *History on Film/ History on Film* (2006) by Robert Rosenstone discussed above. Rosenstone’s work is one of the first to thoroughly explore the topic of history in film and their relation to each other. I wanted to take his analysis on documentaries a step further by making a temporal comparison. There has been little analysis of the three documentaries I have chosen in the context of how they represent the war and its belligerents. *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* are similar in many regards even though one is a set of state propaganda films and the other is a publicly-syndicated series made by NBC. One might expect that *Victory at Sea* would have more similarities with the other post-war documentary series, *The*

³¹ Ibid., 253.

³² Ibid., 254.

³³ Ibid., 255.

World at War, but in comparison they appear unlike. *Victory at Sea* takes on unambiguous tone of its predecessor while *The World at War* presents a grim and quiet depiction of World War II. It is the historical context around each series that informs their representation of the war as well as the similarities and differences between them. *Victory at Sea*, like *Why We Fight*, was created in a time of great patriotism and belief in the United States' international cause. In contrast, *The World at War* was made in a bleaker time in which many were questioning war and its role in the world. Despite these differences between the documentaries, however, there are core similarities that run through the three documentaries in the depictions of the Allied Powers, Axis Powers, and certain themes like religion and death. The first chapter of this thesis will focus on the joint and individual representations of the Axis Powers. The second will then shift to the Allied Powers. Lastly, the third chapter will discuss two main themes which run through all three series: religion and death.

Chapter One: The Fanatical Axis

It is the job of a propaganda piece to portray the unhinged evil of the enemy. The enemy needs to be represented as an existential threat that must be defeated at all costs. To achieve this, an adversary must be simplified and boiled down to a few heinous traits. Both *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* utilized this simplified, propagandistic representation of the Axis Powers and their relationship, whereas *The World at War* more openly discussed Axis motivations and conflict. Beyond this, the representation in all three series attributes to the Axis a core set of traits: fanaticism and cruelty. In the earlier documentaries—*Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*—these traits are more explicitly stated. *The World at War*, while providing a more nuanced and complex representation of World War II overall, still employs imagery and narration that highlights the same negative characteristics depicted in the other series. In addition, the portrayal of each Axis nation has its own unique characteristics. For example, the representation of Japan is heavily influenced by Western racism and anti-Asian sentiments. Also, the Japanese people are dehumanized more than their European counterparts. In contrast, the foci in discussions of Italy are its military failures and lack of concern for its own soldiers and civilians. The portrayal of Germany, however, does not expand beyond the base Axis qualities presented in each series. Because of this, the analysis of Germany will be incorporated within a discussion of these traits and the Axis overall.

For the Allied war cause in World War II, a portrayal which presents the Axis Powers as one intimidating force has great propagandistic use. In the West, the image of an omnipotent, evil monolith that aims to take over the world is one which strikes fear and motivates a population to dedicate itself to the war. This representation of a foreign enemy played a major role in not only the Second World War, but the Cold War which followed it and dominated the

rest of the twentieth century. The image of the communist spy hiding in plain sight, like the image of the fifth columnist during the war, inspired fear, vigilance, and dedication among the American population. In reality, each of the Axis Powers had separate plans and objectives. Germany, Japan, and Italy entered a loosely connected alliance in which each power sought conquest for itself, not for the collective. Each nation signed the Tripartite Pact in 1940 with varying motivations: Japan to gain leverage in its tenuous negotiations with the United States, Germany to deter the U.S from joining the European war, and Italy to carve out its new Roman empire.³⁴ In many ways the alliance was hollow, but the appearance of a strong connection between Germany, Italy, and Japan mattered as much, if not more, than the reality, on the international stage.³⁵ They were not one homogeneous force with a singular purpose. Rather, the Axis was a collection of nations who joined together to achieve their own, individual goals of conquest. Not only were the nations loosely connected, but they also hid things from each other and expressed open disdain for each other. For example, the Germans did not hide their contempt for Italy and its leadership. Despite the close relationship between Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, Nazi officials and the public mocked their ally and mistrusted them. The physical manifestation of this disdain was the slave-like treatment of the approximately 350,000 Italian workers in Germany during the war.³⁶ When a documentary ignores these historical facts and conflicts in favor of a depiction of a fanatical monolith, it perpetuates a deceptive image of the Axis.

³⁴ Eri Hotta, *Japan 1941: Countdown to Infamy*. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2013), 24.

³⁵ Reynolds, 91.

³⁶ Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945*. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 102.

This Axis fanaticism is first explored in the first film of the *Why We Fight* series. *Prelude to War* takes great pains to present the Axis as one homogeneous, threatening force. The film designates the Axis nations as the “slave world.” This moniker comes from a quote from Vice President Henry A. Wallace’s most well-known speech in May 1942 “The Price of Free World Victory,”³⁷: “This is a fight between a free world and a slave world.”³⁸ The “free world,” comprised of the Allied Powers and the other nations the Axis wishes to conquer, is the antithesis of the “slave world.” In fact, the film represents them using two images of Earth, one white and the other shrouded in darkness (see Appendix C for the photo).³⁹ Furthermore, *Prelude to War* presents the soldiers and civilians of the Axis nations as members of a mindless horde at the command of their leaders. These people had “surrendered their liberties and thrown away their human dignity...and became part of a mass, a human herd.”⁴⁰ The narrator explains that the leaders of each nation had promised their people prosperity and greatness in the aftermath of the Great War and the Great Depression. Leaders like Hitler, Mussolini, and Emperor Hirohito had told their people that they were “supermen...the master race, destined to rule all other peoples on Earth.”⁴¹ *Prelude* also visually represents the Axis “hordes” and their fanatic devotion to their leaders with myriad sequences of throngs of people cheering and yelling their nations’ chants—“*Sieg Heil*,” “*duce*,” and “*banzai*”—in unison.⁴²

Victory at Sea also utilizes narration and imagery to further the fanatical representation of the Axis Powers, although it is less explicit than *Why We Fight*. *Victory at Sea*’s portrayal of

³⁷ John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2000), 274.

³⁸ Frank Capra, dir. *Prelude to War*. NYX Channel, 1942. Accessed March 1, 2020, 4:35.

³⁹ Frank Capra, dir. *Prelude to War*, 22:53.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9:34-10:05.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30:22-31:05.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 9:34-10:05, 11:50-12:14, 28:48, 31:21-33.

fanaticism focuses primarily on Japan. The narrator describes the Japanese army as “the hordes of imperial Japan”⁴³ and focuses in on the “indoctrination” of troops which, he states, “technically and emotionally...is as perfect as human ingenuity can make.”⁴⁴ In the second to last episode, the narrator explicitly uses the word “fanaticism” when describing the difference between the Japanese home front and frontline: “At home, desperation, at the fronts, fanaticism.”⁴⁵ Like its predecessor, *Victory at Sea* uses footage of crowds which de-individualizes the citizens of Axis nations. The first instance of this occurs in the second episode. The narrator states that the Japanese government wasted no time “exploiting the news of Pearl Harbor, Japan’s greatest victory.” During this voiceover, shots of large Japanese crowds waving rising sun flags and celebrating are shown.⁴⁶ Here, visuals and vocals intertwine to show Japanese uniformity. It makes sense that *Victory at Sea*’s portrayal of fanaticism and indoctrination focuses so heavily on Japan and not the other Axis Powers, since the series’ focus is the sea battles of World War II, most of which took place in the Pacific. However, the first episode of the series was released months after the official end of the American occupation of Japan in 1952, which was seen as a success. America’s relationship with Japan had done a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn from enemy to essential capitalist bulwark in Asia during the early Cold War.⁴⁷ A consequence of series’ focus on the naval battles of World War II is a

⁴³ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Midway is East – Episode 4,” YouTube Video, 26:27, March 31, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrJQTgx_XI4, 1:10.

⁴⁴ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – The Pacific Boils Over – Episode 2,” YouTube Video, 26:28, March 31, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvxKTWBLCCs>, 5:43.

⁴⁵ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Suicide for Glory – Episode 25,” YouTube Video, 26:27, March 31, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3S65aOSE7Y>, 6:36.

⁴⁶ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – The Pacific Boils Over – Episode 2,” 22:46.

⁴⁷ Kenneth B. Pyle. *The Making of Modern Japan*. 2nd ed. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1996), 224-5.

favoring of the Pacific Theater, but it is curious that the portrayal would be this harsh throughout the series.

Often the odd one out, *The World at War*'s representation of the Axis focuses less on fanaticism. Little is said explicitly, but the series does utilize footage similar to and in some cases the same as *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, most likely because the creators pulled their material from some of the same archives. *The World at War*, like its antecedents, includes footage of large indistinguishable crowds of people cheering and chanting. Some of these sequences are edited for dramatic effect and contribute to the faceless, fanatical portrayal of the Axis. The first example focuses on Japan. In a stylized sequence, footage of Japanese soldiers yelling “*banzai*,” and cheering is intercut with a diagram showing each Japanese victory in the Pacific.⁴⁸ The second example creates a similar image this time with Mussolini and Italian soldiers. Footage of Mussolini raising a sword to the sky is intercut between footage of a mass of soldiers running.⁴⁹ With these edits, *The World at War* implies what the other series say explicitly: that Axis soldiers are the mindless tools of their leaders, controlled by the raising of a sword.

The film suggests that this fanaticism leads to cruelty and mass slaughter. Under the control of their leaders, each series displays the brutality of man. The cruelty of the Axis is a central facet in each documentaries' discussion of the Axis Powers. Each series uses graphic descriptions and images of Axis slaughter and massacres, especially those executed by Germany and Japan, since they are so prolific and horrifying. *Why We Fight* focused heavily on the

⁴⁸ *The World at War*, Episode 6, “Banzai!: Japan 1931 – 1942,” directed and written by Peter Batty, aired December 5, 1973, ITV, DVD, 36:00.

⁴⁹ *The World at War*, Episode 8, “The Desert: North Africa 1940 – 1943.” directed and written by Peter Batty, aired December 19, 1973, ITV. DVD, 2:50.

slaughter to express the importance of the war to its soldiers, and later public audience. This representation of the Axis' barbarity demonstrated its threat to the United States and the world. The "slave world" would not stop once Europe and the Pacific fell, and it was the duty of the American soldier to stop it. Two films in the *Why We Fight* series are dedicated to the march of the Nazis through Europe: *The Nazis Strike* and *Divide and Conquer*. German cruelty is shown to be methodical and calculated. In Belgium, the narrator describes the German bombing of little towns and villages that had no military value except their people. The Germans planned to force these people from their homes, corral them on the major roadways with machine gun fire, and use them to slow down the Allies.⁵⁰ An obvious extension of this calculated cruelty is the Holocaust. The American government made *Why We Fight* during the war which means it included no allusions to or discussions of the Jewish genocide. The public had not yet known about the concentration camps, but historian John Dower argues that the American and British governments did. He states that the Nazi plan to exterminate European Jews was "documented beyond doubt by November 1942," but it was downplayed by Allied leaders and kept out of mainstream Western media until Germany's collapse.⁵¹

Turning to Japan, *The Battle of China* includes graphic scenes of Japanese troops committing atrocities and the thousands of Chinese bodies they left in their wake. In its discussion of the Rape of Nanking, the narrator states that: "The helpless populace was trapped by the city walls and could not flee. The Japanese soldiers went berserk, They raped and tortured. They killed and butchered."⁵² Shortly after this, the film uses footage of Japanese

⁵⁰ Frank Capra, dir. *Divide and Conquer*. NYX Channel, 1943. Accessed March 1, 2020, 33:36.

⁵¹ John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1986), 35.

⁵² Frank Capra, dir. *The Battle of China*. NYX Channel, 1944. Accessed March 1, 2020, 26:51.

soldiers executing two bound, kneeling Chinese people from behind; their bodies collapse for the audience to see.⁵³

Victory at Sea also underpins its representation of the Axis Powers with the theme of cruelty to both soldiers and civilians. On the Eastern Front in Europe, the narrator details the heartbreak for the Russians in the aftermath of the German retreat: “Where the German Army fights, there the SS murders and the Gestapo slaughters. The heaps of innocent executed hostages are monuments to man’s inhumanity to man.”⁵⁴ Newsreel footage shows the toll on the families as women and children clutch the dead bodies of their relatives and loved ones. Although *Victory at Sea* touches on German inhumanity, it does not fully discuss the most prolific and unimaginable German slaughter: the Holocaust. The last episode of the series only briefly alludes to the Shoah with footage of survivors in striped uniforms as the camps are liberated.⁵⁵ This last episode covered the end of the war in Japan and the aftermath of the war in general. Episode twenty-two, “The Fate of Europe,” chronicled the end of fighting in Europe; the Holocaust is not even hinted at in this episode. Perhaps because *Victory at Sea’s* focus is the naval war and by extension the Pacific Theater, the creators did not dedicate as much attention to Europe. In the Pacific Theater, *Victory at Sea* touches on the Bataan Death March, Guadalcanal, Okinawa, and many of the other bloody battles and massacres. The true Japanese cruelty, however, is shown through footage of emaciated Allied prisoners of war. This footage comes from after the release of the prisoners. The men smile and wave at the camera, but their bodies are skeletal, most appearing to be on the brink of collapse. The next shots are of large wooden crates labeled as the

⁵³ Ibid., 27:16.

⁵⁴ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – The Fate of Europe – Episode 22,” YouTube Video, 25:44, June 17, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVhGPFfWyZ0>, 7:45.

⁵⁵ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Design for Peace – Episode 26,” YouTube Video, 26:26, June 17, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=829u1NDMRfE>, 10:30.

ashes of American, British, and Australian prisoners who did not survive Japan's inhumane treatment.⁵⁶

The World at War does not hold back in its presentation of Axis cruelty. In the European Theater, German cruelty is described on both fronts. In the Soviet Union, Germans are shown slaughtering civilians and throwing them into mass graves.⁵⁷ The series uses close ups of frozen, dead bodies discovered in the German retreat and shows their families sobbing over them.⁵⁸ Over these harrowing images, the narrator describes the German army's policy of wholesale murder: "The Germans murdered Jews and communists. They murdered those suspected of supporting the partisans. They murdered hostages. After battle, in retreat, they just murdered."⁵⁹ *The World at War*, unlike *Victory at Sea* before it, explores the pinnacle of German cruelty: the Holocaust. The series dedicated a whole episode to the topic. (I did not watch this episode, but it is the ideal one in which to put the Germans' systematic cruelty and slaughter on full display).⁶⁰ In the Pacific Theater, the series shows graphic footage of the Bataan Death March and the slaughter and treatment of prisoners of war in Burma. In Bataan, the episode shows the long line of suffering American and Filipino soldiers walking in the hot sun. Over this image, the narrator describes the hell the surrendered soldiers went through: "Deprived of water and medicine, starved and brutally beaten, some 10,000 soldiers died along the way, more than had been killed in the actual fighting for Bataan."⁶¹ In Burma, the narrator describes the butchering of medical

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:32.

⁵⁷ *The World at War*, Episode 11, "Red Star: The Soviet Union 1941 – 1943," written by Neal Ascherson, aired January 16, 1974, ITV, DVD, 23:05.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 28:39.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 30:29.

⁶⁰ The episode is titled *Genocide (1941- 1945)*. Here is a link to the full episode: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x695nly>.

⁶¹ *The World at War*, Episode 7, "On Our Way: U.S.A 1939 – 1942," written and produced by Peter Batty, aired December 12, 1973, ITV. DVD, 36:08.

staff at a field hospital and the words of a soldier who was a prisoner of war seals the message: “They captured us, and from then on we were no longer men.”⁶² From the combined representation of the Axis with its underlying themes of fanaticism and cruelty, it is time to shift to the individual nations in the Tripartite alliance—Italy and Japan—and discuss the unique elements of their representations.

The nation of Italy, frequently portrayed as militarily weak, is often seen as a lesser power next to its German ally. This perception of the fascist nation’s lesser role and overall failure is reflected in each documentary. When watched together, a pattern emerges in the portrayal of fascist Italy. The documentaries all present a nation consistently failing to win battles and enlarge its empire. Italy is shown to need the almost-constant intervention of the stronger and more able Nazi Germany. Alongside this weakness, Italy is also presented as a nation that cares little for the lives of its soldiers and citizens. How accurately do the documentaries reflect the reality of Italy’s role in the Second World War? Mussolini became involved in the war to expand his empire, especially to gain command of the Mediterranean, which he referred to as “*mare nostrum*”—our sea. Standing in the way of this ambitious goal were inadequate weaponry and supplies, incompetent commanders, and resistant soldiers.⁶³ Italy lacked industrial might compared to its allies. By 1938, the nation’s “total industrial potential” was a fifth of Germany’s and a half of Japan’s.⁶⁴ Italy also lacked a well-developed military culture and traditions. As a result, Italian society “suffered an almost universal lack of expertise

⁶² *The World at War*, Episode 14, “It’s a Lovely Day Tomorrow: Burma 1942-1944,” directed and produced by John Pett, written by John Williams, aired February 6, 1974, ITV. DVD, 30:09, 30:41.

⁶³ Hastings, 102.

⁶⁴ MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24.

and of interest in military affairs.”⁶⁵ Despite these obstacles, Mussolini was desperate to achieve victories which would ensure a cut of Axis winnings once the war ended. He also sought foreign conquest to elevate fascism and the low spirits of his people.⁶⁶ To Mussolini and his generals, these goals were worth expending the lives of their soldiers and bringing their country to the brink of collapse. It is this history which informs each documentary’s harsh, unfavorable representation of Italy during the war.

The actions and characteristics of Italy are not as thoroughly explored as they are for the rest of the Tripartite Pact. The *Why We Fight* series does not have a film dedicated solely to Italy; instead, Italy is mentioned briefly several times as the bumbling junior partner of Nazi Germany. In *The Battle of Russia*, the narrator refers to Mussolini as Hitler’s “stooge” when discussing the failed Italian invasion of Greece. This narration characterizes Mussolini as an incompetent leader seeking the approval of his better: “The stooge was delighted. Here was his chance to prove to his people that he too was a conqueror, but he was wrong.”⁶⁷ The film shows Mussolini’s failure to conquer Greece as a thorn in Hitler’s side: “Hitler was enraged. The failure of his stooge to protect his southern flank was delaying his attack on Russia.”⁶⁸ Not only was Mussolini hurting his nation through his incompetence, now his failures were affecting his ally. Only with German intervention were Greece and Yugoslavia finally subjugated. This is one of the few instances in *Why We Fight* where Italy’s actions are discussed. Outside of *Prelude to*

⁶⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁶ Hastings., 104.

⁶⁷ Frank Capra, dir. *The Battle of Russia - Part One*. NYX Channel, 1943. Accessed March 1, 2020, 17:48

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18:57.

War's description of Italy as part of the “slave world,” the nation receives little attention. When Italy is mentioned, it is discussed as a member of the collective Axis, not on its own.

Victory at Sea continues this theme by once again representing the nation as weak and controlled by the more successful Germany: “Italy’s dictator, Mussolini greet[s] [his] German overlord...behind the props of the black-shirted fascists, it is the brown-shirted Nazis who call the tune.”⁶⁹ The narrator suggests that Italy has quickly fallen to the role of a second-rate power alongside Germany: “The Fuhrer controls all Europe, but after four years of war, his Axis partner, Italy, has sunk to the status of a satellite.”⁷⁰ In North Africa, where Italy played a major role, it is suggested that it is General Erwin Rommel and the Afrika Korps who truly command and win key victories for the Axis.⁷¹ *The World at War* furthers this portrayal that the Afrika Korps was sent in 1941, “to come to Mussolini’s rescue.”⁷² There is little change in this aspect of the portrayal of Italy between the 1940s and the 1970s. Each series portrays Mussolini and his army as blundering and wholly unprepared for the role as a main Axis power.

Victory at Sea and *The World at War* add another layer to the representation of Italy: a lack of concern for the lives of their soldiers. In the episode “Mare Nostrum,” which discusses the invasion of Greece, the narrator discusses how ill-equipped and poorly trained the Italian army was: “These men go into battle unaware their own commanders believe that for them, war is suicide.”⁷³ *The World at War* expands upon this and is more explicit in its representation. Over

⁶⁹ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Roman Renaissance – Episode 14,” YouTube Video, 25:27, June 17, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_BdQbxUf9w&t=25s, 2:00.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:09.

⁷¹ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Mare Nostrum – Episode 8,” YouTube Video, 26:26, June 17, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nheAZmO58PY&t=801s>, 12:55.

⁷² *The World at War*, Episode 8, “The Desert: North Africa 1940 – 1943,” produced and written by Peter Batty, aired December 19, 1973, ITV, DVD, 8:31.

⁷³ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Mare Nostrum – Episode 8,” 2:33.

footage of countless imprisoned and dead Italian soldiers, the narrator asserts that “Mussolini had said ‘I want 1,000 Italians dead to be able to sit at the conference table’”⁷⁴ This quote comes from the autobiography of Pietro Badoglio, a general who was prime minister of Italy from the end of Mussolini’s fascist regime until June 1944.⁷⁵ (Of course, since Badoglio succeeded Mussolini, it is likely that he would have wanted to distance himself from the fallen dictator; his autobiography, like any self-written work, should be read with a critical eye.) Later in the series, this portrayal of the Italian government’s disdain for the lives of soldiers is extended to civilians. In episode thirteen, which focuses on the beginning of the Allied invasion of Italy and the fall of Mussolini’s government, an extended sequence shows footage of bombed cities, malnourished children, crying women trying to salvage what they can from the wreckage, and masses of refugees leaving their homes behind to walk along the roads. Over these grim images, the narrator states what Mussolini had once told his people: “‘War puts the stamp of nobility on those who have the courage to meet it.’”⁷⁶ In the words of *Victory at Sea* and *The World at War*, Mussolini’s fascist government saw its soldiers and people as a commodity, as objects to be used and thrown away once they passed the point of use. This representation fits within the joint portrait of three nations that view human life as expendable and intend to slaughter anyone in their path of conquest.

The representation of Japan in each documentary is among the most interesting but also shocking aspects of each series. Like the other Axis nations, Japan is represented as cruel, fanatical, and aggressive. Unlike the other Axis Powers, however, the representations of Japan

⁷⁴ *The World at War*, Episode 8, “The Desert: North Africa 1940 – 1943,” 6:53-7:04.

⁷⁵ Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents*. Translated by Muriel Currey. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 15.

⁷⁶ *The World at War*, Episode 13, “Tough Old Gut: Italy November 1942- June 1944,” written by David Wheeler, aired January 30, 1974, ITV. DVD, 29:17.

and its people have the added dimension of race. Race and anti-Asian sentiments colored portrayals of the Japanese just like they colored how people in the West and Allied soldiers in the Pacific viewed their enemy. The main result of this is the dehumanization of the Japanese. As one would expect, this degradation is worst in *Why We Fight*, especially in *Know Your Enemy: Japan*. Both were released during the war when Japan was still actively the enemy of the United States and the sting of Pearl Harbor was fresh. In *Victory at Sea*, there is less racialized imagery and phrasing, but aspects of dehumanization persist. Finally, in *The World at War*, this animalization is presented through the eyes of the soldiers, who had the hatred of the Japanese engrained in them, in interviews.

To comprehend the Western context, it is important to understand the history of anti-Asian sentiment in the West as well as the way Japan and its people were represented in propaganda leading up to and during the war. The hatred directed at the Japanese in the West was nothing new. Until the turn of the century, this disdain was directed at the Chinese and other Asian immigrants who worked on the construction of Transcontinental Railroad and participated in the Gold Rush. The stereotypes placed on the Japanese stemmed from the general Asian sentiments of “yellow peril.”⁷⁷ Japan became both a potential threat and a focal point for anti-Asian sentiment when, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it established itself as a world power by defeating Russia in the Russo-Japanese War and by playing a part in World War I. Japan’s entrance onto the international stage and actions in the 1930s challenged the West’s presence in Asia and the white supremacy on which centuries of American and European rested.⁷⁸ The racial hatred of the Japanese was commonplace in the United States before the

⁷⁷ Dower, 10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

spark of Pearl Harbor; there was little if any attempt to hide racism against Japan and its people. Signs openly barred “japs” from businesses and neighborhoods. Once the war began, racism defined the American war against the Japanese Empire and the treatment of Japanese people in the United States. Songs were released with egregious titles like “We're Gonna Have to Slap, The Dirty Little Jap, And Uncle Sam's the Guy who can do it.”⁷⁹ The explosive surprise attack flared anti-Japanese sentiments to an all-time high and opened the door for the racially motivated Japanese internment.⁸⁰

The role of race is clear in the wartime cartoons of Theodore Geisel, known famously as Dr. Seuss. The depiction of Japanese leaders and people contain stereotypical facial features such as slanted eyes and buck teeth. One of these cartoons depicts Japanese Americans on the Pacific Coast being given TNT by the “Honorable 5th Column” shop with the caption: “Waiting for the signal from home.”⁸¹ Even more shocking are the cartoons which depict the Japanese as animals and insects. An example of this representation from June shows an insect or sea monster-like character with the rising sun on its stomach and stereotypical Asian features on the face getting hit by the “Midway Tide-Stick.”⁸² (See the Appendix D for a collection of these cartoons.) Propagandists in the United States consistently portrayed the Japanese as rats, monkeys, snakes, and vermin.⁸³ It is no wonder that with these cartoons, other propaganda, and the already present

⁷⁹ “We're Gonna Have to Slap the Dirty Little Jap”, 1941, Folder 49, Box 2, Alvah Sulloway Theater and Dance Music Collection, 1772-1978, MC 127, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH, USA.

⁸⁰ Richard Reeves. *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II*. (New York, NY: Picador, 2015), 276.

⁸¹ “Waiting for the signal from home...,” February 13, 1942, Dr. Seuss Political Cartoons. Special Collection & Archives, UC San Diego Library.

⁸² “Well, well! Seems to be a slight shifting of the Japanese current!”, June 10, 1942, Dr. Seuss Political Cartoons. Special Collection & Archives, UC San Diego Library.

⁸³ George H. Roeder Jr., *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two*. (New London, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 86.

hatred for the Japanese, that the internment of Japanese Americans was widely accepted and that the soldiers who fought in the Pacific Theater were pre-disposed to commit atrocities. Japanese soldiers were at first subhuman and then superhuman with the advent of Japan's myriad victories in the Pacific, but they were never just human. Everything on the home front conditioned American troops to view the Japanese as another being entirely, which had no similarities to Americans and deserved no sympathy. This psychological distancing and dehumanization of the Japanese enemy contributed to the terrible atrocities which plagued the Pacific theater.⁸⁴ These atrocities included the mutilation of Japanese corpses for souvenirs, the attacking and sinking of hospital ships, the shooting of sailors and pilots who had abandoned ship or bailed out, the killing of wounded soldiers on the battlefield, and the torture and execution of prisoners.⁸⁵ In the fall and winter of 1943, Army psychologists presented the statement "I would really like to kill a Japanese soldier" to soldiers in an anonymous questionnaire, almost half agreed, while less than one in ten agreed when the soldier was German.⁸⁶ With this picture of race's influence on the Pacific Theater, it is time to analyze how race affected the representation of the Japanese in *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea*, and *The World at War*.⁸⁷

As stated earlier, *Why We Fight* presents the most blatant representation of racism's influence on media. *Know Your Enemy: Japan* is the worst offender. The film describes the "typical Japanese soldier" as "photographic print off the same negative" of his fellow soldiers. He holds fanatical beliefs, that "the Japanese are descendants of gods and destined to rule the

⁸⁴ Dower, 11.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 61-2.

⁸⁶ Roeder, 87.

⁸⁷ It is also necessary to note that the Japanese did not respect the West and held a profound hatred for both the British and the Americans. The hatred and its consequences went both ways. See John Dower's *War Without Mercy*, "Part III: The War in Japanese Eyes" (203-90) for a discussion on Japan's view of its own superiority and the West.

Earth and all who live on it.” Because he is the descendant of the gods, any brutality, rape, or torture against non-Japanese peoples is justified. He will never surrender, to him death is the “attainment of an ideal.”⁸⁸ The narrator of the film states that Americans “shall never completely understand the Japanese mind.”⁸⁹ The suggestion that the Japanese are mindless clones of each other, which a Western mind could never comprehend, places a whole nation of people in the category of “other.” It lowers the Japanese below the status of human. The rest of the *Know Your Enemy: Japan* discusses the indoctrination and fanaticism of a population which will commit “national suicide” before surrendering to the West.⁹⁰ The narrator compares the necessity of defeating Japan to the killing of a feral dog: “Defeating this nation is as necessary as shooting down a mad dog in your neighborhood.”⁹¹ *Know Your Enemy: Japan* wanted the American soldiers who watched it to leave with a subhuman picture of the Japanese people. The essence of this is epitomized in the “mad dog” comment. In the eyes of the War Department, who funded and oversaw the making of the film, and the creators of this film, the Japanese are not a people who deserve respect and understanding; they are rabid animals who America will put down if necessary.

Victory at Sea vastly improves on the heinous representation of Japan, which by the 1950s was an ally of the United States, in *Know Your Enemy*, but it still uses animalistic imagery and perpetuates dangerous, racialized ideas. In this context, it would seem that *Victory at Sea* is criticizing the Imperial Japan of the past, not the democratic Japan of the documentary’s present. In the eyes of the United States Japan had been rehabilitated, but this did not erase racialized

⁸⁸ World War II Propaganda Documentaries. 8. *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, Amazon Prime Video, 63:24. 2019, 4:44 - 6:34.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3:46.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 58:01.

⁹¹ Ibid., 58:44.

feelings about the nation during the war. When describing Japan's rapid expansion in the Pacific before Midway, the narrator compares the nation to an octopus: "In five horrible months, the enemy like an octopus has stretched its tentacles across vast spaces of the Pacific, devouring prize after prize to satiate its appetite for conquest."⁹² Like other western propaganda, this quote animalizes Japan and takes away its human identity. Later in the series, the narrator also suggests that the Japanese appear modern but are truly living centuries in the past: "The Japanese live in a remote, feudal age whose philosophy is war-like. Built on a worship of the nation, of Japan itself. Materially, the Japanese emulate the West, but spiritually they belong to the East."⁹³ Again, this placed the Japanese in the role of the "other" who cannot be understood and poses an existential threat. *Victory at Sea's* representation of Japan may be less outwardly hateful, but it is still influenced by the prejudices that ran rampant during the Second World War.

Finally, *The World at War* looks back on World War II and presents the racial hatred and barbarization of the Japanese through interviews with soldiers and archival footage. One of the instances of archival footage shows a higher-ranking American official giving a speech to a large group of soldiers in the Pacific Theater: "Each one of you is much better than the Jap. You're better physically, you're better mentally, you have better weapons, you're gonna have better support... if you have to run any chance to get a prisoner, then don't get him."⁹⁴ This speech is indicative of the attitudes during the war. It is not surprising that American troops committed some atrocities and killed some prisoners; they were instilled with a sense of superiority and a sense that their enemy was not human, not worthy of saving if it took any difficulty. This view

⁹² Nuclear Vault, "Victory at Sea – Midway is East – Episode 4," 9:20.

⁹³ Nuclear Vault, "Victory at Sea – Suicide for Glory – Episode 25," 1:56.

⁹⁴ *The World at War*, Episode 23, "Pacific: February 1942 – July 1945," written by David Wheeler, aired April 17, 1974, ITV, DVD, 3:29.

was mirrored by the Japanese and reflected in their treatment of Allied prisoners of war, which was much worse than the treatment of Japanese prisoners held by the Allies. 235,473 American and British prisoners were held by Germany and Italy, of which only four percent died—9,348 men. In Japan, however, the statistics were much grimmer: out of 132,134 Allied prisoners, twenty-seven percent were killed—35,756 men, nearly seven times the European numbers.⁹⁵ The American sentiments are corroborated by an interview with a Marine who served in the Pacific:

I was always taught to hate them in the Marine Corps, to detest them and that they were animals, that we were the men, they were the animals.... we were taught that they would die for the emperor, that we weren't taught to die for our president and to come up against an individual who wants to die or who doesn't care about dying is a tough thing to combat in your mind.⁹⁶

This Marine was taught to see the Japanese as nothing more than animals, but he was also told that the Japanese were willing to fight to the death and cared little for their lives. In this one interview, one can see the racialized concepts of both the subhuman and the superhuman rolled together. *The World at War* breaks away from the racist representations of its predecessors. Instead, the series finds the ideal and most honest way to present the unsavory attitudes which the West openly held. These attitudes are neither covered up nor shown to be right; they are simply presented to the audience through the testimony of those who lived through and fought in the war.

In the representation of the Axis Powers of the Second World War—both joint and individual—there are base traits which *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea*, and *The World at War* highlight. Despite the temporal distance between these documentaries, they each drew similar conclusions on the Axis and chose to portray, above all, the fanaticism and cruelty of the nations.

⁹⁵ Dower, 48.

⁹⁶ *The World at War*, Episode 23, “Pacific: February 1942 – July 1945,” 28:33.

Beyond these traits, however, are the individual and unique aspects of each Axis nation that inform how each documentary portrays them. Some of these aspects are historically inaccurate and others are influenced by prejudiced attitudes and sentiments. It is important to not let these representations inform one's whole outlook. One must look beyond these representations to the historical events and people they aim to portray.

Chapter Two: The Idealized Allies

In black and white depictions of the Second World War, the Allies represent all that is good. They selflessly come together to combat the forces of tyranny, and in the process, sacrifice a great deal. Compared to the Axis “hordes,” the people of the Allied nations are individualistic, free-thinking, and dedicated to democracy. This is a simplified and romanticized image. In this idealized picture, the Allies shared the same enemies, the same war aims, and the same commitment to total war against the Axis. Of course, the ideal rarely fully reflects the reality. This glamorized image fits perfectly within the narratives of *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, both of which selectively pick and choose pieces of history to create a righteous depiction of the Allies. *The World at War* breaks away from this mythical representation of the Allies by including the negative. Nevertheless, the 1970s portrayal of the Allied Powers holds many similarities to those of the 1940s and 1950s. In this chapter, the focus will be on two of the Allies: Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Together, these two European nations bore the brunt of the war in their continent. At times during the conflict, they both stood alone against Nazi Germany on opposite sides of the continent. In the context of the documentaries, Great Britain is the most consistent Allied Power. Even though Britain was a colonial power with many skeletons in its closet, it was easy for propaganda pieces such as *Why We Fight* to provide a sympathetic and idealized image of the nation. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had a complex and conflicting history that Western propaganda had to ignore or alter to present to its audience, especially in the United States. It is with this in mind, that I will compare the representations of the two Allied Powers—the congruent and the problematic.

In most of the Western media which covers the Second World War, the Allies are represented as a powerful group of nations, held together firmly by their dedication to democracy

and maintaining the free world from the Axis. Rarely is conflict shown between these nations, despite the fact that disagreements and hostility during the war are well-documented. These disagreements ranged from petty squabbles to long-standing issues between the powers such as the conflict between America, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union over the delayed opening of the second front. This conflict, however, does not fit the standard “good war” narrative in which the Allies worked closely together for a righteous and just cause. The discord between the Allies does not change what they accomplished, but it could potentially muddy the unblemished picture that propaganda wishes to portray. In the context of World War II and the Cold War, an idealized representation of the Allies’ relationship fits the objectives of both *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*. *The World at War*, on the other hand, takes a much more nuanced approach to Allied conflict. The series does not extensively discuss tensions, but it also does not ignore them or manipulate timelines and events to dispel them.

When it comes to strife amongst the main Allied Power—Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union—a clear example is the tension over the opening of the second European front. After the fall of France and Operation Barbarossa, the Soviet Union bore the brunt of the war in Europe. From 1941 to 1944, Russia stood virtually alone on the Eastern Front as the United States and Great Britain focused on the Pacific and North Africa. Joseph Stalin pressed his partners to open a front on mainland Europe and became increasingly embittered as he waited all the way until June 6, 1944, for the western Allies—mainly America, Great Britain, and Canada, but also Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Greece, and the Free French—to land at Normandy.⁹⁷ Documents show that American diplomats originally

⁹⁷ Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Vol. II: Since 1914*. 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010), 154.

promised Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov a second front in 1942.⁹⁸ Despite this promise, no relief came for the Soviets. In June 1943, Stalin once again expressed his frustration in a letter to Churchill. In this letter, Stalin stated that the delay in the Anglo-American invasion of Western Europe had not only disappointed the Soviet government but shaken his confidence in his allies: “a confidence which is being subjected to severe stress.”⁹⁹

This example has been specifically chosen because of its significance to the Allies’ relationship, but also because of how the documentaries addressed it—or rather, how they did not. The bulk of *Why We Fight* was created too early to comment on these tensions, but there is no doubt, based on the simplicity of the story it tells, that the series would have never touched upon it in favor of showing strong relations between the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States. It is *Victory at Sea* which provides the most shocking misrepresentation of events in the second front saga. In episode nine, “Sea and Sand,” the narrator describes the Russian “cry” for a second front and suggests that Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill took “bold, decisive action” by beginning the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa—Operation Torch.¹⁰⁰ Clearly, this is not the second front Stalin demanded. The target of the operation was Vichy France, the German puppet government, which was not one of the Allies’ main concerns. Also, the operation only reached the periphery of Europe; this was not the main European offensive that Stalin and the Soviet Union desperately needed. Operation Torch began in November 1942, one and a half years before the Allies stepped on the beaches of Normandy. Considering the context in which *Victory at Sea* was created—the early Cold War—this

⁹⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰⁰ “Victory at Sea – Sea and Sand – Episode 9,” YouTube Video, 26:30, March 13, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itP09mGQkL4&t=71s>, 2:19-3:32.

manipulation of events serves two purposes: it shows the Soviet Union's reliance on America and Great Britain, and it portrays the two Allies as the decisive saviors of Russia. *Victory at Sea's* assertions do not reflect the nuanced reality of these events; they simply serve to paint the West in a better light.

The *World at War's* representation of this tension between the Soviet Union and its Western Allies is much more honest and nuanced than its two predecessors. In the eleventh episode, "Red Star: The Soviet Union 1941-1943," the narrator discusses the frustration of the Russian people and their leaders:

It seemed to the Russians that they were bearing the whole burden of the war against fascism alone and that the West was not doing enough...Stalin began to call for a second front. Molotov, the foreign minister, was told by Western diplomats that though they admired the heroism of the Red Army, a second front was not yet practical. Stalin didn't believe them.¹⁰¹

In this sequence, *The World at War* concisely and truthfully represents the strain in the Allied relationship over the second front in Europe. Unlike in *Victory at Sea*, this episode does not suggest that this tension is quickly resolved or that the United States and Great Britain act immediately; the script candidly presents the issue and then returns to a discussion about the Red Army. This is not to say that *The World at War* is a perfect series that simply presents facts; the series was made in the West by an Allied nation. There is no way for the creators to separate themselves from their Western European view of the Second World War. Overall, each series portrays the Allied Powers as a tightknit group of nations with little to no conflict. *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* make great efforts to paper over the reality and complexities of the Allied relationship, whereas *The World at War* takes a more nuanced approach.

¹⁰¹ *The World at War*, Episode 11, "Red Star: The Soviet Union 1941 – 1943," directed by Martin Smith, written by Neal Ascherson, aired January 16, 1974, ITV, DVD, 24:33-25:04.

Multiple factors could explain this shifting interpretation between the series. For one, *The World at War* was created in the early 1970s. The 1960s and 70s were watershed decades for changing perceptions of war and conflict. The Cold War and the Vietnam War changed how many Americans viewed war. It is reasonable to assume that the extensive coverage of Vietnam influenced the European War as well, especially since it was the French fighting the Viet Minh before the United States in the First Indochinese War. This change in sentiments is coupled with the fact that Great Britain had a different experience than the United States during and after the Second World War. For the United States, the war fostered an economic boom and pushed the nation into the role of superpower. On the other hand, Great Britain, like much of Europe, was left partially destroyed, economically struggling, and on the edge of losing much of its empire.¹⁰² One can assume that the differences in Britain's and America's war and post-war experience would influence how they each view and present the Allied relationship.

Similar themes appear in the representations of the Allied Nations as individuals. The positives aspects of each ally are emphasized, and the negatives remain unmentioned or are changed to fit each series' narrative or purpose. *The World at War*, however, frequently breaks from this formula and displays a mix of both the negative and the positive. The Allied nation that all three series represent most similarly is Great Britain. Great Britain was one of the most integral nations in the Second World War and a preeminent member of the Allied Powers. Each series focuses on the strength of the British nation and its peoples. Special attention is given to the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, which serve as the clearest example of the British remaining unshakable in the face of Nazi bombardment and potential invasion.

¹⁰² LaFeber, 43, 50.

Why We Fight dedicated a whole film to exhibiting the strength of Britain and its citizens. Released in 1943, *The Battle of Britain* positioned the small island nation as the last barrier between Nazi Germany and world domination, comparing Adolf Hitler to Napoleon Bonaparte, who had also planned to invade the shores of the United Kingdom.¹⁰³ At the beginning of the film, the narrator presents a grim picture of the state of Britain's military: a naval fleet spread thin across the seas, an army that barely escaped France, an air force outnumbered ten to one, and an overall lack of supplies and munitions.¹⁰⁴ This initial bleak picture becomes the foundation on which *Why We Fight* builds its representation of a dogged, determined nation. Special attention is given to the Britons on the home front. Extensive newsreel footage exhibits the young and old forming civilian armies and working around the clock in factories before the beginning of the Nazi bombardment.¹⁰⁵ Once the bombs begin to drop, the narrator affirms valiant efforts of the factory workers continuing under the threat of death and the Royal Air Force protecting Britain and the much-needed supplies coming in from the United States.¹⁰⁶ In the Blitz, the film showcases the strength of Londoners under the constant threat of death as they worked in the day, burrowed underground at night, and dug themselves out of the wreckage in the morning. The footage used does not show them cowering in fear; it shows a people still able to have some semblance of normalcy with small talk and humor.¹⁰⁷ The footage also does not touch on the panicked Londoners who fled the city or sent their children to the countryside, an

¹⁰³ Frank Capra, dir. *The Battle of Britain*, NYX Channel, 1943. Accessed March 1, 2020, 1:42, 2:57.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:42-7:09.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7:35-10:56.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20:48, 22:03.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 32:39, 36:45.

occurrence which is well-documented.¹⁰⁸ This reaction is completely justified, but it would detract from the idealized image *Why We Fight* wished to present.

Why We Fight represents the battle for Britain as a fight won by the resilience of the people. As the narrator states: “The people of the city held on, chin up and thumbs up. They knew this was the people’s war, and they were the people. And a people that couldn’t be panicked, couldn’t be beaten.”¹⁰⁹ The narrator goes even further, stating that the people of Great Britain did more than save their nation; they won a year of “precious time” for the world.¹¹⁰ Great Britain held on alone, defiant and strong against a force which had conquered all of Europe. For its purpose—preparing American troops for the war in Europe and creating a connection between the troops and their Allies— *Why We Fight* represented Great Britain as a courageous and tenacious democratic nation with a hardworking and dedicated people. It is no mistake that this image was one with which troops would sympathize and relate. This image of resiliency is one that Britain itself helped to promote with propaganda films such as *London Can Take It*, a short film released in 1940 that showed the effects of the Blitz on London. Some Americans, like Edward R. Murrow with his radio broadcasts, and Dr. Seuss with his pro-British cartoons in *PM Magazine*, also championed this message.¹¹¹ Until the United States entered the war, Great Britain worked hard to convince the nation that it was a valuable ally. After America’s entry, American propaganda like *Why We Fight* further endeared soldiers and civilians to their new ally across the Atlantic. For obvious reasons, any of Great Britain’s unattractive features—especially the fact that they were a colonial power—go unmentioned. This

¹⁰⁸ Peter Stansky, *The First Day of the Blitz: September 7, 1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 6.

¹⁰⁹ Frank Capra, dir. *The Battle of Britain*, 47:30.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50:38.

¹¹¹ Reynolds, 96-8.

depiction, however, is not just featured in *Why We Fight*. The two other documentary series released after the war also laud Great Britain and, in some instances, minimize the colonial nation's faults.

Compared to *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea* devotes a minimal amount of screen time to Great Britain. *Victory at Sea* is a series which focuses largely on the United States' role in the Pacific Theater. The series also aired seven years after the end of the war and had less of an imperative to feature Britain and to sell the idea that the nation was a worthy ally. Nevertheless, just as in *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea's* representation of Britain is one of strength. The first episode of the series, "Design for War," introduces Britain as the last hope for Europe: "If enough of England's ships are sunk, the issue will not be in doubt. England starves, Europe dies."¹¹² In its short segment on the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, *Victory at Sea* highlights the same themes of resilience and strength as *Why We Fight*. A long sequence backed by a roaring score intercuts German planes dropping bombs on the city and the people of London hiding underground. This scene is contrasted by the next shots which show Londoners clearing the rubble and getting back to work.¹¹³ This footage presents a clear message: the British people did not lay down in defeat. The narrator confirms this sentiment: "By caring not how she expends her blood, sweat, and tears, England stands firm. Hitler does not force her to her knees. A democratic people win the Battle of Britain."¹¹⁴ *Victory at Sea* is a series that relies less on words and more on visuals and music. In these sequences, the visuals and music speak for themselves. The music here is tense during the German barrage but then morphs into something somber but still victorious. The visual of the people digging out their city and the music not only convey the

¹¹² Nuclear Vault, "Victory at Sea – Design for War – Episode 1," 3:25.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 12:48.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13:48.

great hardships the British went through, but also their tenacity and ability to overcome the German onslaught. Seven years after the end of World War II and the final release of *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea* represents Britain as a nation of strength, albeit less explicitly than *Why We Fight* did, simply because the series affords less screen time to the nation. One must also consider that *Victory at Sea*, unlike *Why We Fight*, did not have a duty to convince Americans that Great Britain was their deserving ally.

As it does with most aspects of the war, *The World at War* displays Britain with more nuance than its two predecessors. The series includes many elements present in *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, namely the sympathetic picture of the British people and the lauding of their and the nation's strength, especially in the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. The fourth episode of the series, "Alone: May 1940 – May 1941," chronicles Britain's role as the last nation standing against Germany. The narrator discusses the more than a million British men who volunteered in the home guard to protect against the German invasion.¹¹⁵ Footage showed men and women working in factories, making bullets, shells, and guns. Over this footage the narrator discusses the long hours British citizens put in and how this contributed to a peak in production that helped Britain last through a critical moment in the Battle of Britain.¹¹⁶ When discussing the Blitz, the episode interviews Londoners who experienced it and utilizes footage of citizens digging through the rubble and doing their part for the city.¹¹⁷ One scene shows people singing and enjoying themselves and serves as a testament to the strength, spirit, and ability of the British to overcome their circumstances.¹¹⁸ This segment echoes *Why We Fight*, which displayed the British laughing

¹¹⁵ *The World at War*, Episode 4, "Alone: May 1940-May 1941," directed by David Elstein, written by Laurence Thompson, aired November 21, 1973, ITV, DVD, 7:23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12:17-12:42.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27:26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33:48.

and still having humor despite the bombing. The series, however, also includes discussion of British setbacks as well as the nation's post-war struggles and role as a colonial power. The second to last episode of the series, which covers the end and aftermath of the war, includes an interview with American historian Stephen Ambrose. Ambrose discusses the creation of the United Nations and how it represented the hope for the end to colonialism and the beginning of self-determination and peace.¹¹⁹ Later in the episode, the narrator describes Britain's return to Asia:

The British come back to Asia in triumph. An empty victory, India is no longer docile. Two million of her troops fought for Britain in Britain's war. Now, they want their own country to be free. His majesty's African troops, they want freedom too. Malaya, Burma, Britain is too weak to hold them, even if she wants to.¹²⁰

The World at War is not afraid to show Britain's struggle with its empire after the war. Here, the wishes of the colonized people in Asia are aligned with the cause of the war: freedom for subjugated peoples. The citizens of the British Empire had fought to protect the world from Germany, Italy, and Japan and now they would accept nothing less than their own freedom. The two series before *The World at War* would not touch on such a subject when it came to the Allied Powers. Naturally, as a series created and broadcasted in Great Britain, *The World at War* places more focus on its home nation and has a unique perspective on the toll of the war on the nation. *The World at War's* representation of Great Britain has more complexity than its predecessors' views, but it is still rooted in the same themes of strength and resilience present in its antecedents.

¹¹⁹ *The World at War*, Episode 25, "Reckoning: 1945... And After," produced and written by Jerome Kuehl, aired May 1, 1974, ITV, DVD, 9:01.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26:36-27:05.

For documentaries about World War II, especially Western ones created during the Cold War, the Soviet Union is a nation which presents complications. The course of the USSR as an Allied Power was not straightforward and its post-war relationship with the West was strained and, at times, hostile. How each series represents the Soviet Union is informed by their function and objectives. *Why We Fight* functioned as state-propaganda and needed to rehabilitate a communist nation and convince troops that the Soviets were trustworthy allies. *Victory at Sea*, which had the goal of entertaining the public and reaffirming the righteousness of the American cause and greatness of the military during a time of military setbacks in the Korean War, wanted to avoid potentially thorny discussions about the former American ally that was once again the enemy. Finally, *The World at War* aimed to be the ultimate compilation of archival footage and information on the war. As a British program in the 1970s, *The World at War* had less to fear when it came to the discussion of the Soviet Union. All these series, despite differences in their goals and influences, speak about the suffering and fortitude of the Soviet people. Out of all the Allies, the Soviet Union lost the most, an estimated 8,800,000-10,700,000 soldiers and 24,000,000 civilians.¹²¹ As a result of the war millions of civilians and soldiers perished and the land was left razed by the German invasion. The sacrifice of the Soviet people cannot be denied. Since all documentaries portray this sacrifice in the same manner, I wish to focus on what sets the series apart in their representations of the Soviet Union.

One of the major complexities of the Soviet Union's role in World War II was its initial pact with Nazi Germany. Discussion of this fact and Russia's initial role is missing from the

¹²¹ "Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans," The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war>.

earlier documentaries—*Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*. In both documentaries, this fact is ignored, downplayed, or misrepresented to fit the series’ narratives. On August 23, 1939, a little over a week before the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Soviet Union aligned itself with Germany with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. This landmark pact between two nations with polar-opposite ideologies paved the way for the beginning of the war in Europe.¹²² Joseph Stalin, believing that Great Britain and France would not stop German eastward expansion, judged a pact with Hitler to be the Soviet Union’s best short-term course of action. Secretly, the pact also included a protocol in which the two nations partitioned Eastern Europe.¹²³ Soon after, the two nations ruthlessly divided the spoils of Poland between themselves: Germany taking the West and Russia the East. Until June 1941, when Germany began its invasion of the nation, the Soviet Union remained an informal ally of Nazi Germany and benefitted from its ties to the Axis nation.

As previously stated, two of the three documentaries fail to address the Soviet Union’s early role in the war or misrepresent it entirely. In the *Why We Fight* series, the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact is first discussed in the second film, *The Nazis Strike*. The film characterizes the pact as a necessity for the Soviet Union which was preparing for a war they knew was coming, as if Stalin had been given no other choice.¹²⁴ In describing the invasion of Poland, the narrator states that the Russians halted the German blitzkrieg before it could consume the whole country: “During the last days of the campaign, the Russian army entered Poland...The two strongest armies in Europe faced each other. Hitler could decide now, whether to keep on heading east, or

¹²² Reynolds, 62.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 41, 55.

¹²⁴ Frank Capra, dir. *The Nazis Strike*, 24:10-41.

call it quits. He called it quits.”¹²⁵ Contrary to the film’s depiction, the Soviet Union did not stop the Germans; they actively invaded the eastern half of Poland as an ally to Germany. They also collaborated with the Germans in the rounding up, incarceration, and liquidation of Polish citizens.¹²⁶ *Why We Fight* omits these historical truths and transforms the Soviet Union’s actions with an obvious purpose. The series was created to serve as morale-boosting propaganda for American soldiers. There was no room for nuance or complexity in wartime propaganda. The Soviet Union was America’s ally and representing the truth of the nation’s action had the potential to undercut the goals of the series. The U.S Government and Frank Capra wanted troops and later the American public to be assured about why they were fighting for and with whom they were fighting. A candid presentation of the Soviet Union’s actions before Operation Barbarossa would only gray the series’ black and white representations of the war.

Victory at Sea includes no mention of the pact or the alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union. This feels like a purposeful omission but also a byproduct of the series’ focus. *Victory at Sea*, as its name suggests, primarily discusses the naval aspects of the war. When taking in entirety of the series, one sees that the momentous events of the land war are often overlooked or glossed over. It is also clear that the series focuses much more on the Pacific theater than the European or African theaters. Out of the twenty-six episodes, fifteen of them focus primarily or solely on the Pacific. The first episode, “Design for War,” summarizes the beginning of the land war in two brief sentences: “War has begun: ships are sinking, men are dying; it is September 1939. While German panzers raced towards Warsaw, the German navy, powerful and efficient, its morale high, prepares for a greater, more decisive struggle: The Battle

¹²⁵ Ibid., 37:01.

¹²⁶ M. B. B Biskupski. “Poland: Fleeting, Ambiguous, or Omitted”. In *Hollywood’s War with Poland, 1939-1945*. 119-67, (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 147-8.

of the Atlantic.”¹²⁷ The beginning of the land war is used simply to pivot to a discussion of the Atlantic. This first twenty-six-minute episode covers Dunkirk, the fall of France, the Blitz, the Battle of Britain, and increased American support in rapid succession, giving none of the events a thorough discussion. In this episode, the Soviet Union is not once mentioned. It is not until the ninth episode, “Sea and Sand,” that *Victory at Sea* discusses the Eastern Front. This discussion, however, is just a springboard to the true topic of the episode: the Allied invasion of North Africa. The lack of focus on the Soviet Union, despite its integral role in the war, is a direct product of the early Cold War atmosphere.

Throughout *Victory at Sea*, whenever the focus briefly shifts to the Soviet Union, the focus is either on the strength and fortitude of the Soviet people or on the other Allies helping the Soviet Union with Lend-Lease aid. In the eleventh episode of the series, “The Magnetic North,” American, British, and Canadian convoys are shown delivering supplies through the Arctic Ocean. The focus here is not on the Soviet Union; it is on the Western Allies who are delivering the supplies. This is clear in the narrator’s words: “Despite Nazi hell and Arctic high water, we deliver the goods.”¹²⁸ One cannot definitively state the potential reasons behind *Victory at Sea*’s lack of discussion of the Soviet Union. One can infer, however, based on the context of the time, that the creators of the series took the path of least resistance by avoiding an in-depth discussion of the Soviet Union and its role in the war. The way the series focuses solely on the Soviet people and the Allies providing aid to the nation carries the implication, that NBC, and by extension the United States, has little sympathy for the Soviet Union as a government and nation. The series does not speak in depth about the USSR’s role in the war, but it did show how the

¹²⁷ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Design for War –Episode 1,” 2:07-30

¹²⁸ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – The Magnetic North – Episode 11,” YouTube Video, 26:27, June 16, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHJ7GdES5BI>, 15:00.

western Allies saved the day for a desperate Russia. Like *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea*'s goal is not complexity or nuance; it is not a documentary that aims to present a multi-faceted and contradictory picture of World War II. Rather, the series' objective is to be entertaining and a spectacle of music, editing, and action.

In contrast to *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea*, *The World at War* takes a more nuanced and in-depth approach to its discussion of the Soviet Union's role in World War II. The series does not avoid a discussion of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The narrator states that the pact sealed the fate of Poland and shocked "the unsuspecting West."¹²⁹ The series also shows the two nations invading Poland and meeting at Brest-Litovsk, the site of the Russian surrender to Germany in 1917. The narrator remarks that the previous clash of the two powers during the First World War "was, for the moment, completely forgotten."¹³⁰ There is no misrepresentation here of the Soviet Union's role: the Red Army was not stopping the further movement of the Nazis; it was cordoning off its half of Poland. Nor does *The World at War* shy away from the Soviet Union's aggressive actions in the Baltics. The 1939 Soviet invasion of Finland beginning the Winter War, which was a humiliation for the Soviet Union despite their ultimate victory, is shown and discussed.¹³¹ The Soviet Union's hostile exploits before June 1941 make it appear to be a nation not fit to be part of the Allied Powers. This fact, however, is tempered by the three episodes which *The World at War* dedicated to Russia's solo fight against Germany on the Eastern Front.¹³² Once Russia joins the Allies, it becomes essential in stopping Nazi Germany.

¹²⁹ *The World at War*, Episode 1, "A New Germany:1933-1939," directed by Hugh Raggett, written by Neal Ascherson, aired October 31, 1973, ITV, DVD, 50:30.

¹³⁰ *The World at War*, Episode 2, "Distant War: September 1939-May 1940," directed by David Elstein, written by Laurence Thompson, aired November 7, 1973, ITV, DVD, 3:37, 4:12.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 26:28-33:45.

¹³² Episode 5: "Barbarossa: June – December 1941," Episode 9: "Stalingrad: June 1942 – February 1943," and Episode 11: "Red Star: The Soviet Union 1941 – 1943."

The World at War is unafraid to show this complexity. The series does not hold back from criticizing the Soviet Union's actions, but it also does not minimize the importance of the nation to the ultimate Allied victory.

Much of the representation of the Allied Powers has remained the same from the 1940s to the 1970s. A major theme in each portrayal is the strength of these nations and their people. Another theme is the Allies working together as a unit dedicated to stopping the Axis Powers. These themes remain consistent from during the war itself to almost thirty years after its end. The context and motivations for each series change, but their representations of the Allies remain rooted in the same motifs. *The World at War* provides a more complex picture of the Allies by including negative aspects of their actions and relation to each other, which *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* would not discuss, but it does revolutionize or completely diverge from the formula present in its predecessors. It is surprising, to say the least, that the representation of the Allies remained stable in these documentaries created over three decades and from different nations. It would be safe to assume, however, that documentaries created in the former Axis countries would present a different portrayal of the Allies and their actions.

Chapter Three: Elements of the Mind and the Body

Why We Fight, *Victory at Sea*, and *The World at War* are all documentaries created in the West. They are told from the Allied perspective and influenced by the beliefs of their respective societies. Like any documentary, they are not just a product of archival research, but also of the creators' perspectives. These perspectives cannot be separated from the nation surrounding the creators. This is especially true in Western nations, where Christianity and its myriad denominations were and still are widely practiced. Throughout the twentieth century, religion was influential both in the United States and Great Britain. It served as the motivation and justification for both war and imperialism. Religion was a central element of the "white man's burden" which aimed to bring "savages" to civilization through Christianity and other Western, "modern" influences. To the West, religion could always supply the "why" behind imperial expansion and conquest. Religion was an essential aspect of how Westerners saw themselves and the world around them.

It is no surprise, then, that in the Second World War, the western governments imbued their war causes with religious symbolism and ideas. It is with this in mind, that I have chosen to focus on religion as a major theme throughout my selected documentaries. The influence of religion is expressed explicitly through the narration and imagery of each series. Along with religion, I will discuss the representation of suffering and death in each series. Connected to the theme of religion is the portrayal of suffering and death which is extensive and varied in each documentary. How each documentary represented death differed depending on its purpose and objectives. *Why We Fight*, in the typical fashion of a wartime propaganda piece, generally portrays Allied death as righteous and Axis death as insignificant. The series wished to prepare troops to fight on the battlefield. This goal required that soldiers knew the justness of their cause

and the evil of their enemy. *Victory at Sea* was not created during the war, but it furthers the ideas of its antecedent. Here, Axis death once again has little meaning while its Allied counterpart is for the highest cause. Lastly, *The World at War* breaks away and presents death on both sides of the war with nuance.

Religion played a significant role during the Second World War, both on the battlefield and the home front. It brought religion to the forefront at home, as well as in Europe and the Pacific. Religion acted as a unifying force for those fighting across the sea and those praying for their safe return at home. The representatives of religion for American troops overseas were the thousands of chaplains present in their everyday lives. American chaplains were expected to cross religious boundaries and serve every soldier who required their support. The United States' World War II chaplaincy system had no equal in terms of size and resources.¹³³ Army and Navy chaplains were well-trained and represented a broad number of religions. With this extensive training and funding, they generally had the confidence of the American men and women spread around the world. Through their work on the battlefield and off, chaplains help to create a “benign image of organized religion.”¹³⁴ Chaplains left many young people, who had previously had little contact with religion, with a positive image of a young and vibrant clergy. The outbreak of the war revitalized American religious life and paved the way for a post-war religious boom. The war saw an increase in rates of total church membership across religions.¹³⁵ Allied soldiers in Europe often equated faith and religion with the comforts and environment of the home front. Contemporary surveys demonstrated that combat increased personal faith. Within service life,

¹³³ Michael Snape, *God and Uncle Sam: Religion and America's Armed Forces in World War II* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 594.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 595.

¹³⁵ Snape, 30-2, 46.

there was the development of a “heightened belief in God,”¹³⁶ if not from combat, then from the longing to return to civilian life. To many soldiers, religion was a reminder of home, of families and communities; it served as comfort, but also created a great desire to return to the home front.¹³⁷ Yet, simultaneously, the war cause, at least in the United States, was infused with a sense of righteousness that stemmed from religion.¹³⁸ One only has to watch one of the *Why We Fight* films to see that the series’ representation of the American war cause is explicitly religious. The Axis leaders would destroy God and deify themselves in his place.¹³⁹ They would co-opt religion to brainwash their people.¹⁴⁰ The Allies were the only obstacle to the Axis’ plans to upend religion and enslave the world. With this new existential threat to religion and life as the West knew it, it is no surprise that the Second World War ended a period of religious stagnation in the United States.

The United States’ closest ally, Great Britain, also had a deep connection to religion. Britain was a nation which largely considered itself Christian. Despite declining numbers of citizens who considered themselves active members of a church during the first half of the twentieth century, Christianity still informed public culture and identity; most Britons were still baptized, married, and buried in a Christian church.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the war became linked to religion. In the conclusion of his broadcast announcing Britain’s entry into war on September 3, 1939, Neville Chamberlain said a religious blessing. This blessing made it clear that God would

¹³⁶ Ibid., 597.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 596-7.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁹ Frank Capra, dir. *Divide and Conquer*, 16:03, 17:52.

¹⁴⁰ 8. *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, Amazon Prime, 29:03.

¹⁴¹ Lucy Noakes, "Coping: Belief and Agency in Wartime." *In Dying for the Nation: Death, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain*, 101-24. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 101.

be on the side of Britain and its allies.¹⁴² At the grassroots level, religion served as a comfort for Britons on the home front and the battlefield. Faith offered individual consolation and brought people together in a “collective emotional community.”¹⁴³ Religious beliefs helped many British civilians and soldiers navigate the threats and challenges of the war as well as provided a sense of agency that the war had undermined.¹⁴⁴ However, unlike in the United States, World War II did not precipitate a religious boom in Great Britain. In a Gallup Poll from 1941, only nine percent of respondents said they went to church more frequently than they had in peacetime, while fifty-two percent said they attended less often and thirty-two percent said they never went to church.¹⁴⁵ Despite this, religion continued to be an important aspect of British life during World War II. Religious symbolism and belief were instilled in both nations’ war causes. These religious beliefs were reflected in the documentary series created during the war and in the years following it.

For the Allied Powers, religion is portrayed as a binding force that connects the nations as the free world and helped cement their wartime alliance.¹⁴⁶ For example, both in words and images, each documentary —some episodes more explicitly than others—associates the Allies with righteous, organized religion. *Why We Fight*, in words that seem progressive for its time, places Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, and Christianity equally next to each other and connects them through their belief that “in the sight of God, all men were created equal.”¹⁴⁷ Obviously, this is a simplification of each religion meant to make its audience think about how their Allies

¹⁴² Ibid., 101.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 103-4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 102.

¹⁴⁶ Snape, 598.

¹⁴⁷ Frank Capra, dir. *Prelude to War*, 4:55-5:25.

across the world believe in the same things they do. The American troops viewing *Why We Fight* had little to no connection to China or North Africa and the Confucianism or Islam practiced there. *Why We Fight* sought to create and foster these connections through the common language of religion. The other series, which aired after the end of the war, did not have to worry about cultivating this religious connection. They still, however, showed the importance of religion to the Allies through religious imagery.

The influence of religion is reflected in the imagery of each documentary, and there are patterns that connect the three documentaries. Some of these common images include churches, people at prayer, masses, and statues. Religious buildings, which are often shown burning or being destroyed by the Axis, serve as a physical representation of the Axis' war on Western religion. When they are intact, churches and other houses of worship are shown as places of comfort and strength for the citizens of Allied nations. For example, *Why We Fight's The Battle of Britain* ends with a scene of British planes flying in the air through the roof of a bombed-out building. The building is not explicitly shown to be a church, but any American would recognize the shot from the ending scene of 1942's Oscar-winning film, *Mrs. Miniver*, in which a mass of British people sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" as the planes fly over.¹⁴⁸ Focusing on the Pacific Theater, episode twenty of *Victory at Sea* combines the image of a fallen church in the Philippines with an explicit symbol of the destruction of religion: a crucifixion statue lying amongst the burning rubble.¹⁴⁹ This imagery sends the clear message that Western religion is among the victims of Axis conquest. Perhaps the most haunting inclusion of a church comes in the opening scene of *The World at War's* first episode. Footage of the French city Oradour-sur-

¹⁴⁸ Frank Capra, dir. *The Battle of Britain*, 51:26.

¹⁴⁹ Nuclear Vault, "Victory at Sea – Return of the Allies – Episode 20," YouTube Video, 26:26, June 16, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O50tcFZ_Quo&t=177s, 2:55.

Glane is shown, preserved exactly how it was after the massacre there, in complete silence. A shot of a church is presented as the narrator's voice informs the audience that the Germans drove the women and children into this church and massacred them.¹⁵⁰ Other religious images used in the documentaries are more uplifting. Interactions between soldiers and religious figures such as priests and chaplains are also shown. Footage shows troops listening to sermons on ships,¹⁵¹ the narrator discusses the importance of the traditional prayer of the British Royal Navy over images of the men praying in the vessel's chapel,¹⁵² and, finally, a large Russian Orthodox mass is shown with civilians and soldiers singing.¹⁵³ The religious symbols throughout the documentaries are broadly Judeo-Christian in nature. Rarely are other religions discussed, especially Eastern religions. Only in the context of the evil of Japanese religion is an Eastern religion presented at length.

While the religions of the Allied powers are represented as a benevolent binding force, Japanese religion is portrayed as dangerous and connected to aggressive conquest. To an extent, each documentary series singles out and disparages the official state religion of Japan, Shinto. The documentaries, in this instance, use religion as a device to further separate Japan from the Allies. They distinguish Japan and its people from the West not just in appearance, but also in belief and practice. Shinto has its roots in ancient Japanese mythology and was influenced by Chinese Confucianism and Buddhism. Before 1868, the main doctrines of Shinto were the belief in kami —often translated as “god,” “lord,” or “deity,” dedicating oneself to work and

¹⁵⁰ *The World at War*, Episode 1, “A New Germany:1933-1939,” 00:05-01:18.

¹⁵¹ *The World at War*, Episode 23, “Pacific: February 1942 – July 1945,” 4:29.

¹⁵² Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Mediterranean Mosaic – Episode 5,” 9:20.

¹⁵³ Frank Capra, dir. *The Battle of Russia - Part Two*. NYX Channel, 1943. Accessed March 1, 2020, 2:00.

relationships with others, and revering the basic rights of all humans.¹⁵⁴ Shinto's role in Japanese life and culture changed during the Meiji Restoration in which Japan returned to a practical, imperial rule under Emperor Meiji. Meiji rulers utilized Shinto as an ideological glue for the nation. This new "State Shinto" placed the emperor at the center of religion and government to be respected and revered above all else as a kami. The state drew the imperial lineage directly from Japan's mythical origins with the Emperor Jimmu, the descendent of the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu.¹⁵⁵ The state revived the system of national Shinto shrines and began a movement to propagate the new ideology. Once Shinto became a tool used by the Meiji leaders to imbue the throne with legitimacy and sanctity, Shinto ceased to be a religion, becoming a national ideology and form of imperial political mobilization.¹⁵⁶

Japan's system of State Shinto receives sharp criticism from each series. The pre-Meiji Restoration Shinto, however, is also belittled. Both *Why We Fight* and *The World at War* use the word "quaint" to describe Shinto. The narrator in *Know Your Enemy: Japan*—released to be screened to soldiers three days after the bombing of Hiroshima and on the same day as the bombing of Nagasaki—calls Shinto "a nice, quaint religion for a nice, quaint people" that used to be harmless but since 1870 has contained a "diabolical joker." He explains that the state has created a "mad, fanatical doctrine" using Shinto as its base.¹⁵⁷ Almost thirty years later, the sixth episode of *The World at War* begins with a Shinto ceremony. The scene is peaceful until the narrator informs the audience what the ceremony is for: "Every day now, for more than thirty

¹⁵⁴ Hirai, N. "Shintō." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 10, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinto>.

¹⁵⁵ Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 127-130.

¹⁵⁶ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "State Shintō." Encyclopedia Britannica, January 2, 2009. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/State-Shinto>.

¹⁵⁷ 8. *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, 15:22.

years, this couple has carried out this quaint ceremony, meant before their god to expiate the guilt of seven souls. This is Japan and the seven souls belong to the seven Japanese war criminals hanged by the Allies after 1945.”¹⁵⁸ The intent of this opening scene is to shock the audience and elicit feelings of contempt.

The word “quaint” in both these examples is obviously meant as an insult, as if Shinto is not as real or as sophisticated as other religions. There is no in between: the documentaries either mock Shinto for its simplicity or attack it for its “diabolical” nature. The three documentaries reserve this treatment solely for Shinto. Italy, another member of the Axis, has deep connections to Catholicism. Even though Italy is the enemy, Italian Catholicism is not criticized or discussed in the context of the Axis’ abuse or destruction of religion, likely an intentional avoidance. Unlike Shinto, Roman Catholicism has a large presence in the West, especially in the United States. Insulting Italian religion or calling it “diabolical” had the potential to anger the troops viewing *Why We Fight*, the Americans sitting down to watch *Victory at Sea*, or the millions of potential British Catholics watching *The World at War*.

In *Why We Fight*, specifically, Nazi Germany, like Japan, is criticized for its relationship to religion. This criticism, however, only comes from the earliest of the series: *Why We Fight*. Except for discussion of the Holocaust, the other documentaries are devoid of any mention of Nazi Germany’s attack on organized Judeo-Christian religions. *Why We Fight*, in its description of the “slave world” in *Prelude to War*, showcases Hitler’s attack on religion and God. The series positions the church as the last obstacle stopping Hitler from fully indoctrinating his people. At the beginning of this sequence, church bells and chorale singing are used with the

¹⁵⁸ *The World at War*, Episode 6, “Banzai!: Japan 1931 – 1942,” 00:22.

imagery of people praying and holding rosaries.¹⁵⁹ Suddenly, as the narrator says “The word of God and the word of the Führers cannot be reconciled. Then God must go,” a brick flies through a stained-glass church window with a cross on it. Through the broken window, the camera pushes in on a wall painting of Hitler outside.¹⁶⁰ The rest of this sequence uses quotes from Nazi officials and laws to suggest that the Nazi Party is replacing God with Hitler as well as footage of religious buildings being smashed and burned. The film plays further on the fears of Americans with footage of German school children singing: “For Hitler, we live. For Hitler, we die. Hitler is our lord, who rules a brave new world.”¹⁶¹ In this scene, the suggestion that this is what will happen to American children if Germany succeeds is clear.

Why We Fight uses religion as a device to show the true evil of Germany and suggest that if Hitler were successful that religion in the United States would receive the same treatment. Other forms of American propaganda attempted to utilize the same fears. During the war, multiple propaganda posters displayed Hitler’s assault on organized religion. For example, a poster shows a large, black boot with a red swastika breaking the cross off a white cathedral with the caption “We’re Fighting to Prevent This.”¹⁶² Both the creators of this poster and *Why We Fight* knew that religion was important to Americans and that it had immense value as a propaganda topic. They saw the Nazi threat to religion as a resource to further galvanize the population and cement the American war cause.

¹⁵⁹ Frank Capra, dir. *Prelude to War*, 15:36.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16:03.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17:52

¹⁶² Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Domestic Operations Branch. Bureau of Special Services. “We’re Fighting to Prevent This.” Photograph. From the National Archives and Records Administration: *World War II Posters, 1942-1945*. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/516102> (accessed May 3, 2021).

In contrast to religion, a spiritual aspect of the documentaries, suffering and death are primarily physical. Religion concerns matters of the mind and is portrayed as a comfort for the Allied Powers as well as an element of Allied society which the Axis seeks to dismantle or co-opt for nefarious purposes that support their war causes. This is a secondary goal of the Axis, however. The Axis Powers' key path is the physical destruction of each nation and its citizens standing in their way. In this way, the portrayal of suffering and death of civilians and soldiers is both a contrast and parallel to the discussion of religion. An example of this connection is the many instances in which churches are shown destroyed and ablaze. Churches and other places of worship are the physical "bodies" of religion just as civilians and soldiers are the literal bodies of each nation. The Axis Powers, in their conquest of the world, attempted to destroy both the spiritual and the physical.

With this connection established between the incorporeal and the corporeal, it is important to discuss the use of graphic footage by the documentaries and its changing purposes. There is no denying that the Second World War was a bloody conflict; it was the deadliest in human history. Each series brings the wholesale slaughter of the war to the forefront by utilizing newsreel footage. The focus and goal of this footage, however, changes between the series. In *Why We Fight*, the focus is on the death of Axis soldiers and Allied soldiers and civilians in Axis-occupied nations. The series refrains from presenting graphic footage of American soldiers, most likely because it had the potential to demoralize and scare soldiers preparing for war. This choice was in line with the censorship and propaganda system in the United States, which controlled the release of war photographs and often censored those which displayed American soldiers who died violently. Censorship policy would morph throughout the war and allow more images of American death through, but the most graphic of the photographs would remain

hidden.¹⁶³ Each film in the *Why We Fight* series had to show the cruelty of the Axis, but not at the risk of striking fear into soldiers. *Victory at Sea* includes footage of American death but to a much lesser extent than footage of Axis and Allied death. As discussed, *Victory at Sea* was intended to be entertaining and pushed the idea that the war was a crusade against those who would destroy freedom. This intention colors the series' portrayal of suffering and death. Finally, *The World at War* uses graphic footage to present the horrors of the war honestly. Although the series uses much of the same footage as its predecessors, it is given new meaning by the narration and lack of dramatics surrounding it. Overall, *The World at War* focuses on the nuance and cost of the Second World War.

There is a distinct difference between the representation of Allied deaths and Axis deaths. The significance of the death of a soldier or civilian in both *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* depends on whether one is on the winning side of the war. The soldiers of the Axis Powers, in these documentaries, are fighting to conquer the world and destroy freedom and therefore receive no sympathy. Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussion of the atomic bombs which flattened Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In its very brief discussion of the atomic bombs, *Victory at Sea* parrots the myth created in the aftermath of the war: that the dropping of the bombs saved a million American lives. In the final episode of the series, the narrator explicitly states that after the bombs, "the Empire of Japan surrenders fully, completely. The Allies are spared one million casualties."¹⁶⁴ This is a perpetuation of a widely believed myth around the bombs. There is no evidence that corroborates this "one million" avoided casualties estimate except for press conferences after the war in which the Harry Truman administration attempted to justify the use

¹⁶³ Roeder, 10, 25.

¹⁶⁴ Nuclear Vault, "Victory at Sea – Design for Peace – Episode 26," 3:11.

of the bombs.¹⁶⁵ The episode does not discuss the bomb much further than this. The numbers of Japanese dead from the immediate effects of the two bombs are given over footage of the destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and then the series moves on to the next topic. Only two minutes and twenty seconds is spent on the most controversial decision made by the United States during the war. *The World at War*, on the other hand, dedicates a whole episode to the creation and dropping of the bombs as well as the American firebombing of Japan's cities. The episode interviews survivors of the atomic bombs and Colonel Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the *Enola Gay*, to present the differing perspectives around the decision to drop the bomb.¹⁶⁶ The stark difference between *Victory at Sea's* and *The World at War's* discussion of the atomic bombs speaks volumes about their view of the lives of Axis soldiers and civilians. *Victory at Sea* quickly moves past the bomb and avoids a discussion which would most likely hinder its overall message that the Second World War was a righteous and morally driven conflict. The lives of the Japanese civilians killed are not seen as relevant enough to discuss further. The deaths that truly matter are the American casualties avoided with dropping of the bombs.

An extension of the prioritizing of Allied lives over those of the Axis, is the belief that no Allied life ends in vain. A persistent message present in *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* is that no Allied death is pointless or unjustifiable. A product of the contexts of both series, both series uphold the idea of America's righteous war cause. If a soldier dies in conflict, his life contributed to the fight against the evil Axis. There are no accidental deaths, no lives snuffed out senselessly. Neither shows, for example, soldiers being blown up by mines, dying in accidents related to

¹⁶⁵ Samuel J. Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 102.

¹⁶⁶ *The World at War*, Episode 24, "The Bomb: February - September 1945," produced and written by David Elstein, aired April 24, 1974, ITV, DVD, 36:25-42:00.

equipment or weapon failure, or killed by friendly fire.¹⁶⁷ These deaths were common, but not discussed. Little attention is paid to the individual casualties in favor of the grand picture of what was being fought for.¹⁶⁸ These two documentaries idealized death and placed it within the “good war” narrative. To give a brief example of this from both series, in *Why We Fight* the narrator directly states that Americans are fighting “for their country and for more than their country, fighting for an idea.”¹⁶⁹ This “idea” being the revolutionary doctrine of the equality of men and the entitlement of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹⁷⁰ This is a lofty cause, one which leaves no room for less than valorous deaths. *Victory at Sea*’s episode focusing on Guadalcanal, the first major Allied land offensive against the Japanese, ends with a quote justifying the setbacks and casualties: “If there was horror and ferocity, there was also courage and self-sacrifice. If there was death, filth, and disease, the marines turned the tide of the war and stopped their enemy. The Japanese will advance no further.”¹⁷¹

This determination to overlook less than ideal deaths fit within the United States’ censoring policy during the war. George H. Roeder’s *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two* discusses how photos were chosen to be censored extensively. The death of American soldiers, which the government considered acceptable for viewing, was presented to the public in photographs that left no doubt about the soldiers’ honor and valor. Beneath these grim photos, captions provided a story of suffering and death that fit

¹⁶⁷ Roeder, 24.

¹⁶⁸ Rollins, “Victory at Sea: Cold War Epic,” 112.

¹⁶⁹ Frank, Capra dir. *War Comes to America*. NYX Channel, 1945. Accessed March 1, 2020, 2:39.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:31.

¹⁷¹ Nuclear Vault, “Victory at Sea – Guadalcanal – Episode 6,” YouTube Video, 26:29, March 31, 2010, 25:33.

into a meaningful narrative.¹⁷² Contained in the monograph are shocking visual essays of photographs which the government chose to withhold from the public. Two such photographs showcase what the government did not want the public to see. The first photo is of an American soldier who has accidentally fallen to his death while out of uniform in Australia. The second photo shows a medic tending to the injuries of a soldier who has been injured in a flight training exercise.¹⁷³ By focusing on the cause of the war, rather than its costs, *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* create a narrative around death that cannot coexist with the realities of the Second World War.

How each of the three documentaries presents death is connected to their purpose. *Why We Fight*, made during the war, wanted to prepare and educate American soldiers—and later munitions factory workers—on their allies, enemies, and for what they were fighting. The series wanted to make it clear that American troops were fighting for a just, moral cause which was above such worldly interests as territorial gain or political power. The Axis was the epitome of evil and deserved no sympathy or mercy from the American soldier. In this representation, it follows that Allied lives matter more than their Axis counterparts and that no Allied death is without purpose. Axis lives, on the other hand, are inconsequential because they are expended in the name of enslaving the world. The Axis cause is not righteous; therefore, Axis death has no meaning. It also follows that the religion of the United States' most bitter enemy Japan, would also be portrayed as “quaint” until it was the root of Japan's evil. One would expect that this perspective on Shinto would change with temporal distance from the war, but *The World at War's* mention of the religion demonstrated otherwise. Yet there is nuance and complexity in the

¹⁷² Roeder, 126.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

portrayal of Axis religion. As mentioned earlier, Italy's connection to religion is not criticized by any of the documentary series. It is Germany and Japan who are criticized, but for different reasons. Hitler and the Nazis are lambasted for destroying organized religion and replacing God with themselves, whereas Japanese Shinto is criticized both for its simplicity and its ideological use by the imperial government. *Victory at Sea*, in the middle of the two, has a similar representation of death to *Why We Fight*. Here, Allied lives are still more glorious and worthy than Axis lives. Also like *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea* personalizes the hatred of the Axis and its people with sequences of German sailors hunting down innocent cargo ships.¹⁷⁴ This is curious choice for a documentary aired seven years after the end of the war. The United States was no longer enemies with the Axis nations, but *Victory at Sea* inflames this hatred. This fits in with the grand, entertaining picture *Victory at Sea* wishes to present; it is one clearly influenced by the black and white attitudes and beliefs of the early Cold War. Germany had become a spot of great tension between the East and the West. Only three years before *Victory at Sea*'s release had the German occupation lines hardened into the borders between East Germany and West Germany. Perhaps this tension had informed the series' portrayal of Germany. *The World at War* makes considerable strides in the realistic portrayal of death. Here, death is often displayed in noticeable silence. There is no grand score which tries to inform the audience on how they should feel. There are only graphic images of both sides suffering and dying. Unlike its predecessor *Victory at Sea*, *The World at War* does not glaze over America dropping the atomic bombs on Japan. The series honestly explores what death means on both sides of the conflict. Looking at representations of religion, suffering, and death in all three series, there is a clear

¹⁷⁴ Rollins, "Victory at Sea: Cold War Epic," 115. The scene Rollins refers to: Nuclear Vault, "Victory at Sea – Design for War – Episode 1," 1:22.

change in complexity between *Victory at Sea* and *The World at War*. The more distance there is from an event, the more willing and able people are to present a nuanced perspective.

Conclusion

The history of a momentous event like the Second World War is vast and complex. The myriad interpretations of the war's events and belligerents have evolved in the seventy-five years since the war's end. Just like the thoughts and analyses of historians, the representations of World War II in media have also changed overtime. With further distance from the war and changing war sentiments, as well as more access to sources, documentaries like *The World at War* are able to present a more nuanced and complex picture of the conflict. Series like *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* created during and in the near aftermath of World War II were dominated by the propaganda needs of the war cause and the reductive attitudes of the early Cold War. This is not to say that *The World at War* is completely separated from the minimal nuances, simplistic narratives, and interpretations of its predecessors; each series was made by a victor nation and has inherent similarities in how it portrays the war. Despite the core similarities that run through the documentaries, however, there is a clear line between the dramatics of *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* and the solemnness and realism of *The World at War*. In the end, what *Why We Fight*, *Victory at Sea*, and *The World at War* truly demonstrate is how much the creators of a documentary—or propaganda piece—are reflected in their creation.

This thesis includes analyses about how each documentary series represented the Axis Powers, Allied Powers, and the themes of religion as well as death. When representing the Axis, each documentary presented the nations with the base traits of fanaticism and cruelty. However, the portrayals of Japan and Italy have distinctive elements. Japan's representation is influenced by racism and Western anti-Asian sentiments. The depiction of Italy focuses largely on the nation's military failures and a lack of concern for their soldiers and civilians. As the second chapter demonstrates, the common depiction of the Allied Powers in each documentary is

idealized to an extent. Except for *The World at War*, the series do not focus on conflicts between the Allies, even going as far as to misrepresent historical events to improve an Allied nation's image. An example of this was the discussion, or lack thereof, of the Soviet Union's initial role in World War II as an aggressor and quasi-ally of Nazi Germany. Finally, in the discussion of religion and death there were many similarities between the series. Each series included extensive Judeo-Christian symbolism. Religion is shown to be a binding force between the Western Allies and an element that the Axis powers either attack—Germany— or use as a base for the indoctrination of their populations—Japan. Death is also a major aspect of each series. The series use graphic footage from the war to achieve different goals. For example, *Why We Fight*, in line with the propaganda of the time, uses footage of death and suffering to galvanize its audience of soldiers. Both *Why We Fight* and *Victory at Sea* also suggest that the lives of Allied soldiers have more meaning than their Axis peers because of the righteousness of the cause they fight for. *The World at War*, on the other hand, explores death on both sides without a score or narration that attempts to influence the audience's emotions. Taking the series together, it is clear that the facts of World War II remain the same, but the need to shape the details of the war's narrative to fit the expectations of the time in which each series was made leads to differences between the three documentaries.

After finishing watching and analyzing these three series, one cannot help but ponder what could be observed if more documentaries were included or if the chosen documentaries about the war had a larger temporal gap between them. So much has changed in the world since the 1970s, and so many new World War II documentaries have been released. A couple documentaries that come to mind are Ken Burn's *The War* released in 2007 and the British series *World War II in Colour* released in 2008-9. There is no telling how these series from the twenty-

first century would represent the war. As in the 1970s, the view of war today has shifted dramatically after the September 11 attacks and the ongoing war on terrorism in the Middle East. It would be interesting to see dramatic changes, but even more interesting would be a lack of change between a more modern series and one which is almost fifty years old. Just like in this thesis, one would need to explore not only the lack of change, but the potential reasons behind it. One also has to wonder how the image of the Allied and Axis would transform in an analysis of documentary series made in Axis nations. The majority, if not all, of World War II media a westerner consumes comes from the West and from a victor's perspective. Exploring how the losing side of the war views its own actions and the actions of Allied Power is sure to be fascinating.

Appendix A

Methodology

For my primary research, I analyzed the all of the episodes of the *Why We Fight* series, the majority of the episodes of *Victory at Sea* and *The World at War*, as well as another Frank Capra documentary commissioned by the War Department, *Know Your Enemy: Japan*. *Know Your Enemy: Japan* was made to prepare American troops for the potential invasion of mainland Japan. Ironically, the documentary was released on August 9, 1945, the day the United States dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki and was withdrawn by the government on August 28, two weeks after Japan's surrender.¹⁷⁵ Unlike the majority of the *Why We Fight* series, this documentary focused on Japan. Only one film in *Why We Fight*, *The Battle of China*, focused solely on Japan's actions in Asia and role in the war. *Know Your Enemy: Japan* shows a shift in the strategic focus of the U.S with the closing of the European theater in May 1945. By including all of the relevant Frank Capra work, one can to get a full picture of how Capra and the American government portrayed Japan and its people as well as what they wished to present to troops before they invaded the mainland. Furthermore, historians often group *Know Your Enemy: Japan* with the *Why We Fight* films since it is an extension of the of the series' themes. For example, John Dower, historian and author of *War Without Mercy*, discusses *Why We Fight* and *Know Your Enemy* together in relation to the racist portrayal of the Japanese.¹⁷⁶

Although it was possible to analyze all of the *Why We Fight* series and *Know Your Enemy: Japan*, because *Victory at Sea* and *The World at War* were substantially longer series than *Why We Fight*, I used a sampling method which allowed me to ascertain a representative

¹⁷⁵ Dower, 17-19.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

understanding of each series. In total, I watched forty-six episodes with a running time of approximately 1,951 minutes or thirty-two and a half hours. (For a full list of the episodes, see the episode table below). I watched fourteen episodes of both series and in addition, chose five pairs of episodes, one from each series, that covered parallel themes. For example, episode twenty-four of *The World at War* and episode twenty-five of *Victory at Sea* both covered the dropping of the atomic bomb. My other pairs covered D-Day, the end and aftermath of the war, as well as occupations in Europe and Asia. I chose these themes because they were either major events in the war—D-Day, the atomic bombs—or they would help me explore how each series represented the Axis and Allies. Through these episodes, I was able to see consistencies in each series' portrayal of the war, its actors, and events.

Appendix B

Table of Episodes Watched

Episode Title	Series	Release/ Airdate	Principle Creators (D: Director, P: Producer, W: Writer)	Running Time
<i>Prelude to War</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	May 27, 1942	D/P: Frank Capra W: Anthony Veiller, Eric Knight	51:35
<i>The Nazis Strike</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	1943	D: Frank Capra, Anatole Litvak P: Office of War Information W: Julius Epstein	40:20
<i>Divide and Conquer</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	1943	D: Frank Capra, Anatole Litvak P: Office of War Information W: Julius Epstein	56:00
<i>The Battle of Britain</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	1943	D: Frank Capra, Anthony Veiller P: Office of War Information W: Julius Epstein	51:30
<i>The Battle of Russia</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	November 3, 1943	D: Frank Capra, Anatole Litvak P: Office of War Information W: Julius Epstein	76:07
<i>The Battle of China</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	1944	D: Frank Capra, Anatole Litvak P: Office of War Information W: Julius Epstein	62:16
<i>War Comes to America</i>	<i>Why We Fight</i>	June 14, 1945	D/P: Frank Capra, D: Anatole Litvak W: Julius Epstein	64:20
<i>Know Your Enemy: Japan</i>	<i>[Not Part of a Series]</i>	August 9, 1945	D: Frank Capra, Joris Ivens	63:00

			P: Office of War Information W: John Huston	
Ep 1. Design for War	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	October 26, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:30
Ep 2. The Pacific Boils Over	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	November 2, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:28
Ep 3. Sealing the Breach	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	November 9, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:30
Ep 4. Midway is East	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	November 23, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:27
Ep 5. Mediterranean Mosaic	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	November 30, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:28
Ep 6. Guadalcanal	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	December 14, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:29
Ep 7. Rings Around Rabaul	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	December 21, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:21
Ep 8. Mare Nostrum	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	December 28, 1952	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:26
Ep 9. Sea and Sand	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	January 4, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:30
Ep 10. Beneath the Southern Cross	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	January 11, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:26
Ep 11. The Magnetic North	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	January 18, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:27
Ep 12. The Conquest of Micronesia	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	January 25, 1953	P/W: Henry Salomon	26:22
Ep 13. Melanesian Nightmare	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	February 1, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:29
Ep 14. Roman Renaissance	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	February 8, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	25:27
Ep 15. D-Day	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	February 15, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:26
Ep 20. Return of the Allies	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	March 22, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:26
Ep 22. The Fate of Europe	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	April 5, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	25:44
Ep 25. Suicide for Glory	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	April 26, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:27
Ep 26. Design for Peace	<i>Victory at Sea</i>	May 3, 1953	D: M. Clay Adams P/W: Henry Salomon	26:26

Ep 1. A New Germany 1933-1939	<i>The World at War</i>	October 31, 1973	D: Hugh Raggett W: Neal Ascherson	51:52
Ep 2. Distant War September 1939 – May 1940	<i>The World at War</i>	November 7, 1973	D/P: David Elstein W: Laurence Thompson	51:43
Ep 3. France Falls May – June 1940	<i>The World at War</i>	November 14, 1973	P/W: Peter Batty	52:17
Ep 4. Alone May 1940 – May 1941	<i>The World at War</i>	November 21, 1973	D/P: David Elstein W: Laurence Thompson	51:29
Ep 5. Barbarossa June – December 1941	<i>The World at War</i>	November 28, 1973	P/W: Peter Batty	52:20
Ep 6. Banzai!: Japan 1931-1942	<i>The World at War</i>	December 5, 1973	P/W: Peter Batty	51:51
Ep 7. On Our Way: U.S.A (1939-1942)	<i>The World at War</i>	December 12, 1973	P/W: Peter Batty	52:31
Ep 8. The Desert: North Africa 1940-1943	<i>The World at War</i>	December 19, 1973	P/W: Peter Batty	52:19
Ep 9. Stalingrad June 1942 – February 1943	<i>The World at War</i>	January 2, 1974	D: Hugh Raggett W: Jerome Kuehl	51:44
Ep 10. Wolf Pack: U-Boats in the Atlantic 1939-1944	<i>The World at War</i>	January 9, 1974	D/P: Ted Childs W: J.P.W Mallalieu	51:45
Ep 11. Red Star: The Soviet Union 1941-1943	<i>The World at War</i>	January 16, 1974	D/P: Ted Childs W: Neal Ascherson	52:42
Ep 12. Whirlwind: Bombing Germany September 1939 – April 1944	<i>The World at War</i>	January 23, 1974	D/P: Ted Childs W: Charles Douglas Home	52:11
Ep 13. Tough Old Gut: Italy November 1942-June 1944	<i>The World at War</i>	January 30, 1974	P: Ben Shephard W: David Wheeler	50:21
Ep 14. It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow: Burma 1942-1944	<i>The World at War</i>	February 6, 1974	D/P: John Pett W: John Williams	52:17
Ep 17. Morning: June – August 1944	<i>The World at War</i>	February 27, 1974	D/P: John Pett W: John Williams	51:03
Ep 18. Occupation: Holland 1940-1944	<i>The World at War</i>	March 13, 1974	D/P: Michael Darlow	52:27

			W: Charles Bloomberg	
Ep 23. Pacific: February 1942 – July 1945	<i>The World at War</i>	April 17, 1974	D/P: John Pett W: David Wheeler	50:43
Ep 24. The Bomb: February – September 1945	<i>The World at War</i>	April 24, 1974	P/W: David Elstein	52:14
Ep 25. Reckoning: 1945... and After	<i>The World at War</i>	May 1, 1974	P/W: Jerome Kuehl	51:18

Appendix C

“Free World” vs. “Slave World”



Frank Capra, dir. *Prelude to War*. NYX Channel, 1942. Accessed March 1, 2020, 22:35. The “free world” is positioned on the left and the “slave world” on the right. The conflict and dichotomy between the two worlds are persistent themes throughout the whole *Why We Fight* series.

Appendix D

Dr. Seuss Cartoons



Waiting for the signal from home..., February 13, 1942, Dr. Seuss Political Cartoons. Special Collection & Archives, UC San Diego Library



Wipe that sneer off his face!, October 13, 1942, Dr. Seuss Political Cartoons. Special Collection & Archives, UC San Diego Library



Maybe only alley cats, but Jeepers!
A hell of a lot of 'em!, December
10, 1941, Dr. Seuss Political
Cartoons. Special Collection &
Archives, UC San Diego Library



Isn't it just swell about the war
being over!, May 23, 1942, Dr.
Seuss Political Cartoons. Special
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