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“Disaffection and Othering: Beyond Our Coordinates”

A Collection of Essays By
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Orange, CA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in War, Diplomacy, and Society

August 2023


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May 2023

“Disaffection and Othering: Beyond Our Coordinates”

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by Christen Decker Kadkhodai

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I would like to thank the Director of the War, Diplomacy and Society Program, Dr. Kyle Longley, for his enthusiasm and encouragement for my interest in the intersection between “Othering,” children’s media, and war and society. Dr. Longley, this collection and my degree from Chapman University would not have been possible without your dedication to your craft, your mentorship of my scholarly work, and patience with my process as I juggled this degree with my work as a Foreign Service Officer and demands as a mother. Thank you.

I would like to thank Lance Corporal John J. Petchel and those in possession of his letters for gifting them to Chapman University’s Center for American War Letters. This deeply personal collection provided insight into what it was like to serve our country during the Vietnam War and an individual’s evolving understanding of the nature of his service and ideas of patriotism. I hope my readers take as much from these letters as I personally drew from the collection. Lance Corporal Petchel, thank you for your personal sacrifice for our country and for these letters, which will continue to enrich our understanding of war and its impact on the individual and society.

Lastly, I want to offer my thanks to my family. My husband, Aaron, who made space for me, in every sense, to earn a degree while raising our children, Beaux, Lola, and Fairuz. And my newborn twins, Dara and Thomas, who gestated in tandem with this collection of essays. Khalil Gibran put it best when he wrote: “work is love made visible.” Beyond the publication of this collection of essays I will continue to wrestle with the question of how we might educate the next generation on the people and places beyond their “coordinates” to promote mutual understanding, and to prevent war.

ABSTRACT

Disaffection and Othering: Beyond Our Coordinates

by Christen Decker Kadkhodai

“Othering” is just one of many tools nations use during war time to garner support for the war effort. “Othering” in media often goes undetected, a subtle framing of one’s own viewpoint as *the* viewpoint and *the* gaze, often at the exclusion and alienation of others. This collection of essays explores how individuals and institutions “Othered” during wartime. Essays “A Review of Walt Disney’s Life and ‘Othering’” and “Walt Disney’s ‘Reluctant Dragon’ and the 1941 Strike,” study how and why Walt Disney “Othered” certain audiences in his films *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three Caballeros*. “Who is Left: The Moral Burden of War” explores how Lance Corporal John J. Petchel “Othered” in his private letter collection to his fiancé during the Vietnam War. These essays identify a possible “cycle” of ideologically-motivated “Othering.” The final essay “Coordinates” offers a possible way forward to disrupt this cycle of ideologically-motivated “Othering” for generations to come, with media and curricula designed to connect children with peoples and cultures furthest from their coordinates.

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Introduction:

For my final portfolio, I have submitted four different pieces drawing from my master's degree studies of War, Diplomacy, and Society at Chapman University. Each piece submitted could be read as a stand-alone essay. However, considered together, the pieces form a clear thematic through-line exploring how individuals and institutions "Othered" during wartime. "Othering," defined many ways, is the act of defining one's own experience as the central viewpoint and treating another group's experience or perspective as outside, or aberrant, from one's own central framework.

These studies delve into "Othering" from different perspectives, including a lance corporal during the Vietnam War to Walt Disney during World War II. Although these individuals "Othered" groups during distinct historic conflicts and used different means, their experiences mirrored one another. They begin to "Other" groups that they perceived threatened them. Reflecting on the arc of their individual experiences together in this collection of essays offers possible motivations, even what could be defined as a cycle of individual disaffection that contributes to "Othering." The final piece, drawing heavily from my own experience as a War Diplomacy, and Society student and Foreign Policy practitioner, offers a possible way forward to disrupt this cycle: it begins with changing our educational curriculum.

The studies utilize different primary and secondary sources to explore the theme of "Othering." "Who Is Left: The Moral Burden of War" draws from the letter collection of Lance Corporal John J. Petchel. "A Review of Walt Disney's Life and "Othering" and "1941 Strike and The Reluctant Dragon," draw heavily from secondary literature surrounding "Othering" and the Disney Studios. The film *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three*

Caballeros, and Walt Disney's 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee testimony serve as useful primary sources.

Finally, "Coordinates," draws heavily from the secondary resources forming the course literature as well as my own experience as a Foreign Policy professional and history student in the U.S. public school system. This breadth of primary and secondary resources allows us to consider how "Othering" has been discussed in academic circles historically as well as how audiences have "Othered" in various mediums including personal letter collections, testimonies, films, as well as school curriculums.

The first piece in the portfolio, "Who Is Left: The Moral Burden of War," utilizes the letter collection of Lance Corporal John J. Petchel. The letters, penned from 1962-1966, chronicle the experiences of Petchel as an American recruit through his four years of service. His service took him from his hometown of Milwaukee to off the coast of the Caribbean, and finally the jungles of Vietnam. Petchel changed over the course of these four years. His relationship to his service and his ideas of patriotism shifted with experience and time.

While the essay focuses on how Petchel's ideas of the moral burden of war changed throughout his service, Petchel's challenge can be interpreted more broadly as his struggle to stay attached to a larger collective identity. In the beginning, he identified as an American proudly protecting the United States. Over time, however, as criticism of the Vietnam War becomes more widespread, Petchel identified as one of a select few who truly understand what patriotism means. This shift in identity allowed Petchel to see himself as serving a U.S. population who did not understand or appreciate the sacrifices of their servicepeople overseas. Towards the end of his service, Petchel used his letter collection, penned to his fiancé, to "Other" Americans who criticized and/or protested the Vietnam war.

The second and third pieces, separate but complementary, consider the body of literature surrounding “Othering” and the Disney Studios, and how Walt Disney’s political ideology, deeply impacted by a strike at his studio, informed his wartime perspective and resulting films. The historiography of the Disney Studios and “Othering” is vital to understanding the films *The Reluctant Dragon* as well as the films on South America underwritten by the U.S. Government: *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*.

The historiographical essay, investigating the literature on “Othering” when deployed as an ideological weapon during wartime, provides the framework to read the third essay on the 1941 Disney Studio strike and *The Reluctant Dragon*. The highly politicized historiography of the Disney Studios demonstrates how deeply the public relations teams and Walt himself influenced the literature surrounding the organization. The studio films, perhaps the only content from the studio that has not been edited since its conception, prove useful primary source documents to shed light on Walt’s personal political views.

The third essay, “1941 Strike and The Reluctant Dragon,” addresses Walt’s wartime perspective and how he used the silver screen to “Other” through the film *The Reluctant Dragon* leading up to World War II. *The Reluctant Dragon* was the first film that demonstrated Walt’s capacity to purposefully “Other” and curate the content of his films to ideologically influence audiences.

In many ways, Walt’s personal political evolution echoed themes from Petchel’s letter collection. Initially, Walt viewed himself as part of a larger patriotic whole, the historiography chronicling his personal media narrative confirms this. He used media outlets to promote his personal story as a reflection of the best of the all-American pioneering, boot-strapping spirit: a young man moving West with a dream and just a few dollars in his pocket. Walt built a

formidable media empire, but infighting and labor disputes forced him to rethink his collective identity, and like Petchel, he began to view himself as one of a select few who could protect the United States from a greater threat. In Walt's case the larger threat was Communists who he believed led the labor strikes in his studio.

The arc of Petchel and Walt's experiences defining their own identities as Americans, and how their political ideals do and do not reflect the general *zeitgeist* of the country, provide insight into a possible "cycle" of ideologically-motivated "Othering." Like Petchel, Walt toggled between feelings of belonging and ostracization within a larger group. These feelings influenced his decisions and arguably how he "Othered" in *The Reluctant Dragon*. The period of financial tumult and the worker's strike fundamentally undermined Walt's sense of self and his connection to his organization and country. Walt conceived of *The Reluctant Dragon* to project the opposite image of the studio that existed in real life.

In effect, Walt's gradual understanding of film as a powerful "middle register discourse," as historian John Dower defined it, a public medium "calculated and carefully edited , . . explicitly design for public consumption,"¹ relates how Walt used his studio to influence larger audiences during wartime. Walt's sense of self and belonging, or being Othered himself, largely informed his world view, and how he "Othered" in his films. A close read of *The Reluctant Dragon* is essential to understanding his later films on South America, underwritten by the U.S. Government.

The fourth and final piece in the portfolio, "Coordinates," reflects on how our American educational system "Others" cultures and enemies. It ultimately concludes that the more inclined we are to create curriculums that challenge our students to engage beyond our "coordinates,"

¹ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 27.

defined as self and nation centric ways of thinking, the more likely American students will express curiosity and empathy towards *others*. I grounded this piece in my own perspective and experience as a student of War, Diplomacy, and Society, and how I may have “Othered” certain groups on the outset of the program. Over the course of my studies, my view of who and how we “Other” during wartime changed dramatically, but this was only possible through a calibrating and recalibrating of my own “coordinates.” I close the piece with the hope that we can draw conclusions and constructs narratives and curriculums from our history that go beyond patriotic mythmaking and make use of lessons learned. The cultures and countries furthest from America’s “coordinates,” should be treated with most curiosity and care in the classroom.

While these pieces may read as a criticism of the individual and institutional propensity to “Other” during war time, it is important to highlight that “Othering” is an important, if not intrinsic tool, to unite groups to support wartime efforts. There must be a clear and defined enemy, threatening and different enough to go to war. It is often the government’s job to garner the public’s support for such an effort, and “Othering” will inevitably find a place and purpose where there is war. As Edward Said, perhaps one of the most well-known historians who contributed to our understanding of “Othering,” once wrote: “Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort.”²

The goal of this portfolio is not to advocate for the eradication of “Othering,” but to explore how the cycle of individual disaffection can contribute to “Othering” on a larger, more public-facing scale. The disaffection Petchel expressed in his letters may have influenced an

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), n.p..

audience of one, but Walt Disney's led to the "Othering" in *The Reluctant Dragon* and several other vital wartime films on South America, *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*, to garner support for the wartime efforts. Understanding how these cycles of an individual's disaffection on the "middle register discourse" influence the public is, at its core, a worthy topic for War, Diplomacy, and Society scholars to consider.

Essay 1: Who is Left: The Moral Burden of War

War does not determine who is right, only who is left.

-Attributed to Bertrand Russell

When a government decides to go to war, who is ultimately responsible for the ensuing deaths? This is what scholars debate when they discuss the “moral burden” of war. Is it the soldier who carries out the will of the country through violent means? Or does the “moral burden” of war belong to the society that decides war is necessary? Unpopular wars have brought the question of the “moral burden” into sharper focus.

The realm of media, popular culture, and academia have explored many aspects of the “moral burden” of war. Although all contributors to this discussion agree a “moral burden” of war exists, they offer separate understandings of what constitutes the “moral burden,” who should assume such a weight, and how it manifests in service and society. While scholarly contribution to discussion of the “moral burden” of war is important, it is always conducted in retrospect or in the absence of firsthand experiences of war.

A collection of letters penned by Lance Corporal John J. Petchel serves as a case study in the evolution of how one marine understood the “moral burden” of war during his period of service from 1962-1966 during the Vietnam War.³ Petchel’s collection of letters offers an important primary source viewpoint that reflects how he processed the “moral burden” of war in real time, recorded at the time of service. Scholar Martha Hanna discusses the value of soldiers’ letters in historical study in “War Letters: Communication Between Front and Homefront”: “The

³ John J. Petchel to Ann Bau, March 2, 1962 – February 23, 1966, John J. Petchel Letter Collection, Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University.

correspondence of front-line soldiers, from many different armies, when read in its entirety, is extraordinarily revealing not only for what it said about the war, but also for what it tells us about how combatants remained connected psychologically and emotionally to the families they had left at home.”⁴

Exploring the “moral burden” from the perspective of Petchel through his personal letters provides a multidimensional perspective, that of a serviceperson in an active warzone corresponding within the framework of his civilian identity to those at home. The evolution of Petchel’s assumption of the “moral burden” of war and its many iterations reveals that his greatest burden is not only in the heat of the battle, but also in the memory of war. The “moral burden” then, is not a fixed concept, but an evolving sentiment influenced by many factors relative to the individual, combat experience, the circumstances of war, and the society that reabsorbs them.

Not everyone agrees upon the nature of the “moral burden” of war. For some, the “moral burden” is the act of killing that weighs heaviest of all. Karl Marlantes, Vietnam veteran and author of *What It Is Like to Go to War*, argues that by engaging in combat the soldier inherits at least part of the “moral burden” of war: “You can’t be a warrior and not be deeply involved with suffering and responsibility. You’re *causing* a lot of it.”⁵ Filmmaker, Sebastian Junger, the individual who originally coined the term “moral burden” of war in his 2013 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, believes the “moral burden” lies not in the act of killing, but the decision to engage in combat. “The country approved, financed, and justified war – and sent the soldiers to

⁴ Martha Hanna, “War Letters: Communication Between Front and Homefront,” in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), 2.

⁵ Marlantes, Karl. *What It Is Like to Go to War*. (New York: Grove Press, 2011), 44.

fight it,” he writes. “This is important because it returns the moral burden of war to its rightful place: with the entire nation.”⁶

Michael Robillard and Bradley Strawser are less concerned with which party assumes the “moral burden” of war, but how society “outsources” the burden to soldiers from the outset of the experience of recruitment.⁷ They characterize this shifting of responsibility as society’s “moral exploitation” of soldiers in their article, “The Moral Exploitation of Soldiers.” They write: “...there exists a unique species of exploitation that involves unfairly burdening someone with added moral responsibility or moral decision making. We call this special type of exploitation *moral exploitation*.” Robillard and Strawser believe this moral exploitation is “unfair” and the issue “...at the core of the morally troubling treatment of soldiers.”⁸

Robillard and Strawser’s article, published three years after Junger’s op-ed, posits that Junger is articulating a “widely shared intuition many hold” about “the way society treats its soldiers.”⁹ Junger’s piece is much more focused on American society’s treatment of soldiers from a mental health standpoint. The “epidemic of post-traumatic stress disorder” as well as “rates of suicide, alcoholism, fatal car accidents, and incarceration” are symptoms of the weight of the “moral burden” of war among veterans.¹⁰ Junger believes addressing this “gap between American society and our military” by rethinking reintegration and therapeutic outlets for veterans to process their experiences with their community.¹¹

Robillard and Strawser address the “moral burden” of war from a different perspective, by focusing on what makes soldiers as a group vulnerable to “moral exploitation” by society. To

⁶ Sebastian Junger, “U.S. Veterans Need to Share the Burden of War,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 2013.

⁷ Robillard, Michael, and Bradley J. Strawser. “The Moral Exploitation of Soldiers,” In *Public Affairs Quarterly*, no. 2 (2016): 172

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Junger, “U.S. Veterans Need to Share the Burden of War.”

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

emphasize this vulnerability, they use demographic and economic data. Soldiers are more likely to seek out military service as a means of social and economic betterment, therefore moral exploitation reflects greater racial and class inequity within the United States. As one of ten children from parents with limited income, Petchel was undoubtedly vulnerable to this “moral exploitation.”¹² Robillard and Strawser do not broach specifically how the “moral burden” expresses itself in soldiers. Marlantes is more concerned with this aspect of the “moral burden.”

“Killing in war isn’t always the morally clean ‘it was them or me’ situation which we so often hear about and which I have described,” Marlantes writes.¹³ Although Marlantes agrees that society carries a significant portion of the “moral burden,” he asserts the violent aspects of military engagement occur at the hands of soldiers and therefore the “moral burden” of killing inevitably falls on soldiers. Marlantes further complicates his discussion of the “moral burden” of war by suggesting that many soldiers enjoy the violence and killing and must reconcile those feelings after their tour of duty. “Knowing that I loved it *and* hated it, I concluded I was mildly psychotic, just another little something to hide from everyone, sort of like shell shock.”¹⁴

The collection of letters written between 1962-1966 by Petchel serves as a useful example of how one serviceman assumed the “moral burden” of war. Petchel wrote letters home to Milwaukee, WI, to girlfriend, Ann Bau, while he served in the Caribbean and Vietnam. Petchel was nineteen years old when he entered the Marine Corps in 1961. During the period covered by the 129-letter collection to Bau, Petchel served in the Caribbean aboard the USS Rankin, USS Boxer, USS Grant County, USS Okinawa, USS Thetis Bay, USS Valley Forge, and the USS Merrick. He was on active duty during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In

¹² “Leo J. ‘Lee’ Petchel Obituary,” Legacy.com, accessed November 15, 2020, <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/leo-petchel-obituary?pid=19056066>.

¹³ Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 36.

¹⁴ Ibid, 68.

January 1965 Petchel deployed to Vietnam where he served in the airfield of Chu Lai, South Vietnam, until the end of his Vietnam service in 1966.¹⁵

Over the arc of Petchel's service his attitude evolves on the nature of his role as a self-identified "wandering marine" during his first years at sea to a hardened warrior serving in the Vietnam War. Although he volunteers for the Marines in 1961, Petchel's early letters are not focused on his new vocation, but almost entirely on his relationship with Bau. He wants to marry her in their hometown in Wisconsin before he leaves and is full of regret for both that they did not take this step. It is not until he finds himself at the center of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 that Petchel shifts his gaze from the home to the military front.

The night Petchel hears President John F. Kennedy's address October 22nd, 1962, he writes to Bau: "Things look quite alarming. I pray to God in a couple of months I can reread this letter + say it was all just a big scare."¹⁶ Petchel is referring to Kennedy's address in which he informs the American public of the Soviet missiles in Cuba. Kennedy calls on Chairman Nikita Khrushchev to "halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace and to stable relations between our two nations."¹⁷

This is the first time in the collection of letters that Petchel is aware of the gravity of his position. Kennedy's speech has outlined the seriousness of the situation with the Soviet Union and Petchel's position outside of Cuba. Because of Kennedy's speech and the public's awareness of the missile crisis, this is one of the few moments Petchel can be sure of the depth of Bau's shared knowledge of what he faces militarily. Petchel describes his situation four days

¹⁵ Petchel to Bau, 1962 - 1966, Chapman University.

¹⁶ Petchel to Bau, October 23, 1962, Chapman University.

¹⁷ "Forty Years Ago: The Cuban Missile Crisis," *National Archives*, Fall 2002, Vol. 34, No. 3, accessed November 15, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/fall/cuban-missiles.html>.

later as “quiet and very intense. It's as if we are sitting on a bomb and know one knows when it's going to go off,” he writes to Bau.¹⁸

The Cuban Missile Crisis marks a departure in the tone of Petchel's letters to Bau. It is the first real “action” Petchel witnessed in his service, yet, he describes it almost passively: an event happening to him more than him driving it. He is a witness, a bystander, but not a perpetrator. He remains strongly tied to his civilian identity as Bau's boyfriend. His letters during this period return again and again to the subject of their relationship. His recollection of their shared memories during their brief courtship suggests his commitment to remain firmly footed in that identity during his time in service.

The nature of Petchel's combat during his service at sea is a detached one. He cannot see the enemy and is not directly involved in the act of killing in face to face in combat. Marlantes provides a framing to understand Petchel's state of mind, he is experiencing a “psychic split” facilitated by the sheer space between him and the destruction he is causing.¹⁹ Marlantes' description of the work of pilots launching drones destined for Afghanistan from their desks' in Nevada could easily be applied to Petchel's experience preparing for the Cuban Missile Crisis: “Imagine the psychic split that must ensue from bringing in death and destruction from the sky on a group of terrorists – young men who have mothers and a misplaced idealism that has led them into horrible criminal acts....and then driving home from the base to dinner with the spouse and kids. ‘Have a nice day at the office, hon?’”²⁰ This tone is reflected in Petchel's letter which, like many of his early letters, is more focused on himself and his love for Bau than the urgency of his situation at sea.

¹⁸ Petchel to Bau, October 26, 1962, Chapman University.

¹⁹ Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 18.

²⁰ Ibid, 19.

A few days after the missile crisis is averted, Petchel becomes more reflective about the experience and writes: “The situation of today should make everyone more conscious of the future and the country's future.”²¹ Here he references himself as part of an American collective. He is not separate from the public, but a part of it. The “moral burden” of war that Petchel encounters during the Cuban Missile Crisis is different than what he will face in Vietnam. In this instance, Petchel is more closely tied to a civilian identity which keeps him from uniquely assuming such a burden. He assumes if everyone was “more conscious” it would help steer the country towards a better future. The burden is collective and shared.

It is not until Petchel’s service in Vietnam that he begins to grapple openly with the “moral burden” of the war and his role in fighting it. He sails from Hawaii to Iwakuni, Japan. Eventually he goes with his unit to the airfield in Chu Lai, South Vietnam. He remains there, a frustrated young man, from June 1965 to February 1966. By August 1965 Petchel is a different person writing to Bau, encountering the most difficult period of his service yet. He is still not married to Bau, and there is no clear return to the U.S. or end to the conflict in sight. He writes on February 11th, 1965, “As for my state of mind it would really take a beating. I don’t believe in the principal behind VN [Vietnam] nor do I think we should be fighting there. But this is my country right or wrong and I am a soldier so my dye [sic] is cast. But it is very hard for me to do something which I don’t believe in or do anything which will keep us apart.”²²

At the very beginning of Petchel’s service in Vietnam there is a noticeable shift in his tone. He says he does not believe in the “principal” behind the war or the war itself but acknowledges that the decision is beyond his control, suggesting a subtle shift of the “moral burden” of war to society. Rather than expressing the belief in the importance of his service to

²¹ Petchel to Bau, November 4, 1962, Chapman University.

²² Petchel to Bau, February 11, 1965, Chapman University.

his country, however, he simply writes that his “dye [sic] is cast,” a much more passive description of his role than he previously employs during his deployment in the Caribbean. He has not assumed the “moral burden” of the war and views himself as simply doing his service. This differentiation between what Petchel believes is “right” and “wrong” shifts considerably during his time in Vietnam.

Service in Chu Lai, although considered a relatively safe assignment, posed its own set of moral difficulties. In *The Morenci Marines* Kyle Longley documents the experiences of marine Joseph Sorellman who served in Chu Lai during the same time as Petchel. Sorellman describes the relatively comfortable conditions of Chu Lai belying the combat situation just a few miles outside the base. “It was like there was no war going on,” Sorrellman said in an interview with Longley.²³ He also recalls horrifically wounded soldiers who were airlifted onto the base.²⁴ Longley writes of Sorellman’s experience transporting the wounded and dead from helicopters in Chu Lai, “Blood was everywhere – on the stretchers, the helicopter floors, and the uniforms of the wounded. Its sickly sweet, nauseating smell filled the nostrils, leaving a sensory memory not easily forgotten.”²⁵

Sorellman’s experience highlights a separate aspect of the “moral burden” experienced by soldiers who are involved with a conflict, but powerless to contribute in a way they see as significant. Sorrellman is troubled by his “cushy” experience in Chu Lai. “Those who told Joe that guarding the air base would be a rather cushy duty proved to be right,” Longley writes, “...he lived in a comfortable screened hut complete with cots, radios, and reel-to-reel players.”²⁶ Longley attributes the “boredom and lack of adventure coupled without thoughts of the sacrifices

²³ Longley, Kyle. *The Morenci Marines: A Tale of Small Town America and the Vietnam War*, (University Press Kansas: 2013), 124-125.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Longley, *The Morenci Marines*, 123-124.

being made by his [] buddies” as ultimately leading Sorrellman to request a transfer out of Chu Lai.²⁷

Nancy Sherman writes in her book *Our Ancient Wars*: “Soldiers routinely impose moral responsibility on themselves in the face of factors that make light of their own agency, whether flukish accident, the tyranny of bureaucracy and public indifference, spotty intelligence, or all too lethal high-tech and low-tech weaponry.”²⁸ Petchel’s knowledge of the combat in the vicinity of Chu Lai but his inability to directly engage in conflict may have similarly weighed on him. He echoes Sorrellman’s feelings of boredom: “You don’t know how tiring + frustrating it is to sit + stare at the black emptiness every nite for 12 hours. Your mind plays all kind of tricks on you.”²⁹

Petchel eventually assumes the full “moral burden” of war, in the latter part of his service in Vietnam between 1964-65. Petchel writes in 1965 from his unit in the airfield in Chu Lai, to Bau: “From what I hear they are suppressing of casualties in men as well as equipment. We must win here at all costs + if keeping some fuel for those crazy hypocrites who want us pulled out if necessary.”³⁰ This is one of Petchel’s first references to the anti-war demonstrations in the United States. On April 17th, 1965, the Students for a Democratic Society organized the largest anti-war demonstration in the country’s history in Washington, DC, with an estimated 25,000 protestors.³¹ Although it is not clear if Petchel is referring to this protest specifically, he is aware of student protests at the time that he composes this letter to Bau.

²⁷ Longley, *The Morenci Marines*, 125.

²⁸ Nancy Sherman, *Our Ancient Wars*, (Michigan: University of Michigan: 2016), 150.

²⁹ Petchel to Bau, unknown, 1965, Chapman University.

³⁰ Petchel to Bau, August 6, 1965, Chapman University.

³¹ April 17, 1965: Largest Anti-War Protest,” Zinn Education Project, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/largest-antiwar-protest/>

Petchel often expresses uncertainty about the political machinations that resulted in the United States at war with Vietnam, but he is sure of the righteousness of the cause: “And then we must hide the fact even if necessary,” Petchel explains in the same letter. “...we must stop communism here at all costs. This war is the turning point of our struggle.... the stakes are world freedom the price is our lives.”³² Petchel makes a sharp departure here from earlier attitudes expressing a shared collective identity with fellow Americans or even seeing the “moral burden” of war as the responsibility of society as he did in February. Petchel is beginning to see himself and his efforts as separate from his identity as a civilian and moral obligations to the public, going so far as to suggest the possibility of “hiding” facts from Americans to “stop communism...at all costs.”³³ He no longer believes that if the public is “conscious” of something it will do the right thing.³⁴ He believes himself to be above the public, in this sense.

The longer the Vietnam War went on the more unpopular it became. Widespread antiwar demonstrations swept the United States, with students leading some of the largest protest gatherings in the history of the country. Milton Mankoff and Richard Flacks studied the demographic backgrounds of the student protestors of the late 1960s to gauge just how representative they were of American youth. Their 1971 study, “The Changing Social Base of the American Student Movement,” suggests that the majority of protestors came from a similar background: white, upper middle class, highly educated, and non-religious.³⁵ “The student activist is, according to this body of research, explicitly socialized to be concerned about social problems, to be skeptical of authority, and to take university ideals seriously,” they concluded.³⁶

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mankoff, Milton, and Richard Flacks, “The Changing Social Base of the American Student Movement,” In *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 395 (1971): 55.

³⁶ Ibid.

That university students could defer their service in Vietnam only emphasized the schism, real or perceived, between those protesting the war and those serving their country.

Negative comments on student protestors becomes a reoccurring theme in Petchel's letter collection throughout 1965. His attitudes reflect the growing schism he feels between his role fighting overseas and the students behind the antiwar protests. Petchel's background stands in opposition to the characteristics that defined a typical Vietnam protestor according to Mankoff and Flacks' study. Petchel joins the Marines at nineteen years old and indefinitely defers his college education. Although his letters do not reveal hard data on his socioeconomic background, genealogical research reveals he was one of ten children and he sends money home to his parents during his service.³⁷ "They could use it," he writes in an early letter to Bau when he first starts receiving a regular salary.

Although there is a dearth of data available on the average socioeconomic background of marines during Petchel's time, more recent studies, such as those conducted by Amy Lutz in "Who Joins the Military?: A Look at Race, Class, and Immigration Status," suggest that socioeconomic status is, "...an important predictor to military service...Those with lower family income are more likely to join the military than those with higher family income."³⁸ This supports ideas posited by Mankoff and Flacks' study of economic vulnerability as one aspect of their "moral exploitation."³⁹

³⁷ "Leo J. "Lee" Petchel Obituary," Legacy.com, accessed November 15, 2020, <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/leo-petchel-obituary?pid=19056066>.

³⁸ Amy Lutz, "Who Joins the Military?: A Look at Race, Class, and Immigration Status," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 36, no. 2, (March 2008:): 184.

³⁹ Robillard and Strawser, "The Moral Exploitation of Soldiers."

One important aspect of these studies to highlight, however, is that other more recent scholarship suggests that perceived economic disparity between those who served in Vietnam and deferred was not as wide as many previously thought. “The degree of disparity in casualty rates by income seems far less than is implied by writings on the subject,” write scholars Arnold Barnett, Timothy Stanley, and Michael Shore, who compared economic backgrounds of those who died in combat in Vietnam.⁴⁰ “The belief that affluent citizens were conspicuously missing from the Vietnam war dead is harmful to all Americans.”⁴¹

Petchel’s identity as a devout Catholic and associated religious ideals influence his thinking on his service and the “moral burden” of war. His letter collection begins with frequent references to God, prayer, and his weekly attendance to mass. Bau is also Catholic and together they share an understood vocabulary of religious references. In Petchel’s first letter to Bau he articulates how he views the threat of war and losing his life in a religious context: “Walk in the shadow of death on the brink of great danger; + all of the frivolous concepts + ideas of our modern society are so unimportant.”⁴²

Although they are not married, Petchel signs his letters to Bau as “Your Loving Husband” and “Until Death Do We Part.” Over the course of his correspondence Petchel discusses their decision to abstain from sexual intercourse because of Bau’s religious convictions concerning abstinence before marriage. Although Petchel admits that he wishes they did not abstain, he articulates his respect for Bau’s decision. Where Petchel’s religious devotion begins

⁴⁰ Arnold Barnett, Timothy Stanley and Michael Shore, “America’s Vietnam Casualties: Victims of a Class War?” *Operations Research* 40, no. 5 (1992), pp. 856- 866

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Petchel to Bau, March 2, 1962, Chapman University.

and his devotion to Bau ends, is unclear. Both are a grounding force during his service and provide him a framework larger than himself. “You are my reward for serving in hell,” Petchel writes toward the end of his service in Vietnam.⁴³

One large aspect missing from the study of the “moral burden” of war through Petchel’s letter collection is Bau’s responses back to him. This information is important in understanding how she shared the weight of the “moral burden” of war while Petchel was deployed, a weight many military spouses have carried but has not been properly explored by scholars. The “moral burden” of war, throughout its evolutions discussed here, was partially shouldered by Bau. Whatever she wrote back to him helped Petchel endure the experience.

Although Bau’s side of the correspondence is not part of the collection, we can draw multiple conclusions about how she responded based on Petchel’s letters. She does not include as many details about her everyday life, as Petchel does in his. Petchel often asks Bau repeatedly for basic information such as whether she has taken up teaching in the classroom again. Bau also does not complain about the difficulty of the separation, at least in Petchel’s perception. Petchel writes that he is grateful to Bau for not “complaining” of loneliness in her letters like the wives of his comrades. In this sense, although we cannot read Bau’s letters, we can conclude that Bau has assumed a caregiving and reassuring role in her correspondence with Petchel.

William Nash and Brett Litz write in, “Moral Injury: A Mechanism for War-Related Psychological Trauma in Military Family Members”: “information about war communicated to a military family member by a military parent or spouse is considered a direct impact of war to the extent that information would conflict with moral beliefs no matter how it was received.”⁴⁴ In

⁴³ Petchel to Bau, November 13, 1965, Chapman University.

⁴⁴ William Nash and Brett Litz, “Moral Injury: A Mechanism for War-Related Psychological Trauma in Military Family Members,” *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 16 (2013), 365–375.

other words, as Petchel grappled with the weight of the “moral burden” of war, Bau did too. Petchel, as evidenced later in his correspondence, did not spare Bau the gruesome details of war. “Visual images of death and carnage,” Nash and Litz add, “especially of women and children, and knowledge about brutal acts are examples of direct impacts of war on moral schemas.”⁴⁵ Although Petchel enjoys an intimacy with Bau and views her as his support, he does not consider in communicating these stories that he involves Bau in sharing the “moral burden” of war.

This is a vital aspect of the “moral burden” of war that, during the time of deployment, can only be studied through letter collections. Servicepeople are deeply impacted by the information they confide and receive through their personal letters. Hanna writes of the importance of letter correspondence in “War Letters”: “Soldiers relied on it for reassurances that those at home remembered and loved them; that their welfare mattered to them; and that they continued to have a civilian identity to which they could return when the war was over.”⁴⁶ Although we cannot read Bau’s letters we can confidently deduce that the mere *idea* of his future life with Bau was a motivating and grounding force for him during his deployment. Although he ebbs in his identification as a civilian and part of America as a whole, he never drifts from his romantic identity as Bau’s partner and future husband.

Several events occur in Petchel’s life in the remainder of 1965 that seem to drive him further to assume the “moral burden” of war and depart from his civilian identity. “Operation Starlite,” based out of Chu Lai, takes place over the course of six days between August 18 – 24. It is the first combined helicopter and amphibious landing in history and is often characterized as the first major offensive by Americans in the Vietnam War. “By now you’ve

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hanna, “War Letters,” 1.

heard the news reports on our battle,” Petchel writes to Bau August 23rd.⁴⁷ “It is the biggest engagement of this war. So far we have 57 killed + over 200 wounded. The VC have an estimated 1000 dead + only God knows how many wounded.”⁴⁸ Petchel describes the number of wounded soldiers overwhelming the hospital and patients being placed in the chapel and post office.⁴⁹

It is Petchel’s first major military combat experience. He is not just in the role of supporting the helicopters or manning the perimeter, but actively attacked on many sides of the airbase. One can detect in Petchel’s August 21, 1965, letter to Bau fear and concern, but also pride. In the Marine Corp’s official account of the battle, Colonel Andrew Rod provides a more accurate report of the enemy casualties and underscores the source of this pride and excitement among the corps as a “feeling that American forces had inflicted a decisive defeat on the enemy.”⁵⁰ With 614 “enemy dead,” Rod writes, “This was the first time each would take the measure of the other in open battle.”⁵¹

In a letter penned August 21st from Chu Lai in 1965, Petchel reveals his shifting ideas of his own identity in relation to the public: “As we die and fight here for world peace and freedom. We see a newspaper clipping on how the lunatic college kids want to get a fund started for medical supplies for the VC's . . . This poor misguided kids who want to be recognized in the world of adults take on this stupid cause. Send them here and see what it is really like, the mutilated bodies of captured marines, SVN people who simply want freedom. They roam the country like outlaws of the old west.”⁵² Petchel’s language about his service in Vietnam has

⁴⁷ Petchel to Bau, August 23, 1965, Chapman University.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Rod, Colonel Andrew. [*The First Fight: U.S. Marines in Operation Starlite August 1965*](#), (Washington DC: U.S. Publishing Office, 2015), 57.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Petchel to Bau, August 21, 1965, Chapman University.

inherently changed, he is fighting for “world peace” and for the South Vietnamese who “simply want freedom.”

Peter Kindsvatter, author of *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, & Vietnam*, offers insight into why the growing antiwar sentiment expressed on college campuses contributed to Petchel’s increased assumption of the “moral burden” of war: “The antiwar movement, at least the vocal segment of it centered on the college campus, actively denounced the soldier, adding to his sense of isolation, even alienation,” Kindsvatter writes.⁵³ The growing chasm between society and soldiers which Petchel articulates in this letter is also described by journalist Ward Just in *Military Men*. “Society’s distrust of soldiers is equaled only by the distrust of soldiers for society,” Just writes. “...the sense of isolation is palpable.”⁵⁴

Andrew Bacevich, veteran and author of *Breach of Trust*, expounds on the political context of this growing isolation. He theorizes that as a result of Vietnam and the “upheaval” of the 1960s the army is perceived as “out of step” with American society: “Activists, radicals, and hipsters celebrating a do-your-own-thing spontaneity drove the culture. In their eyes, the army appeared cold, impersonal, repressive, and bureaucratic...that such an institution might advance the cause of anyone’s liberation anywhere was patently preposterous.”⁵⁵ This provides a framework in which to place Petchel’s comments when he writes of his efforts to uphold “world peace” in his letter and the growing distance he feels from American society.

Although President Richard Nixon had not yet made his famous address to the nation calling on a “silent majority,” there are several indications that Petchel begins to identify with

⁵³ Kindsvatter, Peter S. *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, & Vietnam*, Kansas: University of Kansas (2003), 146.

⁵⁴ Just, Ward. *Military Men*, (London: Redwood Press Limited (1970), page unknown [unable to obtain physical copy of book].

⁵⁵ Bacevich, Andrew J. *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013), 52.

this growing conservative sentiment.⁵⁶ One example of this is Petchel's view on race relations in the United States. On August 23rd, 1965, he writes to Bau: "I heard about the race riots in LA and Chicago and it is really disgusting. We follow more and more the pattern of the decline of the Roman Empire. Has there been any race trouble back home?"⁵⁷

Only a month later, Petchel again refers to "misguided students," while complaining to Bau about the ungrateful American public on September 13th, 1965: "...our national holidays commemorating this hard bought freedom are merely a day off or a family picnic to millions. There are no student protests in NVN, China or Russia; you can protest but it will be your last. I get very disgusted with our misguided students but to keep freedom for all is worth the long working days."⁵⁸ His reiteration of these views stands in contrast to his first letter to Bau in 1962 where he articulates his patriotism and the "idea" of America inherently defined as a land of activism: "America can be anywhere; where people have the desire to be free buried in their hearts. People who strive for the dignity of the human being to be held above all material aspects of modern society... Where a man can say "I disagree" and not fear repercussions to himself or his family."⁵⁹

These earlier views of freedom of expression juxtaposed with his later "disgust" for "misguided students" serve as evidence of his ideological transformation during his service. When Petchel writes of the possibility of America being "anywhere" in his 1962 letter, ideologically he still identifies as a part of his American community. He is not imagining yet that protest culture and the "dignity of a human being" could be extended to his enemy. If

⁵⁶ "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," Nixon Library. Accessed November 1, 2020, https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/2018-08/silentmajority_transcript.pdf

⁵⁷ Petchel to Bau, August 23, 1965, Chapman University.

⁵⁸ Petchel to Bau, September 13, 1965, Chapman University.

⁵⁹ Petchel to Bau, March 2, 1962, Chapman University.

Petchel is aware of the student protests in the beginning of his service, he is not mentally impacted enough to mention them to Bau in his letters. “I love my country beyond words,” Petchel writes in another early letter in 1962. My life is not too much to give.” This rhetoric is unimaginable in Petchel’s later letters.

When Petchel writes of his efforts to uphold “world peace,” August 21st, 1965, he is writing in a moment of great stress during “Operation Starlite.” He has participated in a military effort that is truly significant and historic, a far cry from his formerly noncombat post in Chu Lai. Some veterans such as J. Glenn Gray, write of these first combat experiences as formative, almost religious experiences. Reflecting on soldiers’ first tastes of combat in World War II in *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*; Gray writes “The boundaries of the self-expanded, they sense a kinship never known before. Their ‘I’ passes insensibly into a ‘we,’ ‘my’ becomes ‘our,’ and individual fate loses its central importance.”⁶⁰

Marlantes echoes this sense of ecstasy and loss of self in combat: “In Vietnam there were times when I swelled with pride at the immense destruction I could deal out. There is a deep savage joy in destruction, a joy beyond ego enhancement.”⁶¹ Both examples emphasize a departure from a sense of individual self and a communion with something greater. For Gray, it is the “we.” For Marlantes, it is a “joy beyond ego.” Petchel’s August 21st letter reflects this shift, he has seemingly forsaken his communal identity with fellow Americans and now communes with his comrades forming the “we” who “die and fight for world peace.” No longer a bystander of the conflict, he is fully engaged, horrified, scared, and excited. The marine who formerly wrote as if events were happening *to* him has now become the protagonist of his story.

⁶⁰ Gray, J. Glenn. *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 44.

⁶¹ Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 63.

He assumes the role of adult when he comments on the “poor misguided kids” who may be his age or just a year or so younger.

According to many veterans who have written on the experience of combat, the memory of this joy and community goes unrivaled for the rest of their lives. “For some men, combat would be the most exciting, even defining, event of their lives,” Kindsvatter writes. Nothing in their peacetime experience would equal its intensity.”⁶² It is also this memory that haunts soldiers, that becomes a separate “moral burden” to be carried long after the war. Petchel is prescient on this point in the same August 21st letter. Referring to the college students again he comments: “...the job is dirty, disgusting but it must be done. We pay the price in lives and horrible memories that we can never be rid of. But our enemy is cold cruel and ruthless it's [sic] aim is total domination of the world.”⁶³

This letter in the throes of combat, summarizes the contradictory forces at work in the “moral burden.” On one hand, Petchel’s participation in “Operation Starlite” clearly brings him a sense of power. In his characterization of the enemy as “cold cruel and ruthless” whose only desire is “total world domination,” Petchel also elevates himself to superhero status. A superhuman enemy requires a foe of similar superhero status, and in Petchel’s words, someone willing to complete a job “dirty and disgusting.” This description is useful because it also suggests Petchel assigns subhuman qualities to the Vietcong.

Inherent in Petchel’s description above is also a sense of pride. The entire August 21st letter pieced together suggests Petchel has woven a narrative that student protests and activism threaten to take away in their characterization of the Vietnamese as defenseless victims. Petchel, in his view, is a caregiver and protector of his country against a “cold cruel and ruthless” enemy.

⁶² Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 174.

⁶³ Petchel to Bau, August 21, 1965, Chapman University.

He is not even confident that Bau, his letter recipient and longtime confidante, completely understands. Petchel spends most of the August 21st letter explaining just how depraved he believes his enemy to be, acknowledging that his views of the Vietcong sound “hideous.”

Petchel nonetheless highlights for Bau several examples of unsuspecting Vietnamese tactics.

In one, Petchel discusses a standoff with a group of Vietcong hidden in the rice paddies. When a Vietcong fighter comes out with a white flag of surrender, Petchel’s fellow marine guns him and nine other fighters down. Petchel says the observing reporter “was shocked + screamed at the gunner at how inhuman and cruel the act was.” Petchel says the marine, “just stared at him [the reporter] and said, ‘Go home, civilian.’”⁶⁴ Petchel later reveals that all the Vietcong gunned down had dynamite wired to their body with a line leading up to their hands, suggesting the intention of a suicide mission.

The inclusion of stories such as these in his letters suggests how much Petchel wants Bau to see the enemy as he does and the many ways, he unwittingly shares the “moral burden” of war with her. Petchel is conscious of his own transformation during the war and estrangement from his former attitudes. In a letter only two months later he writes to Bau October 1st, 1965: “I can’t describe the strange, proud, and yet frightening feeling it is to watch your planes bombing a few miles away.”⁶⁵ He is aware of the complexity of the experience, the horror of experiencing joy and pride during destruction. “The memories,” as Petchel writes, that he “can never be rid of.”

Petchel’s letter collection is limited to his time overseas, but he anticipates problems reconciling his experiences with his former life and self. As Petchel’s tour continues, he becomes keenly aware of his transformation. Shortly after Operation Starlite Petchel writes to

⁶⁴ Petchel to Bau, August 21, 1965, Chapman University.

⁶⁵ Petchel to Bau, October 1, 1965, Chapman University.

Bau on September 18th, 1965, “When I was a boy I dreamt of war and glory and now that I am a man I know the gloomy horror of war, I wish I could be an innocent boy once more.”⁶⁶ Petchel’s desire to be an “innocent boy once more” articulates the guilt he carries from his combat experience, either because of things he has done or witnessed, or both. Marlantes speaks to this experience in *What It Is Like to Go to War*: “The realm I enter now, the transcendent realm one reaches through violence, is one that society says it condemns but in fact celebrates everywhere, on film, on television, and in the news.”⁶⁷

Junger speaks to the same sentiment when he reflects upon a soldier’s experience post conflict: “...when soldiers come home spiritually polluted by the killing that they committed, or even just witnessed, many hope that their country will share the moral responsibility of such a grave event.”⁶⁸ Instead, Junger writes, soldiers encounter a country where even those who supported their role in the fighting “don’t want to hear the details.”⁶⁹ Societies where communities thank them for their service but provide no outlets for validating and processing the horrors they have experienced. This only contributes to the soldier’s sense that they have participated in something shameful. The student protests and general antiwar sentiment have provided a glimpse of the country to which he will be returning home. Petchel has found his “own war” worth fighting, narrative that will prove difficult to maintain in a country where antiwar sentiment is prevalent.

If Petchel’s first years of letters can be characterized as those of a patriotic bystander, and the latter half as hardened superhuman protector, the final letters suggest another shift: apathy and confusion. This marks the beginning of Petchel weaving antiwar sentiment in United States,

⁶⁶ Petchel to Bau, September 18, 1965, Chapman University.

⁶⁷ Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 66.

⁶⁸ Junger, “U.S. Veterans Need to Share the Burden of War.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the very real threat to his life in the field, and his own views of the “moral burden” of war together. November 7th, 1965, Petchel writes the following to Bau: “We’ve had infiltrations every nite so far and things are really looking bad. We found detailed maps of all our positions on one of them and they’re expecting a nice big attack. As our guard commander greeted us with last nite; “Some of you men will probably be dead by the end of this month, but that’s your job!” Real boost for morale.”⁷⁰ The glory of victory in Operation Starlite has worn off and Petchel is experiencing immense fatigue. Far from defender of “world peace” as he saw himself earlier, Petchel is simply trying to make it out of Vietnam alive.

On November 13th, 1965, Petchel writes, “If people could only conceive the horrors of war; it sure is different from the gung ho movie version I had before. I can see now why men who have been to war don’t like to talk about it.”⁷¹ Again, Petchel is anticipating his reentry into civilian life. Although at times as he cast himself as superhero, he is now reconciling that idea with the true horrors of war he has experienced that he understands others don’t like to discuss.

In one of Petchel’s final letters to Bau January 26th, 1966, he wonders if he will seem like a different person to her: “I wonder if you’ll find me changed. Everyone I know who’s gone home says everyone at home commented how he changed. But I guess you can’t go through a war and not be different.”⁷² The “moral burden” of war becomes something entirely different as Petchel begins to contemplate his reentry into civilian life and his reunion with fiancée, Bau. Far from the “innocent” boy who entered the marines at nineteen, Petchel worries Bau will find him “changed.” Throughout these transformations during his service, Petchel holds onto certain core

⁷⁰ Petchel to Bau, November 7, 1965, Chapman University.

⁷¹ Petchel to Bau, November 13, 1965, Chapman University.

⁷² Petchel to Bau, February 3, 1966, Chapman University.

ideas such as the importance of his role overseas, whether American society understands or supports what he is doing.

The “moral burden” as it is experienced by Petchel, evolves during the time of his service. It is influenced first by his profile as an individual. Petchel, due to his humble socioeconomic background and youth, is vulnerable to the “moral exploitation” of society as articulated by Robillard and Strawser.⁷³ These vulnerabilities, coupled with Petchel’s lack of college education impact how he would eventually view the student demonstrations, with disgust and distaste. Petchel can’t see himself among them because his profile and life circumstances are dissimilar to theirs. The news of these protests, like many serving in Vietnam, causes Petchel to feel further isolation from the American public.

Petchel’s combat experience as well as the nature of the Vietnam War also impacts how he experiences the “moral burden” of war. His initial combat experiences keep him physically separated from the enemy and the destruction he causes, allowing him to continue to remain a bystander in the destruction rather than the person driving it. In these moments, Petchel feels united with the American public, and the need for everyone to be “more conscious of the future and the country's future.”⁷⁴

Petchel’s tone changes immensely following his deployment to Vietnam at the Chu Lai Airbase and his first taste of active face to face combat. Petchel’s experience and the circumstances of the “moral burden” of war drastically change in Vietnam, he is actively involved in the “killing” aspect of war. The stakes become “world freedom” and Petchel, along with his comrades, is a defender from a “cold cruel and ruthless enemy.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Robillard and Strawser. "The Moral Exploitation of Soldiers."

⁷⁴ Petchel to Bau, November 4, 1962, Chapman University.

⁷⁵ Petchel to Bau, August 21, 1965, Chapman University.

The period during and following Operation Starlite is at once a time of great stress and joy for Petchel, his letters suggest a marine fully engaged and enraptured by the war. Petchel speaks of the “misguided students” and a public who cannot know fully what is happening in the theater of war for their own good. The “moral burden” of war in this circumstance, is a weight carried by a superhero.⁷⁶

Without interviewing Petchel, is impossible to know his experience of the “moral burden” of war following his return home in February 1966. Although Petchel credits Bau repeatedly in the letter collection from keeping him “stable” through the war, their relationship eventually ends. Based on information posted on his personal website, Petchel’s marriage to Bau ends in divorce in 1972, six years after his return from Vietnam and the birth of two children.⁷⁷

Although Petchel reiterates his belief in the cause in Vietnam until the very end of his letter collection penned to Bau, his innermost feelings about his service and its meaning will remain with him alone. Regardless of the extent of research and discussion on who scholars, politicians, and policy makers believe *should* be responsible for the “moral burden” of war, servicepeople, whether they want to or not, will always bear a part of it, in active participation and eventually in their memory. A serviceperson’s experience of the “moral burden” of war, as evidenced by Petchel’s letters, is highly individual and fluid. While it may change with time it never fully goes away.

⁷⁶ Petchel to Bau, September 13, 1965, Chapman University.

⁷⁷ “John Joseph Petchel: Computer Services Company Executive,” Prabook. Accessed October 10, 2020, https://prabook.com/web/john_joseph.petchel/488923

Essay 2: A Review of Walt Disney's Life and "Othering"

The Walt Disney Company⁷⁸ has dominated the children's media market for eight decades, and its programming has shaped children's cultural identity and their relationship to others. The \$314 billion dollar company strives to delight and entertain but remains primarily a market-driven international company beholden to its stockholders.⁷⁹ Henry Giroux, a cultural critic and leading Disney scholar, posits that Disney has maximized profits by "nurtur[ing] a corporate image that equates the Disney brand with American patriotism."⁸⁰ This study takes that assertion one step further to suggest that Disney films were pro-American and exclusionary leading up to, and during, World War II. It focuses on Walt Disney, the company's founder, as the creative power behind Disney's "Othering" in three feature films leading up to and during World War II. "Othering," defined in a variety of ways, is the act of defining one's own experience as the central viewpoint, and treating another group's experience or perspective as outside, or aberrant, from one's own central framework. This historiography will provide a review of the literature to support this assertion including secondary sources covering the theme of "Othering" and the Disney Studios. It will also cover primary sources including interviews and testimonies from Walt Disney, as well as Disney Studios films.

"Othering" and themes of racism are inextricably tied when reviewing visual representations in Disney films. An extensive body of research exists addressing "racist" themes in Disney movies, however such scholarship in recent years could have also employed the term "Othering." The terms are not synonymous but have a great deal of overlap when discussing

⁷⁸ In 1986, "Walt Disney Productions" officially becomes "The Walt Disney Company." This study refers to "Walt Disney Productions," as it was named from 1929 – 1986. It also refers to "Walt Disney Productions" as "Disney" and the "studio."

⁷⁹ "The Walt Disney Company," Yahoo Finance, Accessed December 16th, 2020. <https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/DIS/>

⁸⁰ Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2010), 31.

these cinematic representations. Historians have highlighted such gross racial stereotypes in movies such as *Song of the South*, *Peter Pan*, *The Jungle Book*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *The Aristocats*, *Dumbo*, and *Swiss Family Robinson*. Works such as Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck*, Douglas Brodes' *Multiculturalism and the Mouse*, and Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan's *Deconstructing Disney*, are among the best-known works that explored these themes in Disney films. In fact, the scholarly discussion of these depictions has gone well beyond academia, and entered the homes of all viewers in 2020, when the Walt Disney Company formally addressed such racially questionable depictions in its streaming service, Disney+, by offering a warning message for such films: **"This program includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures. These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now."**⁸¹ However "wrong" the Walt Disney Company deems these films; they continue to stream many of them without alteration or further context for viewers beyond the initial written warning message, which many young viewers cannot yet read.

While scholars and the public have focused on the racial aspects of these films, more recent scholarship focuses on its treatment of the "Other" from a war and society perspective. Racist themes are often easily identifiable, associated with the animation of a character using gross physical exaggeration, for instance. However, "Othering" is far more subtle. "Othering" considers the assumed audience of the film, not necessarily the vast and diverse audience that will ultimately view the film. There are many ways to frame a film to exclude certain viewers and mischaracterize and stereotype others. For the purposes of this study, three movies in the Disney canon enhance this study including: *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three Caballeros*. These films "Other" non-White, upper to middle class American viewers,

⁸¹ "Stories Matter," The Walt Disney Company, Accessed November 9, 2021. <https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com>

addressing an assumed audience, a prototype Walt considered to fall under the category of “one hundred percent American,” a quote from his 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee testimony, a source addressed later in this study.⁸²

Disney’s “Othering” of non-White, upper to middle class American viewers, did not occur in a vacuum. The American media generally treated these groups as “Others;” with early attitudes informing American identity. However, Disney actively participated in such “Othering” in films such as *The Reluctant Dragon*, and eventually pre-wartime films including *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*. This study provides a historiography to explore Walt Disney as the creative power behind these films who strongly influenced the decision to frame these films for White, middle to upper class American audiences.

To better understand how Walt Disney “Othered” audiences in his films and came to harness power of political persuasion in his films, it is necessary to review the literature on his life. There are many sources on Walt Disney with several interviews demonstrating the multi-faceted nature of Walt Disney’s personality and behavior in and out of the studio (referred to as “Walt” to avoid confusion between the man and the company). Early interviews, such as those conducted by Diane Disney Miller, Walt’s daughter, who wrote a series of articles in 1956 entitled, “My Dad, Walt Disney,” for the *Saturday Evening Post* help piece together the disparate pieces of a complicated man who created arguably the world’s most powerful media conglomerate. She quoted her father: “Everybody in the Disney studio . . . would describe me in a different way. One of them would characterize me as a bogeyman, who roars into the shop and tears up things other people have been working on for weeks. But someone has to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No,’ and stick to it. And that’s my job.”⁸³ Miller added, “I can’t see my dad as a bogeyman at

⁸² Qtd. in Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 37.

⁸³ Diane Disney Miller, “[My Dad, Walt Disney](#),” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 17, 1956.

all” and pivoted her father’s early struggles in Hollywood as justification for his complex personality.⁸⁴

Although the Walt Disney Family Museum mined this series of articles heavily for quotes, like certain interviews or essays penned by Walt and his immediate family, many of these documents have disappeared from the internet or only remain in circulation in their hard copy form such as this *Saturday Evening Post* series photographed when offered in an auction. The Walt Disney Company and Walt’s family have carefully curated Disney’s memory for public consumption. For this reason, many interviews like this one containing even slightly questionable material by today’s political and social standards have been scrubbed from the internet and the corpus of sanctified Disney memorabilia to avoid damaging his legacy.

Walt’s legacy is inextricably tied to the Walt Disney Company and the company itself. While Walt’s family can make his questionable content disappear from the archives and the internet, the company is not so nimble. Many of the aforementioned films still contain racially offensive material, and the company has chosen not to edit those films. However, the Walt Disney Company has made a concerted effort to address criticism about these racist depictions by openly acknowledging them and working with various cultural groups to create more socially and racially sensitive content for children. “Stories Matter,” a section of the company’s corporate website directly addresses problematic depictions: “We can’t change the past, but we can acknowledge it, learn from it and move forward together to create a tomorrow that today can only dream of.”⁸⁵

The company’s racially and culturally sensitive approach accomplishes two goals: it stays current with the evolving understandings of appropriate depictions of culture and ethnicity on

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ “Stories Matter,” The Walt Disney Company, Accessed November 9, 2021. <https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com>

screen, and it is profitable. Scholars such as Richard Breaux explained how profitable Disney's new awareness has been in "After 75 Years of Magic: Disney Answers its Critics, Rewrites African American History, and Cashes In on Its Racist Past" with movies such as *Princess and the Frog*. Breaux underscored that while not achieving the box office success, the film and its merchandizing succeeded in specifically leveraged the buying power of African American communities. Breaux wrote, quoting Disney scholar Henry Giroux: "In the end, the *Princess and the Frog* will be a financial success, not so much because of the movie, or because it won over African American audiences, but because as Giroux reminds us that Disney controls 'ABC, numerous TV and cable stations, five motion picture studios, 466 Disney Stores, multimedia companies and two major publishing houses.'"86

The Walt Disney Company's attempts to rebrand their image in the face of criticism about racial depictions in their films directly impacts the literature available on Walt Disney's life, creative influences, political and world views. Bronze statues of Walt Disney holding the hand of Mickey Mouse may still greet every guest entering a Disney amusement park, but the more unsavory aspects of his personal story explored in this study have largely faded to the background of the company's narrative or disappeared altogether.

Despite the disappearance of select pieces of Walt Disney historical content, many extended first-person interviews with Walt Disney still exist that provide insight into how Walt conceived of his own identity and came to define "Others." Many of these interviews exist because of communications scholar Kathy Merlock Jackson, who compiled these sessions with Walt Disney between 1929 – 1966 in *Walt Disney Conversations*. In this volume, she provided

⁸⁶ Richard M. Breaux, "After 75 Years of Magic: Disney Answers Its Critics, Rewrites African American History, and Cashes in on Its Racist Past," *Journal of African American Studies* 14, no. 4 (December 2010): 415.

chronological and feature film context for each interview. They provide a glimpse of Walt and his publicist, Joseph Reddy's, attempts to fashion Walt and his company as what Jackson describes as an embodiment of the "American dream."⁸⁷ Jackson wrote that beyond the rich content of these interviews, they underscore the historical and cultural framework of the times and "may tell much more about the people who write and consume them: what they care about and what they want to hear."⁸⁸

Merlock's compilation also includes Walt's 1947 testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), a document crucial to this study on Disney and "Othering." This testimony, taken as a direct transcript without Reddy's approval, showed how Walt's experience of a 1941 strike in his studio impacted his worldview and his ideas of patriotism, which ultimately affected his films and their "Othering." The HUAC testimony provided additional context for the studio films leading up to and during the early war efforts and explained largely propaganda films the studio produced during early war efforts. Walt did not mince words when he called those who chose to strike at his studio in 1941 as tools of the Communist Party: "I definitely feel it was a Communist group trying to take over my artists and they did take them over," he told the committee.⁸⁹ Walt assured HUAC that those who continued to work at his studio opposed communism as "one-hundred-percent American [s]."⁹⁰ Walt's conceptualization of what it meant to be "one-hundred-percent American" and how that related to his own identity and "Others" is vital information to understand how he framed his films during and after this studio strike. The greater threat of Communism and its perceived

⁸⁷ Ed. Kathy Merlock Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), xii.

⁸⁸ Merlock, *Walt Disney Conversations*, xvii.

⁸⁹ Robert E. Stripling and H.A. Smith, "The Testimony of Walter E. Disney Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities," October 24, 1947.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

impact on Walt's own workforce had a tremendous impact on Walt's political ideology. These themes permeated the studio films, Walt's testimony and other sources discussed later reveal his efforts to "Other" anyone associated with Communist ideals, alienate them from his workforce, and drive them from his studio.

With the dearth of information available on Walt Disney's world views, less conventional sources provide clues into the origins of what Walt considered "one-hundred-percent American" and how he "Othered" in his creative pursuits.⁹¹ In addition to his films, physical manifestations of his creative visions appear such as Disneyland's Main Street USA. Walt and others modeled Disneyland's Main Street USA entirely on the Marceline of Walt's childhood. Scholars such as Brian Burnes, Robert W Butler, and Dan Viets have noted Disney's "affection" for "small-town, turn-of-the-century life to the boyhood experiences echoed and in expanded in his animated cartoons" in their work *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius*.⁹²

Main Street USA not only provides a helpful source to understand Walt Disney's nostalgia for his childhood Marceline experience but also how he envisioned the ideal America, the assumed White, middle-class audience of the studio films. Walt Disney Historian Steven Watts noted the brazen political and social overtones of the construction as "an unproblematic celebration of the American people and their experience . . . with its nostalgic images of turn-of-the-century small-town life, the heroic conquest of the West represented in Frontierland, the sturdiness of the heartland reflected in the Rivers of America, the Jungle Cruise

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Brian Burnes, Robert W Butler, and Dan Viets, *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius* (Missouri: Kansas City Star Books, 2002), 37.

in Adventureland with its playful pacification of the Third World.”⁹³ Beyond the architecture, the parks’ shows and historical characters say even more about the kind of memory of America Walt Disney wanted to evoke, what historian Richard Francaviglia calls a “pre-urban Anglo America that was and indeed still is widely embraced by Americans.”⁹⁴ Many parallels exist between Main Street USA and films such as *The Reluctant Dragon*, they are creative endeavors that include only one small slice of the complexion and cultural makeup of the United States.

While these sources provide some insights into the subject, studio films also serve as the primary sources for this study, *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three Caballeros*, among other films released during this period. As the studio’s major creative authority between the 1930s – 1960, Walt influenced the representations, dialogue, and music of these films, unchanged since their release. This study argues many of the cultural, ethnic, and political depictions in these films correspond directly with experiences and political ideals defined by Walt in interviews. These films, produced during the 1940s, highlight the central focus of this study, how Walt Disney “Othered” non-American, non-white audiences leading up to and during World War II, even as he received U.S. government funding to endear Latin American audiences to American culture for two out of the three films.

In the study of Disney and “Othering” it is useful to utilize other primary source material including newspaper and magazine articles on Disney movies, especially film criticism.

⁹³ Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 392.

⁹⁴ Francaviglia, Richard V. “Main Street USA: A Comparison/Contrast of Streetscapes in Disneyland and Walt Disney World.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15.1 (1981): 141–56

Reviews by popular film critics such as James Agee of *The Nation* captured a highly educated, culture viewpoint. Agee and others became increasingly wary of Disney productions financial entanglements with the U.S. Government, its political influence over the creative output, and impact on potential audiences. It is important to acknowledge, however, that while valuable to this study, reviews such as Agee's largely do not reflect general audience's reception to these films. Many of the films Agee panned proved highly popular with American audiences. While Disney films reflected the political and social *zeitgeist* of the moment, they promoted a specific brand of patriotism and American ideal that subtly "Othered." While Agee and other film critics may have picked up on these attempts to "Other" in films, noting it in their reviews, if the box office can serve as a barometer for audiences' enthusiasm for these films the public remained somewhat oblivious to these themes.

Film critics were not Disney's only detractors, and some of the most useful historical accounts emerged in the late 1960s. Although the term "Othering" was not yet popularized, many of the themes covered in Richard Schickel's *The Disney Version*, published in 1968, offer insight into Walt's views on patriotism and what informed his views on what it meant to be "one hundred percent American."⁹⁵ Schickel's work is the earliest scholarly criticism of the creator and his company, published just two years after Walt's death. Schickel, both literary critic and film historian offered one of the few rigorous multidisciplinary works on Walt and his films. Considered the first study to truly turn a critical gaze toward the man and his company, it initially received mixed reviews. While other aspects of Schickel's work, such as the extensive discussion of the Disney company's finances, received the most attention, he was the first

⁹⁵ Qtd. in Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 37.

historian to explore how the intellectual community “dropped” interest in Disney, and therefore freed him from the confining “claims as an artist” to form popular media for the masses.⁹⁶

Schickel saw this disconnect as dangerous: “If the happy few do not study them at least as seriously as they study Andy Warhol, then they will lose their grip on the American reality and, with it, whatever chance they might have of remaking it in a more pleasing style.”⁹⁷ Schickel’s work also provided the most extensive coverage of Walt’s vitriol during and after the 1941 studio strike, arguably Walt’s most formative experience contributing to his political views in the next two decades.

Following’s death in 1966, many critics and fans consider the 1970s and 1980s a “lost” period for the studio, both creatively and influentially. The films produced during this period offer little to provide context for “Othering” or insight into Walt’s political views. Live action rather than animated films comprised most of the films produced during this two-decade period. Of the seventy-six films produced, only nine had full animation. The studio’s largest box office successes, many of them mixed animation and live action, include: *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, *The Aristocats*, *Robin Hood*, *The Rescuers*, *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, *Pete’s Dragon*, *The Fox and the Hound*, *Tron*, *Oliver and Company*, and *The Little Mermaid*. Although books such as James B Stewart’s *Disney War*, provided a view into the internal troubles which may have impacted the studio’s creative output, notably little scholarship exists on Disney and its films during this period.

The studio’s loss of its dominance over the children’s market in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to correspond with a marked disinterest among film and media scholars. Strong political

⁹⁶ Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: the life, times, art, and commerce of Walt Disney* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 225.

⁹⁷ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 225.

or cultural commentary are also notably absent from these films, which corresponds with the creative void left following the death of Walt. While the films and the literature on the studio during this period proves less useful for this study, that the studio experiences such a shift following Walt's death supports this study's assertion of his creative steer contributed heavily towards any subsequent political and cultural commentary in the films, including its "Othering."

Many of the best-known critics of Disney films and culture emerged in the 1990s when scholars became most critical of Disney's framing of the "Other." This period, encompassing Michael Eisner's tenure as the company's Chief Executive Officer, saw the release of Disney's most concerted attempts to present more diverse programming, animated features such as *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, *The Jungle Book*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*. It is also a reflection of the times and the new forms of study that increasingly focused on race as a means of social construction and analysis.

Arguably the field's most influential text, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, by Henry Giroux, Disney scholar and cultural critic, appeared during this period. He argued, later in concert with co-writer Grace Pollock, that Disney was a "teaching machine" exerting political and cultural influence over consumers.⁹⁸ Although Giroux and Pollock discussed at length how Disney "Othered" through its programming, the scholars focused on the global implications of such messaging to children, and the numerous ways Disney continues to "deflect, if not completely, trounce, criticism at every turn" for its consumerist goals: a capitalist wolf in Mickey Mouse clothing.

⁹⁸ Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2010), xiv.

Giroux and nearly every scholar critical of Disney films and products acknowledged Disney's unique and equally powerful role in the American psyche. Disney and publicist Joe Reddy successfully created a brand so intertwined with American identity and nostalgia that it felt unpatriotic to criticize the conglomerate. Essays appearing in *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions*," edited by Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch, explored how the studio has influenced, and even shaped American society: "The new Disney critics implicitly had to try to understand why people, perhaps including at least part of themselves, actually liked, even needed Disney – without attacking, demonizing, or condescending those people."⁹⁹ This volume contextualized the evolution of Disney criticism and the notable lack of critical material produced during the time of the making of the films highlighted in this thesis.

Alongside the work of historians, scholars and teachers in the field of education offer a different perspective on the themes of "Othering" explored in this work. Compilations such as *Teaching with Disney*, edited by Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie C. Garlen, discussed how Disney's "curricula and pedagogies manifest in public consciousness, cultural discourses, and the education system."¹⁰⁰ In particular, essays highlighted in the "Teaching Race" section spoke directly to this study of Disney and "Othering." Jessica Baker Kee and Alphonso Walter Grant's "Disney's (Post?) – Racial Gaze: Film, Pedagogy, and the Construction of Identities" framed Disney films as "complex discursive spaces" to be read and analyzed through multiple "racial gazes."¹⁰¹ Although Kee and Grant did not directly address the films explored in this thesis, their work connecting scholar Laura Mulvey's "gaze theory" directly with other Disney films, is equally relevant and applicable to *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three*

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie C. Garlen, *Teaching with Disney*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

¹⁰¹ Baker Kee, Jessica and Alphonso Walter Grant. "Disney's (Post?) – Racial Gaze." In *Teaching with Disney*, edited by Julie C. Garlen and Jennifer A. Sandlin, 68. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016, 67.

Caballeros: “Through the normalization of White language, culture, and beauty standards, [certain Disney films] serve as racial pedagogies that both reinforce structural and institutional racism,” they emphasized.¹⁰²

Other Sandlin and Garlen collections of essays and works make contributions to understanding within this study. Jake Burdick’s “Practical Pigs and Other Instrumental Animals: Public Pedagogies of Laborious Pleasure in Disney Productions” was part of a separate compilation edited by Sandlin and Garlen, *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*. It examined how Disney films connected directly to the life and ideologies of Walt leading to it becoming a “psychoanalytic text” reflecting the “primal scenes of trauma . . . of Walt Disney’s own demanding childhood.”¹⁰³ Specifically, Burdick’s analysis of the “id-like qualities inherent in” Donald Duck and possible connections between the cartoon and Walt Disney’s personal psychological mindset proved invaluable in deconstructing films such as *The Three Caballeros*. Burdick argued: “the infantilization suggested by his sailor cap and coat, his difficulty in speech, the libidinal suggestion in his lack of pants, and the radical and emotive and irrational ways in which the character behaves.”¹⁰⁴

Beyond essays and books examining Walt and his films, scholars and others have produced nearly two dozen biographies. These works provided scholarly insight and analysis on Disney’s life, and importantly for this study, quoted Disney from the extensive body of interviews throughout his professional life. Authorized biographies of Walt Disney include Bob Thomas’s *Walt Disney: An American Original* as well as Disney’s daughter, Diane Disney Miller’s *The Story of Walt Disney*. Both authors had more access to Walt Disney, his family, and

¹⁰² Ibid, 69.

¹⁰³ Burdick, Jake. “Practical Pigs and Other Instrumental Animals: Public Pedagogies of Laborious Pleasure in Disney Productions,” In *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie C. Garlen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the studio, but remain largely uncritical works and simply echo many of the life stories and talking points promoted by Walt and Reddy. This material largely underwrote the narrative at the Walt Disney Family Museum, with many of the museum's archives and exhibits reinforcing and regurgitating what Walt said in interviews.

While these works did not explore how Walt Disney may have “Othered” non-American audiences in his films, they explored how the 1941 studio strike contributed to Walt's decision to travel to the South America to research the films *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*. Although the Walt Disney family diminished the impact of the 1941 studio strike on Walt, every authorized biography and the Walt Disney Family Museum acknowledged it as a turning point in Walt's life. There is no mention of Walt's 1947 HUAC testimony in the family website or museum, for instance, but the family did play a major role in the creation of the documentary *Walt and El Grupo* which explores the primary source material used for the films *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*, providing insight into how Walt and his creative team interpreted what they saw in their research trip and how they chose to depict that on the silver screen.

More critical unauthorized biographies on Disney containing more relevant material to this study include Neal Gabler's *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. Gabler took a decidedly warts-and-all approach to analyzing Disney's life and possible political and social motivations behind the man and his studio's endeavors. Gabler's work contained the most thorough accounts of the 1941 strike, ensuing creation of World War II propaganda films and their impact on the Disney team and brand. “These small propagandistic forays...they didn't change public opinion; they reinforced it,” Gabler wrote, adding: “Now Walt aimed higher. If he

was going to make propaganda, he wanted to lead a crusade, not follow one.”¹⁰⁵ Gabler’s thorough review of the studio’s precarious financial situation provided further context for Walt’s desperation and underscored why he may have channeled this energy into strong political ideology, such as his “Othering” of those who participated in the strike and his “Othering” of audiences in *The Reluctant Dragon*.

Marc Eliot’s *Walt Disney: Hollywood’s Dark Prince* is another critical unauthorized biography. It delved deeply into the interpersonal issues that contributed to the 1941 studio strike and how Walt’s management style likely exacerbated preexisting tensions. His interviews and material quoted studio staff including Frank Thomas, Les Clark, and, crucially, Arthur Babbit, the latter for many years the target of Walt’s anger about the strike. Eliot also published the leaflets posted in the studio during the strike that many have attributed to Walt and his executive team, signed by the anonymous “Committee of 21.” Unlike Gabler’s study, Eliot’s work was highly controversial and even overly critical of Walt. A review in *The New York Times* called Eliot’s methodology “dubious:” “This books flows, *overflows*, with hate – scorn for Disney and contempt for his achievements . . . Mr. Eliot misses the ultimate point . . . Walt Disney Studios is the last studio in Hollywood to retain the identity of its founder, a singular fellow who managed to convert his unhappiness and imperfections into a world of childlike fantasy and shrewdly packaged entertainment.”¹⁰⁶

Although *The New York Times* reviewer argued Eliot “misse[d] the ultimate point,” Eliot’s study offered windows into Walt’s personal interactions with staff which provided insight into his personal feelings about the strike and its relationship to how he viewed American

¹⁰⁵ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 390.

¹⁰⁶ Patrick McGilligan, “Wak! Unca Walt!,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 1993, 41.

patriotism and “Others.” For instance, Eliot’s coverage of the strained relationship between cartoonist, Arthur Babbit, and Walt, helped fill out our understanding of why Walt labeled the strikers Communist and the role that played in his “Othering.”

In *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three Caballeros*, Walt and his team “Othered” their audiences by establishing a White, middle class, “gaze” for the films. Employing the work of Laura Mulvey and Jessica Baker Kee and “gaze theory,” allows for a deep read of these films. Kee wrote in “*Seeing White: Animated Disney Films as Racial Pedagogy*.” “Through the normalization of White language, culture, and beauty standards, [Disney films] serve as racial pedagogies that both reinforce structural and institutional racism and maintain status quo pedagogies.”¹⁰⁷

Beyond Mulvey’s gaze theory, other works shaped the understanding of the topic of “Othering.” For example, “Othering,” as defined by John Dower in *War Without Mercy*, portrayed a group perceived as a threat as “subhuman, inhuman, lesser human, superhuman.”¹⁰⁸ Disney’s cinematic representation of “Others,” those perceived lying outside a society’s dominant social paradigm, has some foundations in widely accepted cultural attitudes at the time of their release. Dower’s research of “Othering” focused specifically on WWII in the Pacific, a representation that created “psychological distancing that facilitate[d] killing” on both sides.¹⁰⁹ While Americans “Othered” the Japanese during WWII in a fundamentally different manner, this study utilizes Dower’s work to look more broadly at how Walt “Othered” in *The Reluctant Dragon*, and later, how the U.S. Government uses the power of media to “Other” non-Americans

¹⁰⁷ Baker Kee, Jessica and Alphonso Walter Grant. “Disney’s (Post?) – Racial Gaze.” In *Teaching with Disney*, edited by Julie C. Garlen and Jennifer A. Sandlin, 68. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 11.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

during times of war and affirm a White, American-centric viewpoint, in the films *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*.

In addition to Dower, scholar Edward Said contributed to our understanding of “Othering,” and its relationship to American media, in his famous volume *Orientalism*. Like Dower, Said provided historical examples of how Western media organizations have exoticized and “Othered” non-Western cultures in books and film to establish and affirm racial and cultural superiority. He argued convincingly: “Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort.”¹¹⁰

Many supported such concepts. In *The Mouse that Roared* Giroux and Pollock applied both Said’s theories of Orientalism and Mulvey’s “gaze theory” directly to Disney films. Said’s theories of Orientalism, they argued, “perfectly capture” Disney films as a promotion of American culture as empire, a form of “Western imperialism that shapes dominant thinking about the East . . . its dependency on new images and exotic narratives in order to affirm and sanction the centrality of Western culture and its ongoing domination of others.”¹¹¹

Similarly, Giroux and Pollock incorporated Mulvey’s “gaze theory” into their analysis of Disney films “Whiteness is simultaneously universalized through the privileged representation of dominant middle-class social relations, values, and linguistic practices.”¹¹² All of these scholars whether writing directly or indirectly about Disney films have enriched our understanding of “Othering” in media, and how the Disney Studio subtly universalized whiteness in the three films of focus in this study.

¹¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), n.p..

¹¹¹ Giroux and Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared*, 111.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

World War II serves as the backdrop connecting Walt Disney and the 1941 studio strike with the content of films *The Reluctant Dragon*, *Saludos Amigos*, and *The Three Caballeros*. Although a dearth of information exists on Walt's personal politics, clearly the strike and the politically charged climate at the time impacted Walt's perception of what happened at the studio and how he conceived of what it meant to be "one hundred percent American." In essence, like all people in the Allied and Axis countries, WWII shaped Walt and his creative pursuits as a result.

Several volumes focus specifically on the impact of World War II and the emergence of cultural diplomacy efforts to influence public opinion, but Darlene J. Sadlier's *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II*, contributed most significantly to this study. Sadlier's work chronicled the creation of the *Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs* or CIAA and its leadership under Nelson A. Rockefeller. Critical to this study, Sadlier covered what motivated the U.S. Government to approach Walt Disney and the dynamics between the Disney Studio and its government benefactor. She argued the Nelson A. Rockefeller's leadership of the CIAA proved most consequential in Walt and the studio's participation in the South American project to produce *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*. Sadlier attributed the following quote to Rockefeller: "Of the three arms of psychological warfare – radio, news, and movies – the latter, from my point of view, has by far the greatest potentialities as it combines the impact of sight and sound ...[Film] is an industry that stands ready to produce the most potent instrument of war possessed by any nation in the world."¹¹³

¹¹³ Darlene Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press: 2012), 37.

Despite attempts to revise the history of Walt and the Walt Disney Company, the historiography surrounding these subjects remain vast and complex. Disney films are static primary sources produced by Walt and his studio, but our understandings and interpretations of those films continues evolving. We cannot expect that today's widely held social and political norms would have been reflected in films produced in the mid-twentieth century, and this study tries not to superimpose ideas from today on the films of yesterday.

However, we can confidently contextualize shared social and political norms of the period and juxtapose them with what Disney produced. By delving deeply into the history and interviews with Walt, what occurred in his personal and professional life, alongside the changing political landscape leading up to and during World War II. we can better understand what influenced his creative vision and how he communicated that on screen. Oftentimes the process works better in reverse, with the films offering more insight into the thoughts and ideas of Walt than his carefully curated interviews. In both cases, this study concentrates on pro-American and "Othering" agendas communicated in the films, and secondarily, what impact those ideas and visual representations rendered on Disney audiences.

Essay 3: Walt Disney's "Reluctant Dragon" and the 1941 Strike

The 1940s were a decade of tremendous economic, political, and social change in the United States. These years encompassed U.S. participation in World War II from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 to the U.S. dropping of atomic bomb in Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945. Dramatic social change occurred, both affirming and challenging White Americans' view of their privileged position in society from Japanese American internment camps to Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in Major League Baseball in 1947. Many scholars have noted that the end of World War II shepherded in a general shift towards liberalism and urbanism. Millions of Americans moved to the city to work in factories that supported the war effort. Women joined the workforce, and many rejected their original domestic arrangement. While many Americans doubled down on their populist notions of the merits of a simple, country life, they also witnessed a country rapidly leaving those days behind, something that caused great consternation among many Americans, especially those with small town roots.

Walt Disney (hereafter just Walt) also experienced tremendous personal and professional change during the 1940s, and described 1941 specifically, as "one of the toughest periods" of his life.¹¹⁴ Germany's 1939 invasion of Poland enveloped Europe into World War II, cutting three quarters of the studio's income.¹¹⁵ The U.S. economy continued sputtering, although defense spending made a difference by 1941. After the critical success of *Snow White* in 1938, the Disney brothers Walt and Roy invested heavily in the *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, and *Fantasia* productions the following years. They also built their dream studio in Burbank, California, a \$3.8 million dollar venture.¹¹⁶ "What appears to have happened is that in the first flush of big

¹¹⁴ *Walt and El Grupo*, Directed by Theodore Thomas. Los Angeles: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2008.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1968), 230.

success, Disney set aside his habitual, populist distrust of bankers and plunged ahead with a recklessness unprecedented even for him,” author David Schickel wrote.¹¹⁷ Walt and Roy’s financial decisions reflect the country’s general move away from small-town populist ideals during this decade; they turned out to be far from prescient.

This historical period marked an ideological shift for Walt, one in which he public distanced himself from the Communist ideals he attributed to the unionization that he believed caused a 1941 labor strike in his studio. In his few press engagements not explicitly covering his films, Walt underscored his commitment to American patriotic notions that appeared his films. This study asserts that a close read of the 1941 film *The Reluctant Dragon*, conceived and produced leading up to the Strike, offered a glimpse of how Walt conceived the studio culture and its cinematic representation to the world. It also foreshadowed his shifting political framework, and how he eventually “Othered” audiences in the subsequent films *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*. To fully appreciate how the 1941 studio strike influenced Walt’s political ideals and his creative endeavors, it is helpful to provide background on his early, formative experiences in the entertainment industry and the image of himself he promoted to the media.

Typically, the “story” of Walt for public consumption begins with Walt as a young man. In 1923, he went to Hollywood with forty dollars and a dream of a career in animation. This narrative about his relative poverty appears throughout interviews with and about Disney, a touchstone of his personal story that ties to the Horatio Alger myth of the country. The Walt Disney Family Museum notes, “Walt arrived in Hollywood with \$40 in his pocket and a coat

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

and a pair of trousers that didn't match."¹¹⁸ He and his brother, Roy, started "Disney Brothers Studios" out of their Uncle Robert's garage in Los Angeles. The brothers financed their first part live action part animated series, *Alice*, with 200 dollars Roy put aside from his military pension, a 500-dollar loan from their uncle Robert, and 2,500 dollars from their parents who mortgaged their house to back their sons. After 57 episodes of *Alice*, the Disney brothers shifted their studio to a larger space, calling themselves the "Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio."

Working with the same New York distributor, Charles Mintz, the Disney brothers inked an agreement for their first fully animated feature of what one Disney biographer characterized as a "floppy eared rabbit with a decidedly Mickey Mouse face," a character called Oswald.¹¹⁹ The Oswald cartoons utilized characters already featured in the *Alice* series, and after producing several popular episodes, Walt's New York producer informed him that contractually they owned the intellectual property to all of the characters. Walt walked away from the agreement deflated to learn the studio not only intended to underpay him for his work, but that all but one of his animators intended to defect from Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio to work for Mintz.¹²⁰

The impact of losing the rights to Oswald enhances this study's analysis of why Walt reacted so strongly to the 1941 strike in his studio. The situations bore a strong resemblance, both resulted in Walt's loss of creative and corporate control and ended with the unexpected departure of trusted studio employees. Scholars and journalists note that losing the rights to *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* and his animators proved a seminal moment for Walt Disney. Thirty-six years later a Walt Disney Company Executive relayed to journalist Bill Davidson of *Saturday Evening Post* that the loss of those rights haunted Walt and influenced his business approach:

¹¹⁸ "The Rocky Road to California," Walt Disney Family Museum, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.waltdisney.org/walt-disney>

¹¹⁹ Louise Krasniewicz, *Walt Disney: A Biography* (Oxford: Greenwood, 2010), 37.

¹²⁰ Krasniewicz, *Walt Disney*, 38.

“Everything Walt does today is conditioned by his past problems. When he makes one of his tough deals, he negotiates like he’s afraid someone might take another *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* away from him.”¹²¹ In 2006, Walt Disney Studios regained intellectual rights to *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*, forty years after Walt’s death.¹²²

The brothers rebounded from their loss. Walt hired and eventually married fellow animator Lillian Bounds while their reputation as a promising animation team grew. After the fateful business encounter with Mintz in New York, Bounds and Walt boarded a train headed west to California. “He was like a raging lion on the train coming home,” Lillian Disney said in an interview nearly three decades later. “All he could say, over and over, was that he’d never work for anyone again as long as he lived.”¹²³ This train ride became a significant moment in Walt Disney lore, chronicled by newspaper and magazine journalists and later biographers, much like the image of the young man arriving in Hollywood with forty dollars in his pocket.

Behind this story, however, exist clues to understanding how he behaved later including the 1941 strike at his studio. Indeed, Walt’s determination to “never work for anyone again as long as he lived” also translated to a distrust, paranoia even, of the loyalty of those who worked for him in the coming decades. After interviewing dozens of studio associates journalist Don Eddy concluded: “The commonest misconception about Disney, I believe, is that he is a sentimental softy . . . He knows what he’s doing every instant. And behind the shy façade is a tough realist who can and does fight like a wildcat when the occasion demands it, and as inflexible as an oak.”¹²⁴

¹²¹ Bill Davidson, “The Fantastic Walt Disney,” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 7, 1964.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *The American Magazine*, vol. 160, no. 2, August 1955 pp. 29, 110-15.

¹²⁴ Don Eddy, “The Amazing Secret of Walt Disney,” *The American Magazine*, 1955.

Although scholars often point to the 1941 strike as an ideological “turning point” for Walt, this shift for Walt began with the Oswald losses. The history of this incident pieced together with interviews about the resulting “birth” of Mickey Mouse show what real life experiences informed the creation of Walt’s most famous character. Mickey Mouse is not in any of the films analyzed in this study, but a “reading” of his character, as Burdick suggests below, renders insight into Walt’s own ideals and what he hoped to communicate in his films. Burdick wrote in “Practical Pigs and Other Instrumental Animals: “Walt’s creation of Mickey as a sort of savant illustrates his desires for his own capacities as a labor leader, as an ego ideal within the rising tide of industrialists, a reading that bears fruit, given Walt’s espoused political and economic disposition.”¹²⁵

This study argues that the 1941 studio strike and release of the film *The Reluctant Dragon* followed by Walt’s 1947 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) shows a clear trajectory of the film maker’s evolving political attitudes and perceptions, shifts that arguably began with his early loss of Oswald. Walt’s reaction to the studio strike revealed insecurities and his own evolving political leanings. Arguably, the studio strike not only brought these views to the forefront, but they also helped Walt formulate them.

Beforehand, if Walt maintained a vague Populist ideal of his America during the studio’s early years, the strike coupled with World War II pushed those views in a different direction, fueling Walt’s virulent anti-Communist, pro-American rhetoric of the 1940s and 1950s. Public pedagogy scholar Jake Burdick notes in his essay “Practical Pigs and Other Instrumental Animals: Public Pedagogies of Laborious Pleasure in Disney Productions:” “As every

¹²⁵ Burdick, “Practical Pigs and Other Instrumental Animals,” 51.

biographer of Walt Disney has noted, the Disney Studio (hereafter just studio) strike of 1941 was a turning point. It effectively destroyed the harmonious labor dream envisioned by Walt, culminating in his claims that it was the darkest point of his life, his involvement in a fist fight with a worker, and his open weeping at the workplace.”¹²⁶

The release of *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* (the studio put *Bambi* on hold while focusing fully on these works) saw little of the anticipated box office success due to the war and economic hardships in the United States, and the studio owed the bank roughly \$4.5 million.¹²⁷ Given the global economic and political atmosphere, their financial prospects appeared lacking. “I know the bank is nervous now about our indebtedness,” Roy penned to Walt in a March 1941, describing the studio’s financial situation on “very thin ice.”¹²⁸ Roy recommended the studio cut costs, including a 20 percent reduction in expenditures, closing Walt’s art school, and firing anyone who “can possibly be released without affecting the immediate work in progress.”¹²⁹

This loss of revenue and closure of the school dispirited Walt, who in interviews had described the studio as “more like a school than a business.”¹³⁰ Tightening the financial belt and making tough personnel decisions ran completely counter to previous ideas about the studio, perpetuated by the American press. “It’s a mad-house, that’s what it is,” wrote journalist Arthur Miller of the studio, “And such a nice, refreshing one in this congenitally nutty world.”¹³¹ Journalists and, to a certain extent Walt, framed the studio as a “democratic, collective, creative

¹²⁶ Burdick, Jake. “Practical Pigs and Other Instrumental Animals: Public Pedagogies of Laborious Pleasure in Disney Productions,” In *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie C. Garlen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 53.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 350.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Qtd in Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 167.

¹³¹ Ibid.

paradise,” as Watts described it. Walt, despite his controlling, micro-managing leadership style, affirmed these ideas to the press. "We all work together, no one of us any more important than the other," Walt told a newspaper.¹³²

The press’s eventual shift from the zany, creative “mad-house” descriptions of the studio to its factory-like “assembly line” proved stark. They may have also contributed to Walt’s own shifting internal perspectives on enterprise, leadership, and how he “Othered” in his films. In April 1940, desperate to raise capital, the studio offered the public stock options after the bank cut off their credit line. Walt always opposed such measures, fearing loss of creative control. Mentor, Henry Ford, already having experienced the process, provided little solace for Walt, telling him: “If you sell any part of an enterprise, you should sell it all.”¹³³ Walt revered Ford’s business acumen and accomplishments and some journalists often compared Walt Disney Productions and Ford Motors. *Fortune* magazine noted in 1934: “In Disney’s studio a twentieth-century miracle is achieved: by a system as truly of the machine age as Henry Ford’s plant at Dearborn, true art is produced.”¹³⁴

Although journalists often lauded the studio’s efficiency and organization, employees often found it less appealing. Even Ward Kimball, counted among “Disney’s Old Nine Men,” a group of Walt’s most trusted and loyal creative forces, questioned the studio’s output compared to industrial level production, remarking artists were decidedly not “factory workers. They're not putting fenders on Fords, or nuts on bolts, they're trying to do a good creative job,” Kimball emphasized.¹³⁵ Animators despised comparisons of their illustrations to new cars, although

¹³² Qtd in Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 168.

¹³³ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 247.

¹³⁴ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 167.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 228.

many confirmed the strenuous, almost factory-like working conditions. Marc Eliot, author of *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince*, described Walt's approach as unrelenting and the 1936 working environment segmented and pressure filled: "[T]he staff kept their socializing to a minimum, wary of the tightening grip of what some staffers now referred to as 'Waltitarianism,' fearing that a single misinterpreted word to anyone could result in immediate termination. Under these conditions, few friendships between animators developed at the studio, and even fewer relationships between men and women."¹³⁶

Far from a flourishing creative paradise, Walt instead promoted his studio as a factory as evidenced by an article he contributed to the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* where he noted: "Hundreds of young people were being trained and fitted into a machine for the manufacture of entertainment which had become bewilderingly complex. And this machine had been redesigned almost overnight from one for turning out short subjects into one aimed mainly at increased feature production."¹³⁷

Although his public rhetoric about the studio may have shifted abruptly, Disney's biographical information highlighted a consistent belief in firm organizational structures and factory-like efficiency. Even in 1928, Walt remained convinced that issues related to the production of *Steamboat Willie* related to management style: "The basis of a good organization" Walt wrote Roy, depended upon "systematizing everything."¹³⁸

Descriptions of the studio as an efficient, factory-like organization led more journalists to compare Disney and Ford, both American archetypal self-made millionaires. *Time* featured Walt

¹³⁶ Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 90.

¹³⁷ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 170.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

on the cover describing him as a “genuine hand-hewn American original . . . a grassroots genius in the native tradition of Thomas A. Edison and Henry Ford.”¹³⁹ Walt never outright refuted these comparisons or publicly objected to them, and clearly inherited his father’s reverence for Ford.¹⁴⁰ Although products of different eras, Disney and Ford, as Watt’s characterized them “emerged from a nineteenth-century tradition of self-made success and entrepreneurship and harbored a nostalgic attitude toward the past.”¹⁴¹ Other sources suggest that Disney and Ford had less in common personally but shared “another type of American cultural icon, the systems builder.”¹⁴²

Many scholars have weighed in on the subject. Disney historian Kevin Shortleeve suggested that comparisons went beyond their affinities for control and efficiency and could be interpreted as ideological: “as both men were anti-Semitic and accused of being overly friendly to the Nazi party. Both resisted unionization.”¹⁴³ Walt’s alleged anti-Semitism allowed him to become increasingly tied in the American imagination to a well-known anti-Semitic that affected his evolution of the “Other.” Unlike anti-Semitism, the 1941 studio strike revealed Walt’s shared aversion to unionization with Ford and many others of that generation.

These comparisons made by both journalists and historians help us understand how public perception of the similarities between Disney and Ford may have actually reinforced these affinities in real life. Evidenced in how Walt promoted the studio in *The Reluctant Dragon*, and why Walt eventually characterized the studio strike as an insult to “democracy,” insinuating he

¹³⁹ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 350.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 178.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Eric Smoodin, *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

¹⁴³ Shortleeve, “Why Disney Scares Us,” 9.

fought a separate “war” at home.¹⁴⁴ Shortsleeve argued: “In the 1930s, Disney was not only appreciated as a provider of utopian and escapist fantasy, but also represented the success of a strong-armed, production-oriented enterprise.”¹⁴⁵ Several sources confirm Walt’s perception of himself and the studio partially explained why the strike incensed him.

Following the successful release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, many employees experienced disappointment in 1939 after moving into the new Burbank studios. Far from the “vaguely promised” bonuses, Walt followed through with a separate promise to Roy, pursuing aggressive layoffs.¹⁴⁶ The new studio boasted new equipment and air conditioning, but the compartmentalized, sprawling layout discouraged creative cross-pollination. One employee manned the entrance to each section to clarify the destination and business of every incoming employee departing his designated position for another office. Disparity in compensation furthered discontent, with an animator earning close to \$400 a week and an assistant just \$25. Animator Kimball noted: “Two people would have done the same work for the same number of years . . . and one would be making twice as much as the other.”¹⁴⁷

These working conditions and growing discontent led toward unionization that initially barely ruffled feathers and represented a group of employees willing to “smooth [] things over in a manner favorable to management.”¹⁴⁸ Employees who remained dissatisfied with this arrangement began talks with the Screen Cartoonists Guild (SCG), an organization far more militant toward studio leadership. Soon, hundreds of picketers stood outside Walt Disney

¹⁴⁴ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 226.

¹⁴⁵ Kevin Shortsleeve, “The Wonderful World of the Depression,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 28, no. 1, (January 2004): 9.

¹⁴⁶ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 250.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 205.

¹⁴⁸ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 251.

Productions. A rough estimate by the SCG suggested 55% of employees joined the strike, but historians believe the Guild's leadership inflated the number.

The strike put employees into a difficult position and felt strange for the public. Many viewing the studio's features in major cities waded through strikers at their local cinema. Journalist Philip Hartung wrote in the magazine *Commonweal* of the "public's uneasiness over this whole affair . . . we want to love the creator of Mickey Mouse and not have the reluctant Disney be the oppressing plant owner."¹⁴⁹

Walt responded quickly, approaching the studio attorney, Gunther Lessing "who convinced him that the weak young union could not hold out long if he took an intransigent line," concluded Schickel.¹⁵⁰ Although these labor activities and strikes occurred commonly during this period, the unique dynamic between Walt and his employees made the Disney Strike stand out. Despite the studio's cultural transformation, many employees remained fiercely loyal to their leader, and even those who joined the Guild refused to believe Walt shaped the studio's reaction to the Strike. "What [Walt] did not understand was that many of his employees were locked into his psychological condition with him," Shickel argues. "If he was the father figure, they were, in fact, his spiritual sons."¹⁵¹ One animator observed: "Daddy wouldn't talk to us. We had the feeling that if he really listened to us, the dream of the paradise for artists would have come true."¹⁵²

Walt had reinforced this perception before the strike, referring to his animators as his "boys." Another one remarked about Walt following the strike: "We were disappointed in him, in the promise of the big happy studio where everyone would be taken care of that was simply

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 214.

¹⁵⁰ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 256.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

not working out in reality.”¹⁵³ In an interview earlier in the year in *Ladies Home Journal*, he emphasized that employees referred to Walt on a first-name basis. “This easy camaraderie – this complete lack of red tape, titles, dignity – goes a long way to explain the success of Walt Disney Productions, Inc,” the journalist gushed.¹⁵⁴ Later that year, however, Walt contradicted this journalist’s narrative, telling his employees that getting too close to them threatened to reward the “apple polishers” instead of the “conscientious, hard-working individual[s].”¹⁵⁵

Desperate for resolution, Walt attempted to “appeal[] to the missionary zeal of his employees” in a series of extended town-hall style discussions.¹⁵⁶ In two three-hour speeches Walt described all the financial measures he and Roy pursued to keep employees during the studio’s “financial crisis,” emphasizing that he voluntarily agreed to a 75 percent pay cut and vehemently denied that a “class system” existed in the workplace.¹⁵⁷ He avoided mentioning unions throughout. “Don’t forget this – it’s the law of the universe that the strong shall survive and the weak must fall by the way,” Walt emphasized, adding: “I don’t give a damn what idealistic plan is cooked up, nothing can change that.”¹⁵⁸

The picketers’ creativity, another distinguishing aspect of the Strike, utilized their artistic talents by creating elaborate displays that parodied the studio’s films and Walt, catching reporters’ attention. “Disney artists were not run-of-the-mill industrial workers, of course, and comic inventiveness became the order of the day,” Watts wrote.¹⁵⁹ Thus, historians have argued that the Strike affected Walt on a personal level as the artists freely used their creative talent, nurtured, and developed at the studio, to mock him and the films. The newly-released film *The*

¹⁵³ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 256.

¹⁵⁴ “Mr. and Mrs. Disney,” *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1941.

¹⁵⁵ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 360.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 209.

Reluctant Dragon inspired a group of strikers to form a long line with a cartoon head of Walt at the front, snaking around as the “Reluctant Disney.”

While Walt’s biographers and historians have explored how readily he dismissed the strikers as Communist influenced, few have explored how Walt himself contributed to that false sense of security and social welfare in his studio. During the course of Walt’s “impassioned plea” to his employees at the height of the strike, one employee recounted that he “actually choked with tears as he reminded everyone how he felt like a father toward them and that he considered each his own son.”¹⁶⁰ Years after the strike, one employee reflected that he felt strongly that Walt was not a “bad” person, but “he was poorly advised and he was naive as far as politics and all related subjects were concerned.”¹⁶¹ Unable to acknowledge Walt’s role in the studio’s stance, or at the very least complicity, Lessing became the target of much of the strikers’ vitriol, with some picketers parodying the French Revolution and pretending to repeatedly behead a dummy fashioned after the attorney.

Like the public shift from the studio as a bastion of creative freedom to an efficient factory, Walt’s attitude toward the strikers similarly turned as he began to reference his own “son[s]” or “boys” who decided to strike against him as “Communists.” Significantly, by labeling the strikers as “Communists” Walt effectively “Othered” them. During the 1920s to 1930s, anti-Communist ideas gained prominence with the emergence of European fascist governments. The “Communist” label carried its own “Othering” and had done so since anti-Communist ideas spread during the First Red Scare. Historian Alastair Bonnett wrote in his essay “Communists like us: Ethnicized modernity and the idea of ‘the West’ in the Soviet

¹⁶⁰ Eliot, *Walt Disney*, 150.

¹⁶¹ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 255.

Union” that the “orientalization of the USSR by Western commentators reflected both an identification of Asia and communism as sharing the same despotic characteristics and a long standing tradition of racial suspicion towards Russia.”¹⁶² Put simply, more than mere political “Othering,” by labeling a striker a “Communist” Walt actively participated in a form of what Bonnett identified as “ethnic othering of communism through its representation as an Asian contamination of Western tradition.”¹⁶³

How Walt understood and subsequently framed of the 1941 studio strike for the House Committee on Un-American Activities highlighted this viewpoint. Little evidence suggests that Walt’s understanding of the Strike differed from how he presented it to the public and his employees. Walt noted to a friend that Communists took over his studio and “his boys” were the ultimate victims of their “dirty, foul means.”¹⁶⁴ His letters indicated his awareness of employee grievances, but he attributed the turmoil to Communist inspiration. Toward the end of the strike, Walt tried convincing his employees in a July 1941 letter that they were a part of a “Communist agitation.”¹⁶⁵ Marc Eliot’s *Walt Disney: Hollywood’s Dark Prince* was one of the only biographies that republished a series of leaflets released in the studio during the strike. Although penned anonymously as the “Committee of 21,” many employees believed the mysterious committee consisted of, among others: Gunther Lessing, Walt, and Roy. A leaflet posted on May 23, 1941, read:

¹⁶² Alastair Bonnett, “Communists like us: Ethnicized modernity and the idea of ‘the West’ in the Soviet Union,” *Ethnicities*, 2, no. 4 (December 2002), 437. [check how to capitalize journal articles]

¹⁶³ Bonnet, “Communists like us,” 435.

¹⁶⁴ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 226.

¹⁶⁵ Eliot, *Walt Disney*, 158.

*Your Leadership STINKS. Do not allow your American courage to be further DUPED with the paralyzing poisons of the RED SPIDERS . . . The freedoms of Democracy must not be misused by Subversionists to destroy our Democracy.*¹⁶⁶

The language used in this leaflet attempted to first identify the studio strikers as Communists and enemies of democracy, and second, to “Other” them using the symbolism of Red and “spider” reference. Historian John Dower’s seminal work *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* delves into similar uses of the insect, and even “vermin” label applied to the Japanese during World War II and the American necessity to “exterminate” them. “You know that we have to exterminate these vermin if we and our families are to live . . . We must exterminate the Japanese,” he quoted an Allied Power General in 1943, just two years after this leaflet posted.¹⁶⁷

The “Othering” of the Communists also stands out for being partly racial but also cultural, an attitude reflected among middle America at the time, mainly those in the heartland and outside major cities like NYC. The “Committee of 21” focused on continuing to compare the studio employees to Communists, rather than Fascists, even following the June 1941 German attack on the Soviet Union. Both the “Committee of 21” and Walt never deviated from their Communist comparisons, content to follow the same line of attack used against unionism for two decades including those employed by Ford.

The assaults continued throughout the strike. A subsequent leaflet issued by the same “Committee of 21” stated their case more boldly:

We are not willing to report on what you have been and saying until you yourself answer the question of your own conscience: AM I A LOYAL AMERICAN OR A LOYAL DUPE. The COMMITTEE OF 21 holds this conviction that anyone who knows the facts and fails

¹⁶⁶ Qtd in Ibid, 152.

¹⁶⁷ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 71.

*to speak out in this hour of national emergency must be judged as equally guilty with those who are seeking the destruction of DEMOCRACY.*¹⁶⁸

This perhaps more than any other piece of evidence suggests efforts to directly connect the studio strike activity with “this hour of national emergency” that became World War II. Although it remains impossible to definitively connect Walt to the “Committee of 21,” the political language that Walt employed to describe the strike echoes the sentiments in these messages. These leaflets underscored being a “loyal American” as the antidote to communism, an idea Walt utilized six years later in his HUAC testimony. Chief Investigator, Robert E. Stripling, inquired if Walt felt that the 1941 strike at his studio had been “instituted by members of the Communist Party to serve their purposes?”¹⁶⁹

“I definitely feel it was a Communist group trying to take over my artists and they did take them over,” Walt answered.¹⁷⁰

He also confirmed connections between the strike activities and Communist influence, telling the committee he blamed Herbert Sorrell, an American labor leader who specialized in Hollywood unions. Sorrell eventually represented SCG, and Walt openly accused Sorrell of being a Communist “because of all the things that I had heard and having seen his name appearing on a number of Commie front things.”¹⁷¹ Walt suggested later in his testimony that Sorrell all but confirmed his Communist connections, telling Walt that “he used [Communist] money” to finance a strike in 1937.¹⁷² Walt substantiated his testimony by citing several “Commie front” publications that “smeared” him and put him on the “unfair list,” including *The*

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Qtd. In Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Qtd. In Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 38.

¹⁷² Ibid. 39.

People's World, *The Daily Worker*, and *PM* magazine out of New York.¹⁷³ Sorrell terrorized the studio, he emphasized, threatening to turn his enterprise into a “Dustbowl” if he didn’t recognize the SCG.¹⁷⁴

Private correspondence, press coverage, and his eventual HUAC testimony suggested that Walt eventually found a “more positive direction” to channel his energies from the strike. If “his boys” fell victim to the Communists, Walt used the public crisis to promote himself as a lover of democracy and the true American both privately and in studio press coverage. “I was shocked into the realization that the Democracy which, as a kid in 1918, I went to fight for in France, was gone,” Walt wrote towards the end of the Strike in 1941 to Westbrook Pegler, a personal confidant and, perhaps not coincidentally, a prominent journalist. “To me, the real fight for Democracy is right here at home. Guts and not guns will win it . . . My eyes are open and I only hope that other people throughout the country, like myself, will be aroused to an understanding of what is happening to our government today ... I have capitulated but, believe me, I'm not licked. I'm incensed.”¹⁷⁵ A 1942 long form piece on the studios in *Life* described the studio working environment as “peculiarly democratic” creating films that “crusade for the kind of world where a free, popular art, using man's unlimited imagination, can flourish – where everyone has some chance to laugh and learn.”¹⁷⁶

Walt and his public relations team readily understood if the strike represented communism, then naturally the Walt Disney Productions should represent democratic ideals, a thoroughly American enterprise. “Disney poses as democratic to mask his despotic tendencies,” wrote Shortsleeve in the essay “The Wonderful World of the Depression.”¹⁷⁷ Within studio

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 359.

¹⁷⁵ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 225.

¹⁷⁶ “Walt Disney Goes to War,” *Life*, August 31, 1942.

¹⁷⁷ Shortsleeve, “The Wonderful World of the Depression,” 24.

walls, however, Walt personally acknowledged the inability for the studio to be democratic: “In the early days I tried to be very democratic,” he told his employees in a town hall meeting during the strike. “It’s in my nature to be democratic . . . However, I realized at that time that it was very dangerous and unfair to the organization as a whole for me to get too close to everybody.”¹⁷⁸

Walt mentioned the word “elections” six separate times during his HUAC testimony in 1947, describing how Sorrell “tried to take over” his artists. Walt expressed concern when his artists told him Sorrell opposed a majority support among the employees. Walt said he “demanded an election” to resolve the loyalties issue, emphasizing his approach as “what the law had set up” through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Walt said that Sorrell “laughed” at him, threatening to “use the Labor Board as it suited his purposes.”¹⁷⁹ No one knows why the election at the studio failed to occur, but Walt successfully portraying himself as a proponent of “elections,” thus presenting himself as representing democracy and Sorrell communism. The United States may not have officially entered World War II, but a microcosm of it had entered Walt Disney Productions.

Toward the end of the testimony, a committee member asked Walt about his “personal opinion” as to whether the Communist Party should be considered a political party. “I believe it is an un-American thing,” he told the committee and “that [the Communists] are able to get into these unions, take them over, and represent to the world that a group of people that are in my plant, that I know are good, one-hundred-percent Americans...are represented to the world as supporting all of those ideologies.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Qtd in Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 18

¹⁷⁹ Qtd. in Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 37.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

When asked towards the end of the testimony if there were “any grievances or labor troubles whatsoever at [his] plant,” Walt stated plainly that “the only real grievance was between Sorrell and the boys within my plant, they demanding an election, and they never got it.”¹⁸¹ Alternative accounts, such as Marc Eliot’s *Walt Disney: Hollywood’s Dark Prince* suggested, in contrast to his testimony, that Walt held up the entire process as he refused “to believe his animators had actually signed [Sorrell’s] the cards themselves . . . [and] requested a one-day delay and used the time to call a last-chance meeting with his entire staff.”¹⁸² Bill Littlejohn, a leader in the studio strike, told newspapers Walt’s called for an election with “the purpose of beclouding issues involved in the strike.”¹⁸³

There are many other ways to interpret the studio strike, but Walt consistently promoted it as Communist inspired. This was one of the many ironies of Walt’s testimony. If Disney employees had not felt fully betrayed by Walt, his testimony suggested the employees had no legitimate labor grievances other than being denied an election because of Sorrell, and that they were all susceptible to the brainwashing and manipulation of Communists. Although Walt assured the committee that at present “everybody at [his] studio is one-hundred-percent American,” his testimony suggested that anyone involved with the Strike was, ostensibly, operating under Communist influence.¹⁸⁴

This narrative on the Communist influence behind the strike served two purposes: it provided him psychological and political distance from the events. If “his boys” were victims, Walt was too. Perhaps Shickel’s assessment of Walt’s employees being locked into a “psychological condition” with him, equally applied to Walt. He could not conceive of a studio

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Eliot, *Walt Disney*, 149.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 154.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

strike solely motivated by dissatisfaction and inequality, and yet, ample evidence supported this notion, even if the strike had political forces greater than the studio. “The only explanation that made sense was that they...were Communists or Communist sympathizers bent on destroying Walt Disney. ‘Commie sons-of-bitches’ was how Walt put it,” wrote Gabler.¹⁸⁵ Several accounts confirm an altercation with animator and striker, Arthur Babbitt, at the entrance to the studio with Walt having pictures taken of the crowds. He pinned them up in his office and reviewed them with Roy and Lessing, discussing each and every face he could identify and his disappointment in their participation or elation at being able to possibly fire them. Simply dismissing the studio issues as the product of Communist influence allowed Walt to depersonalize the strike.

The Communist narrative satisfied the U.S. Government’s desire to emphasize Communist influence in Hollywood, especially in the postwar era. When Walt showed the photos to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, they told him the strikers were “professional instigators,” further infuriating Walt and underscoring this activity had no correlation with the actual studio working environment. In this way, the strike also created a symbiotic relationship between Walt and the U.S. Government that played out in the future.

Gabler and other biographers and historians emphasize how the strike deeply wounded Walt, but they ignore how these events possibly contributed to his ideological shift. Walt never comprehended how his “boys” could “let him down,” as animator Kimball described it.¹⁸⁶ From his point of view, he had shown overwhelming generosity to his staff, working to keep everyone on the payroll through the Depression and maintaining, relative to other animation studios, adequate, if not superior working conditions.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 366.

Walt's indignance surrounding his staff's grievances provides context for how to understand and analyze the contents of film *The Reluctant Dragon*. The release of *The Reluctant Dragon* coincided with the beginning of the 1941 studio strike. What at first watch appears to a combined animated and live action, vaguely documentary film about the studio, can, is at closer read, a direct response to many of the criticisms raised in the preceding strike. *The Reluctant Dragon* serves as a primary document showing how Walt Disney wished to depict his studio at a critical moment in the company's evolution with the strike and leading into the war. The strike also marked a political turning point for Disney, a personal ideological shift reflected in his subsequent films and political activities. Although there are no overtly political themes in the movie, several aspects of the framing of the organizational structures in the film infer corresponding political structures. *The Reluctant Dragon* remains dismissed and largely unexamined by historians who called it a "hastily conceived promotional effort" to bring in money quickly at a low production cost compared to feature length animated films.¹⁸⁷ Even Disney employees at the time of production considered the film "distinctly un-Disneylike" with its absence of fairy tale themes, careful storyline consideration, and polished animation.¹⁸⁸

Instead, *The Reluctant Dragon* shows the image of the creator of Walt Disney Productions wanted to show the world at a pivotal historic moment in his creative career. It also serves as evidence of Walt's necessity to show it and increase awareness of the precariousness of its reputation and juxtaposition with reality. "*The Reluctant Dragon*, a minor, impersonal combination live-action-animated production," Eliot wrote, "offered a highly controlled peek behind the front gates of the Disney studio."¹⁸⁹ When a staff member suggested that the film

¹⁸⁷ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 255.

¹⁸⁸ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 335.

¹⁸⁹ Eliot, *Walt Disney*, 150.

should present the magic behind animation in an unnamed studio, Walt offered his studio specifically: “I don’t think you should have *any* studio,” Walt told the employee. “I think it should be this studio. This studio is known all over the world . . . There is audience value in showing this plant in operation if you properly present it.”¹⁹⁰ “Properly present[ing]” the studio translated to providing the public with a fictionalized version of the Burbank reality, one interpreted as a historical cinematic representation of how Walt wished the studios could be and his cognizance of the changing studio culture.

The Reluctant Dragon did not “Other” in the traditional sense that we often conceive of “Othering.” The film contained no clear villains, racist depictions, or characters with exaggerated accents or physical features. The film “Othered” more subtly, addressing an assumed audience for the film, namely white, upper to middle class Americans, a prototype Walt considered to fall under the category of “one hundred percent American.”¹⁹¹

The fictional world of *The Reluctant Dragon*, much like Disneyland’s Main Street USA, “Others” by exclusion. For instance, people of color never appeared or even existed at the studio. Although difficult to obtain information on the studio’s employment of people of color during the making of *The Reluctant Dragon*, as early as mid-1950s the studio welcomed half a dozen black American animators to its ranks, including one of studio’s longest serving animators, Floyd Norman.¹⁹² It is reasonable to conclude that if black animators began working at the highest rank at the studio in the 1950s, the studio employed other people of color at lower ranks in the years preceding. Significantly, there is new research available noting the presence

¹⁹⁰ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 335.

¹⁹¹ Qtd. in Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 37.

¹⁹² Noor Wazwaz, “At 81, Disney’s First African-American Animator Is Still in The Studio,” *NPR*, April 26, 2016.

of Japanese American artists within the studio, including animators Iwao Takamoto, Bennie Nobori, Bob Kuwahara and Chris Ishii.¹⁹³ All four animators worked at the Studio during the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁹⁴ However, none of artists of color appear in *The Reluctant Dragon*.

However, aspects of this “Othering” paralleled widespread practices in media at this time. People of color existed rarely in popular media representations, such as some of the period’s most popular programs including “Howdy Doody” and “Hopalong Cassidy.” But important exceptions existed, such as the “The Ed Sullivan Show” which featured many people of color, including performers such as Bo-Diddley, Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Bill “Bojangles” Robinson. It is important to note that while these performers may have made repeat appearance, they were always guests on the show and never permanent cast members.

Discontentment and disagreement also did not exist at the Disney studio portrayed in *The Reluctant Dragon*. In the film, every employee cheerily completed their work (and assumedly received a satisfactory compensation). It was fantasy as dissatisfaction over salary compensation as well as wage gaps between workers fueled the studio strike. Filmmakers portrayed the studio environment as so fun that it did not resemble a work setting, but more of a collegial atmosphere. It is unimaginable for viewers to comprehend how the fictional presentation of the studio contrasted with the reports of the working conditions that caused the studio strike. Like *Main Street USA*, the film effectively edited out and rewrote the most unsavory aspects of the history of the studio to create a white-washed, saccharine depiction matching Walt’s fictional public representation. In other words, “Othering” by erasure.

¹⁹³ “Discover the Pioneering Japanese-American Animation Artists of the Golden Age,” Cartoon Brew, last modified may 26, 2023, <https://www.cartoonbrew.com/classic/japanese-american-animation-artists-of-the-golden-age-9375.html>

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

The film's plot revolved around the protagonist Robert Benchley (referred to as Mr. Benchley for most of the film), played by the radio comedian of the same name, a nondescript, white middle to upper class Californian, whose wife pushed him to pitch Walt Disney the story of his nephew's children's book, *The Reluctant Dragon*, by Kenneth Grahame.

Overall, the film presents an accessible Walt who, to Benchley's complete disbelief, agrees to meet him (a complete stranger) to discuss the cinematic possibilities of the book. In the meeting with "Walt," Benchley stumbles into various offices in the studio. Congenial workers greeted him and showed their work and the animation process. Over the course of the film, a decidedly skeptical Benchley becomes a Disney believer.

The film opens with Mrs. Benchley, played by Nana Bryant, sitting next to a pool, and reading the book aloud. She turns to her husband: "Robert, I have an idea, why don't you sell this story to Walt Disney? I'm sure if you went to his studio and suggested it to him, he'd jump at it."

"Me suggest a story to *Walt Disney*?" gasps Mr. Benchley, who lounges in a pool and shoots floating ducks with his nephew's toy gun. "Why, I hardly know him . . . he can't listen to every crackpot with a wild idea!" he says incredulously to his wife.

"They're always open to new ideas," the wife assures him, cementing perhaps one of the film's most fictional premises along with the story of the dragon itself, that the studio is a dynamic organization open to feedback and new ideas. The film characterizes Walt as an affable creative director completely accessible to the public. "The thing we should play up throughout the entire picture," Walt wrote in a memorandum to one of the film's screenwriters, Al Perkins, during the creation of the film, "is that the gang generally have a good time."¹⁹⁵ This perception

¹⁹⁵ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 335.

corresponded with the studio's public perceptions in media coverage leading up to this period, with glowing pieces such as Paul Hollister's 1940 essay, "Walt Disney: Genius at Work." Hollister described the new Burbank studio as "severely gay as a World's Fair model, as immaculate as a hospital, and as functional as a research scientist's dream laboratory."¹⁹⁶ These reports belied the reality of the staff's widespread discontentment with the working practices, conditions, and wages.

Benchley initially rejected his wife's suggestion that Walt would accept a meeting with an outsider. "It's a wild goose chase, that's what it is," Mr. Benchley emphasizes, but his wife insisted on driving out to the Burbank studio to meet with Walt personally. "Don't imagine he's out here in the first place."

"Where else would he be?" Mrs. Benchley asks her husband matter-of-factly.

"You know these movie producers," Mr. Benchley says, "New York, Saratoga, Palm Beach" as the screenwriters went to great lengths to differentiate Walt from other studio executives that led to Benchley finishing "Hollywood."

Despite not having a previously scheduled appointment and being a stranger, Mr. Benchley immediately secures a meeting with "Walt," as his employees refer to him familiarly. Almost immediately after, Benchley unexpectedly obtains the appointment with "Walt" and the entire campus full of hundreds of workers seem magically aware of Benchley's presence and purpose at the studio. When he strays from his studio chaperoned tour, Benchley literally trips and falls into "Art Class" where he follows an attractive, robed model.

The fallacies begin to pile up. At this point, Walt's aforementioned art school had been closed from budgeting restraints. This scene and facet of the studio was entirely fictional, and its

¹⁹⁶ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 186.

inclusion in the film after cost cutting measures likely purposeful to create a fantasy like Disney like to sell. The closing of “Walt’s cherished art school” had been a particularly sore point in the variety of belt tightening measures recommended by Roy prior to the film.¹⁹⁷

As the scene unfolds, the teacher asks: “You’re Robert Benchley, aren’t you?” Both to his dismay and delight, the drawing “model” is a large elephant in a birthday cap. Throughout the film, the directors create a sense of communal knowledge among the studio employees, like a shared brain. It directly contrasted to interviews with employees who complained specifically about the compartmentalized nature of the Burbank studio.

Many have highlighted the myth portrayed in the film. Schickel described the layout and protocol at the Burbank studio: “the new productions units were isolated from one another, and at the entrance to each group of offices sat a young lady whose duty was to ask the destination and mission of anyone desiring to leave his work area to visit another.”¹⁹⁸ *The Reluctant Dragon* representation of the studio presents it as a free flowing, collegial atmosphere, a youthful almost university like campus full of excitement, curiosity, camaraderie, and fun clearly failed to connect with reality. Far from segmented as it actually was, Benchley moves seamlessly between sections, hiding from his chaperone, and basking in the presence of enthusiastic employees thrilled to show Benchley their work and how it fits into the bigger picture of the studio.

Unsurprisingly, Walt wanted to portray a positive image of the studio fulfilling public the curiosity. Of course, the employees portrayed were cheerful and the cinematic representation of the studio never approximated reality. This representation, however, purposefully, and painstakingly emphasized unreal aspects of the studio that undergirded the employee discontent.

¹⁹⁷ Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 350.

¹⁹⁸ Schickel, *Walt Disney*, 249.

There was no free flow of physical movement, information, and access to Walt. That the studio released this film with such a representation precisely when employees picketed the studio campus to protest those issues shows Walt's level of creative control and capacity to figuratively focus his camera lens to create the fictional world he wished existed.

Benchley's uniformed chaperone, Humphrey, reinforces these themes. Bespectacled, serious, hair slicked back, and ornery, Humphrey serves as a foil and accentuated the artistic, democratic nature of the Disney employees. Serving under the studio's "Traffic" department, Humphrey delivered Benchley to "Mr. Disney." Humphrey is the only character that refers to Walt in this manner, underlining his outsider status and exclusion from the studio culture and community. Humphrey robotically repeats statistics about the physical attributes of the campus from a small notepad, telling Benchley he is on "51 acres of land . . . that contains cobalt and gypsum." Benchley spends the entirety of the film hiding in the offices of the other employees who want to avoid Humphrey.

Humphrey's character can be interpreted in several ways. On one hand, he reinforces structure onto Benchley's visit. Everyone else has endless time to familiarize Benchley with their work while Humphrey remains preoccupied with delivering Benchley as quickly and efficiently as possible to "Mr. Disney's" office. Humphrey's character can also be interpreted in a larger political context, a character, albeit benevolent, who nonetheless evokes Nazi-like mannerisms and efficiencies. Humphrey wears a Mickey Mouse patch on his left arm where the Nazis wore the swastika. In 1948, Walt even wrote the following of Mickey Mouse and World War II: "Hitler was infuriated by him and thunderingly forbade his people to wear the then popular Mickey Mouse lapel button in place of the Swastika."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ "What Mickey Means to Me" Qtd in "Walt Disney Celebrates Mickey's Birthday," Mouse Planet, accessed July 14, 2021, https://www.mouseplanet.com/8168/Walt_Disney_Celebrates_Mickeys_Birthday

Humphrey's characters subtly suggest war time power looming the distance, but it is a power unable to outsmart or control Disney's cast of sweet, good-natured creatives. Humphrey salutes Benchley when he meets him and clenches his hands when listening to Benchley speak and marches stiffly through the studio. He is not a free thinker and rattles off memorized statistics and inane physical studio attributes such as the air conditioning units, seemingly completely oblivious to the activity surrounding him. At one point, a female employee passes the two and shakes her head pitifully at Humphrey, whose attention remained focused on his notepad and reciting inane facts about the studio. She seemed to sum up the collective opinion of Humphrey, an outsider but certainly no threat.

After a series of encounters with different offices, Benchley finally meets Walt. He sat in the middle of a group in the projection room wearing an emerald leisure suit, with an informal polo style shirt. He leans back in the seat, feet tucked under him casually. Not being at the center of the camera's frame, viewers almost miss that Walt is the boss. He appears in a sea of similarly dressed men and talked with an employee about a creative aspect of the upcoming production of *Bambi*.

Walt greets Humphrey by his first name when he sees him, reinforcing the intimacy of the studio. When Humphrey asks for Walt's signature to confirm Benchley's delivery, he looks surprised, like it is an unnecessary formality. Walt shrugs and signs the paper.

"Boys, this is Bob Benchley," Walt says to the group, immediately adopting a sense of familiarity.

Such a scene sought to depict Walt as an accessible, on site, down-to-earth, connected boss. Earlier that same year Walt stated to his employees in a town hall meeting that the perception that a "closed circle" existed in his studio was false, although he acknowledged there

was a group (likely the aforementioned Nine Old Men), with whom he spent more time, adding this caveat: “a lot of you can feel lucky that you don’t have too much contact with me.”

Addressing his disconnection with the employees Walt said this: “I realized . . . it was very dangerous and unfair to the organization as a whole for me to get too close to everybody . . . Some of them I might not recognize when I meet them, but I know them by name and reputation.”²⁰⁰

The sickly-sweet representation of *The Reluctant Dragon*’s tour of the Walt Disney Studios in Burbank juxtaposed with the realities of hundreds of employees picketing, provided a distinct political and social backdrop for the release of the film. The film reflected Walt’s awareness of the issues at the studio and his first attempt to skew the public’s perception of the studio, and by extension himself, through film. John Dower characterized movies meant to influence public opinion on World War II such as Frank Capra’s film documentary *Know Your Enemy – Japan* and written works such as *Read This and War is Won* as “middle register discourse(s) . . . ideological and overt, calculated and carefully edited, explicitly design for public consumption.”²⁰¹ And while the content of *The Reluctant Dragon* was not overtly political, it resembled many of the aspects of Dower’s description of the “middle register discourse” in its “calculated” and “carefully edited” version of the studio it presented, absolutely “explicitly design for public consumption.”

This close read of *The Reluctant Dragon* reveals not only Walt’s shifting political ideals in the wake of the 1941 studio strike, but also his realization of how his films could be realized as a “middle register discourse” and tool to influence the public. These examples from *The*

²⁰⁰ Qtd. in Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 18.

²⁰¹ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 27.

Reluctant Dragon illustrate that Walt knew exactly how to employ film as a “middle register discourse” to influence public opinion in the wake of the studio strike.

Following the release of *The Reluctant Dragon*, in summer of 1941, Walt Disney, his wife Lillian, and fifteen Studio employees traveled to South America. The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), President Theodore Delano Roosevelt’s newly formed agency to counter Axis power propaganda during World War II, approached Walt about traveling to the South American countries to reinforce “hemispheric unity” in the face of increasing German hostilities in Europe. The OCIAA's Motion Picture Division, a subsidiary of the OCIAA facilitated cultural diplomacy between the United States and nearby Latin neighbors, to form deeper bonds with nations increasingly influenced by Axis power ideology. The agency initially asked Walt to act as a goodwill ambassador for the United States, taking a trip to several South American countries, holding meetings with leaders, and engaging in press events.

“They first wanted me to go on a hand-shaking good will tour, and I said I didn’t go for that, I’m not a hand-shaker,” Walt recounted of the experience. So then they came back and said, ‘Well, you go down and make some films about these countries,’ and I said, “well, that’s my business, I can do that.”²⁰²

Ultimately, the OCIAA offered to fly Walt and studio employees for a six week stay in South America in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, and agreed to subsize \$50,000 for each resulting film and cover the travel expenses for the entire group. The agreement also included federal mediation for the ongoing studio strike.²⁰³ “All in all, it was a propitious offer – getting Disney away from the strike scene.....and giving him a new project to occupy his mind,” Shickel

²⁰² Merlock, *Walt Disney Conversations*, 93.

²⁰³ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 263

writes.²⁰⁴ The six-week period encompassing the studios trip to South America and its impact on Walt's creative output has received less attention from historians. The Disney Studio itself eventually released a documentary on the trip entitled, "Walt and El Grupo," a travelogue using footage shot by the group and the contents of letters penned by Walt's animators and creatives who accompanied him on the journey. It promoted the adventure aspect of the trip and only briefly acknowledged the background noise of the studios strike and the anguish, exhaustion, and frustration experienced by Walt at the time of the journey.

Following the trip, Walt planned to produce four films using material and ideas gathered during these travels. Ultimately, the State Department rejected this idea, arguing each film featuring a specific country had to be released exclusively in that country. Walt decided instead to produce *Saludos Amigos*, a feature length film combining live action and animation, *The Three Caballeros*, as well as a handful of smaller productions either featuring original content from the 16-millimeter film documenting the studio employees South American experience or film shorts utilizing characters developed in the feature length films. In all of these cinematic ventures, the studio had been given a tall order by the OCIAA. Create films using South American subject matter that flatter local audiences to cultivate stronger political and diplomatic ties with hemispheric neighbors.

Walt made that order even taller by insisting that the same films be released in the United States as well, requiring the content to resonate with two, arguably very different audiences. "When the office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs asked us to make *Saludos Amigos*, we had one purpose," Walt said in an interview, "to make a picture both Americas would like, so that, in the end, they would like one another better. We've all been thinking of the

²⁰⁴ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 264.

barriers between the Americas. But now, rather suddenly, we see that these things don't matter."²⁰⁵ Around this same time, Walt conducted a series of radio interviews in which he articulated his thoughts on "American culture" as it extended to South American neighbors. "Our other American neighbors are gay and charming, but they know the meaning of hard work and achievement," Walt told listeners in 1943. "[A] new and virile and unselfconscious American continental culture is on the way."²⁰⁶

Walt Othered South American audiences in his films in subtle ways that, while they have been noted by some historians, have never been sewn into the greater narrative of Walt's evolving ideas on what it meant to be "one-hundred-percent American."²⁰⁷ Indeed a surface read of both films finds their representations far from Othering, even smothering of the South American neighbors. The storylines poke fun at American tourist culture, emphasize the intriguing customs of the Latin American cultures, the local beauty of the flora, fauna, and people, and prominently feature local music and art. However, both films are framed from a decidedly American lens. They are films about American characters in South America, American characters who "travel" in the films to South America, like Donald Duck. Or South American characters who function as facsimiles of American characters in a local context, such as Goofy and the Argentine Goucho.²⁰⁸ Almost all the characters and storylines underscore American values in South American contexts.

²⁰⁵ Thomas, *Walt and El Grupo*, 2008.

²⁰⁶ Radio interview Qtd in Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 243.

²⁰⁷ Robert E. Stripling and H.A. Smith, "The Testimony of Walter E. Disney Before the House Committee of Un-American Activities," October 24, 1947.

²⁰⁸ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 246.

It is worth noting that all three films discussed in this study found major success at the box office, with warm receptions from audiences that might have rejected the films either in the middle of the studio strike in the case of *The Reluctant Dragon* or for their explicit propaganda goals with South American audiences for *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*. Follow on studies exploring how Walt employed many of the same “middle register discourse” tools in *The Reluctant Dragon* in *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* could further illustrate how Walt purposefully and deftly “Othered” many of his audiences while simultaneously ingratiating them, inspiring people of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds to accept this American, White, middle-class framework as their cinematic gaze.

Essay 4: Coordinates

Whatever time it was
It was local time, our time
What was foreign never occurred
Until we heard it here
Wasn't it true?
And didn't enough happen here?

- "Local Time," Stephen Dunn

Since my family and I move around the globe a lot, I have an exercise I do with my small children to remind them that wherever they move, they belong. It goes like this: we start with the idea that we live inside our bodies, our home address, city, state, country, and eventually continent (we've lived on three different ones so far!). It helps them learn broadly about geography and reminds them that wherever we move, the first coordinate never changes: they will always live inside their body and their concept of "self."

I wanted to provide a sense of stability in our transient lifestyle and to capitalize on the interest of already self-focused small children. Together, we study maps in the same way, locating all the people in our family and just how close or how far they live *from us*. The coordinates for how we view the world are always firmly placed where we are, *us* in relation to *others*. This approach is not so different from the order in which we teach history in many of our public schools. We teach our children about their own identity and work our way out to local history, American history, Western Civilization, and then World History.

The problem is by the time we are skipping from countries to continents we do not have the time or resources to educate our children profoundly on the people and places that are furthest from their own coordinates, and these are often the cultures and peoples with whom we fight our wars. Exploring what Michael Neiberg refers to in his essay "War and Society" as the "iterative symbiotic relationship between social and cultural systems and how those systems

experience war,” is helpful here.²⁰⁹ How can we create symbiotic relationships between how we think about ourselves, our education system, and the study of history and culture, to challenge our children beyond their coordinates? This is fundamentally a war and society question.

John Dower writes in *War Without Mercy* that to understand the nature of our wars we must “work constantly at correcting and re-creating the historical memory.”²¹⁰ I think we must do the same in reference to our own perspectives: correct and re-examine the nature of our personal, educational, and national viewpoint and how it influences how we interpret information and view others. Our “coordinates,” as I refer to them in this essay. Where does our background privilege us to keen insight others may not have, and where does it limit us, obscuring and distorting our thinking? How were we taught about historical events and how deeply did we reflect upon them?

In 2020, the White House formed a commission to promote what American President Donald Trump called “patriotic education.”²¹¹ By funding a grant through Executive Order, President Trump vowed to create a pro-American curriculum where “We will state the truth in full, without apology: We declare that the United States of America is the most just and exceptional Nation ever to exist on Earth.”²¹² The curriculum according to the administration will emphasize what they consider positive aspects of American history and to refute the idea of the United States as a “wicked and racist nation.”²¹³ This essay posits the opposite of this approach, suggesting that classroom narratives championing pro-American ideals not only do a

²⁰⁹ Michael Neiberg, “War and Society,” in *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History*, ed. Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

²¹⁰ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, ix.

²¹¹ “President Donald J. Trump is Protecting America’s Founding Ideals by Promoting Patriotic Education,” White House Archives, last modified April 27, 2023, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-protecting-americas-founding-ideals-promoting-patriotic-education/>

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Michael Crowley, “Trump Calls for ‘Patriotic Education’ to Defend American History from the Left, *The New York Times*, September 17, 2020.

disservice to our children in denying them the opportunity to learn an objective history, but sow the seeds for future wars.

In this course reflection paper, I examine the role of “self,” how it extends to national identity, and influences how we learn, frame history, and ultimately behave in war. I will use our course readings to support my argument that the more inclined we are to engage beyond our coordinates, self and nation centric ways of thinking, the more likely we are to be curious and empathic towards *others*. To do this, we need to think about history differently. Based on what I have learned in War and Society 500, I suggest small changes to how we conceive of and teach history. If the next generation understands the nature of their own coordinates and how they view others, they are likely to value the coordinates of others.

Although the books we read for War and Society 500 were nonfiction, historical studies, they did not follow a formula wherein the United States is the protagonist and the ultimate force of “good.” Initially, this bothered me. If you accused me in the beginning of War and Society 500 of harboring this naïve, grade school notion of American history and its benevolent global role, I would have denied it. But during our readings, I discovered I still nurtured this narrative on a subconscious level. As a Public Diplomacy Officer in the Foreign Service, I was accustomed to taking any story concerning U.S. Foreign Policy and pivoting to the positive with it, downplaying the negative aspects, and sticking to the pro-American talking points. When I am posted overseas, the history of the United States is a history I am constantly explaining, defending, and sometimes justifying. During War and Society 500 I discovered that my work encouraged me to see my country as an extension of myself, and my coordinates.

Swiss psychiatrist, C.G. Jung, once wrote, “Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” I believe this idea extends to books too, in my case: *Quagmire*, *Chechnya*, and *Wuhan, 1938*. Without America as protagonist, these books went completely beyond my coordinates. In *Quagmire*, the Americans were, at best, supporting actors, committing all the same sins of geography and politics of the French. In *Chechnya* and *Wuhan, 1938*, the Americans never fully entered the narrative. Though impacted peripherally by American politics, these histories of conflict and war belonged fully to the places and people they set out to explore. For someone with my training who is always searching for the American through-line and talking points, these were uncomfortable reads. They were also powerful initial clues that I needed to examine my own coordinates and how they impacted my approach as a student of history.

Mary Dudziak writes in *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences*: “Americans have a particular need to understand their role in history...the U.S. role in worldwide conflict makes it essential to unpack American thinking about wartime, and the way it affects the politics of war.”²¹⁴ I would challenge Dudziak’s assertion and suggest Americans’ “particular need to understand their role in history” does more harm than good, inherently suggesting the centrality of our narrative globally, and causing us to be less engaged with histories outside the framework of our country.²¹⁵

When did World War II begin? Our War and Society 500 class grappled with this and similar historical questions on where to place our time-based coordinates for how we understand history. At the individual level, the War “begins” at the moment the individual is taught it begins. Like most American children, long before I became a diplomat, I was a student in the

²¹⁴ Dudziak, Mary L. *War time: An idea, its history, its consequences* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

American public school system and instructed from an America-centric perspective. World War II, according to my teachers, began on December 7th, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Applying this logic, World War II potentially began at a different point for every country involved in the conflict.

This approach, unfortunately, encouraged me and my classmates to orient our compasses strictly to American coordinates. The subtext is that we don't become engaged with the history of a war until it directly impacts us. What does not fall within "our" World War II time is irrelevant to us historically. This is dangerous because it contributes to the idea of America as protagonist and the discomfort of engaging with historical texts that do not include the United States. Dudziak writes of a similar phenomenon surrounding World War II among historians: "The story extends beyond these dates, and scholars miss the war's impact when they exclude from consideration U.S. engagement with this global conflict prior to the events of December 7th, 1941, and after surrender documents were signed."²¹⁶ Even scholars are not immune approach to approaching history.

This self and nation centric perspective that we continue to propagate in our classrooms, does not lead to mutual understanding. They are history lessons forging a distorted historical memory that only includes us. Michael S. Neiberg writes about this mythmaking in his essay "War and Society": "Societies intentionally and unintentionally create constructed versions of past events that fit more easily and comfortably into national self-images or into contemporary circumstances... This 'collective memory' reveals itself in works of fiction, commemoration of the dead, and the writing of history."²¹⁷ As Americans we have been encouraged to think about

²¹⁶ Dudziak, *War time*, 36,

²¹⁷ Neiberg, *War and Society*, 54.

World War II in this limited time, a time that required extraordinary measures and horrific choices. If the bombs we dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, for instance, did not end World War II, what was their purpose? The dropping of the bombs and the American historical narrative of the “end” of the war, are inextricably tied in historical memory.

Our self and nation centric perspectives at their extreme present repercussions far beyond the ramifications of how we conceptualize ourselves and our connectedness with others in a classroom. These biases have the potential to influence discriminatory and racist policies that change the character of our military to alter landscapes, destroy artifacts, and annihilate those perceived as too far outside our cultural coordinates. Our ideas about our identity and our place in it impacts our war behavior, informing how, who, and what we choose to kill and protect.

The history of the destruction of certain cultural artifacts and architecture serve as a powerful example of Americans’ desire to treasure what is sacred and familiar to us and wantonly destroy what is culturally unfamiliar in our warpath. In *The Destruction of Memory*, Robert Bevan attributes the U.S. “strategy of protection” of Italian architecture and artifacts in World War II, as Americans seeking to preserve their own cultural reflections overseas. “Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance,” President Dwight Eisenhower wrote to his commanders occupying Italy in 1943, “...a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped, and now in their old age illustrate, the growth of the civilization which is ours.”²¹⁸

Conversely, just two years later, acting American President Harry Truman ordered conducted the first air raids utilizing napalm against the Japanese in 1945. Far beyond the

²¹⁸ Bevan, Robert. *The Destruction of Memory* (Chicago: Reaktion Books, 2016), 118.

devastating loss of Japanese cultural artifacts and architecture, fifteen square miles of Tokyo and the civilians who inhabited it, were incinerated. Robert Neer, author *Napalm: An American Biography*, describes the damage of the attack as “apocalyptic....the center of one of the world’s largest cities lay in ashes.”²¹⁹ American General Henry H. Arnold congratulated General Curtis LeMay, informing him that “there were more casualties than in any other military action in the history of the world.”²²⁰ Clearly, from a self and nation centric standpoint, the absence of a shared “cultural inheritance” and perception of “other,” can result in destruction and annihilation in its most brutal, cruel forms. Dower attributes these ruthless military tactics on both sides of Pacific War, as evidence of “how stereotyped and often blatantly racist thinking contributed to...atrocious behavior, and the adoption of exterminationist policies.”²²¹

Have we created invisible fences in siloed historical memory? As Robert Bevan writes in *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, paraphrasing the famous Robert Frost poem: “Good fences do not make good neighbors; they foster defensiveness, fear and otherness.”²²² What if we taught students about war slightly differently? What if, for instance, we taught Americans that World War II begins not in 1941 when *we* are attacked, but in 1939 when Adolf Hitler orders German troops to invade Poland? The subtext of this is we become engaged with the history of a war when it impacts *others*. Beyond our coordinates as Americans, we are part of an interconnected global world.

We could take it a step further. Instead of dedicating years of students’ lives to the study of Western civilization, Europe, the Renaissance, we focus instead on the people, places, and

²¹⁹ Neer, Robert. *Napalm: An American Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 2015), 81.

²²⁰ Ibid, 82

²²¹ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, x.

²²² Bevan, *Destruction of Memory*, 227.

histories that have received the least attention. By placing the connection with the people and places like China, India, and Iran, of utmost importance, we challenge our students to learn and love that which lies far beyond their coordinates.

These small revisions, correcting and recreating a more global historical approach, focusing in on cultures with which we have the least connection and mutual understanding, is a radical reexamination of how and what cultural values we communicate to our children in the classroom. The lives of others beyond our borders are important. “War time” can and should be thought of more collectively. It is not as a timer that only goes off with the loss of American lives but an extension of human politics, as Carl Von Clausewitz characterizes it, “a continuation of State policy by other means.”²²³

This only underscores the importance of historians and educators to that process. They are instrumental in creating a collective narrative and memory, worthy of passing to the next generation. We should approach this process like the way Bevan approaches architectural preservation, taking what he calls the “honest course”: “There are no easy answers but, where possible, critical preservation and reconstruction remains the most honest course, with the cracks and fissures and layers of experience incorporated as reminders...of the people who lived among them and continue to do so.”²²⁴ A memory of World War II, as the “good war” and a story of national victory is useful for purposes of patriotism. But an objective, truthful, collective recollection of what really happened during the war, the kind that builds upon the “cracks and

²²³ Clausewitz, Carl von. 1997. *On War*. Translated by J. J. Graham. Wordsworth Classics of World Literature. Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, np.

²²⁴ Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory*, 247.

fissures,” promises something even greater, the opportunity to go beyond our coordinates, beyond the mythmaking, and to learn from our history, our mistakes, and preserve human life.

