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# Politics and the popular culture : an examination of the relationship between politics and film and music.

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POLITICS AND THE POPULAR CULTURE:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICS AND FILM  
AND MUSIC

A Thesis Presented

by

PATRICK J. KNIGHTLY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
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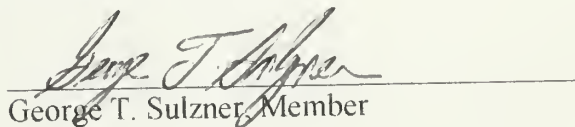
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Politics is about power, policy and people. Politicians are constantly trying to tap into what the public thinks through polls, surveys, focus groups and numerous other means. It is no surprise then that politicians and their campaigns look at and utilize popular culture. Popular culture, i.e., music, movies, plays etc., is more than a form of entertainment. Films and music can have an underlying influence on people's beliefs and the way they think about certain topics. The power and scope of the influence music and film has on people is not easily measured, but it does exist. Music has always been an integral part of various political and social movements throughout American history. From the old African slave work songs to current presidential campaigns, music has been the thread that has been knit into the fabric of American culture and history. Music, as one musicologist stated, is "the soundtrack of our lives." Since the inception of moving pictures, film has had a magical hold on the public's imagination. It did not take long for politicians and politically motivated citizens to start using film as a way to express their beliefs. Film became a very important part of political propaganda, not just in America, but throughout the world.

In this thesis, I will examine how the power of music and film has been utilized by politicians as a form of populist appeal. I will also examine how music and film has been used during various military campaigns in the 20th century. The second chapter of my thesis will discuss the importance of music in American politics and political culture. I will focus primarily on how music has been used in political campaigns, especially in

the latter half of the 20th century. I will be culling most of the information about the role music has played in politics from John Street's book Rebel Rock: The Politics of Popular Music and from various periodicals and magazines and from my own research. There is not an overabundance of books or articles on the specific relationship between music and politics; it is a fairly new concept.

In the third chapter I will show how music has played a major role in numerous wars in the Twentieth Century. I will provide specific details on how the songs during four wartime eras of the 20th century reflected the mood of the American public and how song lyrics changed from war to war. The four wars I will focus on are World War I, World War II, The Vietnam War, and The Persian Gulf War. Though the wars may have been fought on battlefields around the world, the overt and underlying themes brought forth through these war era songs remained consistent throughout most of the century, only during the controversial military campaign in Vietnam did the music of the times provide the nation with songs that were less than supportive of the war.

In the next chapter I will focus on the importance of campaign films. There is little written on the topic of campaign films, yet they provide the nation with some of the most memorable scenes of the American political process. Every time there is a presidential election the two major parties hold political conventions. Many times one of the highlights of these conventions is the film that precedes the nominee's acceptance speech. These films usually are a collage of pictures that tell the life story of the candidate. They also can review the candidate's record, especially if he is an incumbent. These films also can explain the candidate's views on many topics and his plans and



policy initiatives for the future. These political films have become so important over the years that now Hollywood has become involved in creating them. The latest example of this phenomenon was Clinton's *The Man from Hope* campaign film produced by his good friend and Hollywood producer Harry Thomasson. Other notable campaign films are Ronald Reagan's *Morning in America* and the disastrous campaign film made for Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign in 1964.

I will also detail how Hollywood films have produced an unflattering caricature of campaigning politicians over the years and how this stereotype of the average politician as being a liar, a cheat and a bumbling idiot has become rooted in American culture. I will examine various films from the 1930s all the way up to the 1990s, and show how little the characterization of a campaigning politician has changed over the decades. After lawyers and journalists, politicians are one of Hollywood's favorite targets to make fun of and lampoon. In this chapter I will explore these films and their effect on America's perception of politicians in general.

The books that I will use as references for the chapter on film and politics will include Movies and Politics: The Dynamic Relationship edited by James Combs. This book surveys various essays on the interplay between American politics and films. I will also be using Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography by James E. Combs and Sara T. Combs. This book delves deeply into the history of films being used as propaganda, both overtly and covertly. It also focuses on how campaign films have become important pieces of political imagery. Other books which I will utilize in regard to film and politics are Cinema, Politics, and Society in America edited by

Philip John Davies and Brian Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition by Brian Neve, Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, Reel Politics by Terry Christensen and Visions of Empire: Political Imagery In Contemporary American Film by Stephen Prince.

Most of the literature on the topic of film and American politics are simplistic forays into ideological diatribes, where Marxist thinkers spout off about how almost every film is pro-Capitalistic and jingoistic fare that is meant to brain wash Americans. Other books and essays on the topic seem to stress more the art and style of the films than the actual political content and consequences of the film. This topic is fairly new, so there is not a surplus of literature on it. Though there are more books about the relationship between films and American politics than music and politics, there is still a scarcity of information on the topic.

The fifth chapter will be a bookend companion piece to my second chapter on music and military campaigns, as I will investigate the films made during major military campaigns in this century. Like the third chapter on music and military campaigns, this chapter will provide ample evidence on how a major cultural medium like film was used as a rallying cry to support various American war efforts during the century. Whereas the music during wartime was mostly a by product of the society and a reflection of the public's attitudes, the films made during various American conflicts in this century were closely tied to the U.S. government. Calling many of these films propaganda would not be going too far, since for most of this century the government held tight reigns on the Hollywood film community, especially when it came to producing films about war

during times when the U.S. was involved in actual military conflicts around the globe. In the wartime films chapter I will focus primarily on the war films made during World War I, World War II and the Vietnam Conflict.

To conclude my thesis, I will focus on the limitations of my work and how further research on this topic is needed. Any time one studies forms of entertainment such as music and films there is always the problem of getting side tracked by the art and style of these cultural endeavors. Another danger in doing this thesis has been the problem of choosing the films and music to use as examples, the choosing of what films and music to include in a study can become arbitrary if one is not careful. When dealing with films and music, and trying to find out their political impact on society, one must be very cautious not to make grand assumptions based on the material at hand. A film that one person may find very conservative, another may find very liberal. It is all in the eye of the beholder. I have tried hard not to have my serious study of the relationship between politics and film and music become simply a review of certain films and songs. Whether a film was fine cinema or not is not the point, its political relevance is the focus in this thesis. Another trap one must avoid in studying films/music and politics is becoming obsessed with trying to pinpoint a certain ideology with a work of art. It is easy to state that a certain film is conservative or liberal, but that is just creating a big ideological scorecard which has no real intrinsic value.

The focus of my study on films/music and American politics is broader; it is a study of how cultural items such as film and music play a bigger role in politics and our society than most people think. By adding the study of the impact that music and film has

on the perception of various military conflicts I have chosen arguably the two most important issues that Americans' opinions are influential on: politics and war. No matter how powerful a politician is or how important a military campaign might be, without the support of a majority of Americans the political/military campaign will fail in the end. Both politicians and the government know full well how important the public's opinion is on these two separate but crucial issues, so they will try any way they can to influence the public's perceptions and views. This is where cultural items like film and music become substantial and worthy of examination. No one can calculate the full influence film and music has on the public, nor can one calculate how much the public influences film and music, but it is clear there is some interaction between the two. In this thesis I hope to explore the inner workings of this relationship. Knowing that this dynamic exists and how it shapes our politics and culture is very valuable to political scientists and anyone else concerned with the state of American politics.



## CHAPTER 2

### MUSIC AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

The power of music and song is immeasurable. Nothing can rally a nation together more than a patriotic song or a good victory march. Music has been used by all facets of society during war and peace, during good times and bad. Music is part of a citizen's daily life. It is no mystery that politicians would also want to use the power of music to help them in their political campaigns and causes. Music has been part of America's rich heritage and history since its inception. All Presidential nominees since the times of Washington have had marches and songs written for their campaigns. Presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy have had famous marches and songs written on their behalf. In today's political landscape the power of song has not waned but increased. Gone today are the old time marches and hymns that were used in the campaigns of yesteryear, in their place are pop, rock and country songs. In this chapter I will examine how music has been used in political campaigns and whether it is a smart tactic to use it in today's world. I will focus primarily on presidential campaigns because they have used music and song to its fullest extent so far.

Politicians when running for office want to garner the most support and gather the most votes they can obtain. The politician wants to grab hold of a populist theme and run with it, all the while trying to add more and more followers to his campaign and cause. The use of music in trying to garner this support is a logical step that a politician and his campaign can take to create the illusion that the candidate is an "average Joe", i.e. one of

the guys. In the first 150 years of American political campaigns, marches and old standards were the main forms of music chosen by political campaigns. The campaign would hire a music writer or musician to write a march in support of the candidate. These marches were always full of patriotic fervor and complimentary prose about the candidate. Not every campaign song was full of glowing niceties, some campaign songs would also lampoon and make fun of the other candidates. Campaign songs thus can be used for both uplifting the candidate and as a mudslinging weapon against other candidates.

In his book Rebel Rock, John Street states that:

Politicians and political activists have employed popular music to advance their careers or their causes. State and individual involvement with pop (music) has tended to reveal more about the politics of the government or the politician than about the music, but it raises interesting questions about how and when music can serve pre-conceived political goals.<sup>1</sup>

Politicians must be wary of thinking that the use of one hit song or other populist rhetoric will make them as popular as the musical artists themselves. The famous Soul Singer James Brown once quipped that Presidents talked to him “because they feel they need me and need my influence.”<sup>2</sup> Brown also claimed that: “My stage act is so organized that the whole establishment wants to steal it from me, they want to know how I command the love of the people.”<sup>3</sup>

It is foolhardy for a politician or his campaign to think that he can become as popular as a musician. Politicians see the enormous power and adoration and support musical acts receive from their followers, so politicians try to catch some of that populist fan appeal of certain artists by using their songs in their campaign or by having the actual

musical act play at campaign stops along the campaign trail. The use of famous celebrities in political campaigns has grown immensely over the years. John F. Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign put to use many famous singers and movie stars. Frank Sinatra even reworked his hit tune "High Hopes" into a Kennedy campaign song.

Over the years many presidential candidates incorporated musical artists and their songs into their political campaigns. Politicians would utilize all forms of music, whether it is pop, soul, rock, country or folk, as long as it was American music and inspiring, a politician would use it. Hubert Humphrey campaigned to the soul music of James Brown. By using the music of the number one black artist at the time, Humphrey was reaching out to the black vote, especially in the South. Senator Fred Harris used the folk music of Harry Chapin and Arlo Guthrie in his bid for the Democratic nomination for President. These type of "dust-bowl songs" and folk music that Chapin and Guthrie played fit well into Harris' populist appeal. This political populism that was tied in with music came from the New Deal era.<sup>4</sup>

During the New Deal, politicians tried to experiment and use new and different ways to communicate with the public. One of these forms of political communication was music and song. The most famous political campaign song of the era and maybe of all time was "Happy Days Are Here Again," which was FDR's official campaign song. Huey P. Long was one of the first New Deal politicians to take advantage of music in his political campaigns. Long was Governor of Louisiana between 1928 to 1935 and was also a songwriter. John Street writes that Long's song "Every Man a King" was able to

“capture the New Deal message” by promising “castle, clothing and food for all and a peaceful future in which everyone could share.”<sup>5</sup>

During the late 1960s and early 1970s more and more musicians lent their talents on the campaign trail of politicians they supported. Simon and Garfunkel performed and campaigned for Senator Eugene McCarthy in 1968.<sup>6</sup> When George McGovern ran for President in 1972 he had almost the total support of Hollywood and the music industry. Actor Warren Beatty organized many concert/fund raisers for the McGovern campaign. A cavalcade of big time stars such as Barbara Streisand and the Grateful Dead performed at these concerts to help support and raise money for the McGovern campaign. Not since 1960 for John F. Kennedy had so many in the music and film world rallied around a candidate during a presidential election. These concerts raised a total of 1.5 million dollars and this fact did not go unnoticed. Since then, getting big time performers to sing at fund raising rallies and concerts on behalf of Presidential and Senatorial candidates has become a regular occurrence.<sup>7</sup>

Why did so many musicians come out and actively support McGovern in 1972? To stereotype all musicians as being liberal would be simple minded and inaccurate. Many musicians are independent, they are not devoted Democrats. Even staunch liberals like Art Garfunkel have ulterior motives for supporting a candidate. When asked why he performed for McGovern’s campaign in 1972, Garfunkel simply said, “It appealed to my showmanship. Much more than McGovern could to my politics. I do believe in the lesser of two evils, and in that spirit I became a McGovern supporter.”<sup>8</sup>



Before the 1960s, musicians usually shied away from associating themselves too closely with politicians or political parties for fear of alienating at least one half of the country. Yet the turmoil of the 1960s, with the fight for civil rights, the escalation of the Vietnam War and the growth of feminism, changed musicians attitudes drastically. By 1972 many popular musicians were frustrated with the ongoing struggle in Vietnam and thus threw their support toward McGovern. The musicians “saw in Vietnam a moral issue which allowed them to distance themselves from typical political infighting and which was of direct relevance to their fans.”<sup>9</sup> Like his musical partner Art Garfunkel, Paul Simon supported George McGovern only because he disliked Nixon so much, not because he supported McGovern’s social and economic platform.

One of the most surprising endorsements of the 1972 Presidential Campaign came from the Godfather of Soul, Soul Brother number 1, James Brown, who actively supported Richard Nixon and even performed for him. To many, seeing James Brown, one of the most pro black singers ever and a true humanitarian during the 1960s, supporting the rich white Republican candidate was truly blasphemy. Seeing Sammy Davis Jr. hug Nixon was the ultimate shocker to many liberals, a true impiety in their eyes. This is troubling since no person should be pigeonholed into supporting a single party all the time.

It is common knowledge that, in general, African Americans and the arts community, which includes musicians and popular artists, tended to support the Democratic Party overwhelmingly over the years. But in the 1980s and 1990s some popular musicians did actively support Republican Presidential candidates. Frank Sinatra,

a life long Democrat, supported Ronald Reagan vigorously in the 1980s, even singing at campaign stops. The Osmonds, Pat Boone and other easy listening singers have supported Republicans over the years, including the now deceased former singer/performer and congressman Sonny Bono. The popular Country singer Lee Greenwood has been a staple at the Republican Convention for the past four elections, where he usually sings his signature hit “God Bless the USA.” One of the more unusual artists to support Republican candidates and causes of late is the hard rock singer/guitarist Ted Nugent. Known for his wild on-stage antics and songs about sex, drugs, rock n roll, and more sex, he hardly sounds like the posterboy for the Republican Party. Yet like James Brown, Nugent cannot be judged politically by his artistic work alone, his own personal political views are pretty much mainstream conservatism. Nugent is a strong supporter of the 2nd Amendment, and is for less government and less taxes. He is also against an intrusive government that he sees to be stripping away at citizens’ rights and freedoms. His closeness to the Republican Party (whether they want him or not) has become so apparent that in 1996 the music cable channel MTV hired Nugent as their on the floor political reporter and commentator at the Republican Convention.

John Street in his book Rebel Rock details how musicians can greatly help a political campaign financially:

Musicians can act as a valuable source of cash, a particularly important advantage since the change in US electoral regulations in 1974, which limited the size of individual contributions to the ever-increasing campaign costs. Rock concerts allowed large sums to be raised without infringing the law. If artists waive their fee, the takings from a concert can go straight into the campaign fund. This is not

deemed to be a donation by the artists themselves but to be a contribution by the individual ticket-holders.<sup>10</sup>

Today politicians have raised this fund raising technique to an art form. Bill Clinton's 1996 Presidential campaign received millions upon millions of dollars from concerts that Barbara Streisand performed at on behalf of the DNC (Democratic National Committee).

There are many examples of singers contributing their talents to political campaigns; many times even big musical stars get involved, like the aforementioned Barbara Streisand. The famous John Lennon penned Beatles song "Come Together" was originally written in mind for Tom Hayden and his political efforts in California politics in 1968. John Lennon was a big supporter of Hayden's and wrote the famous tune for him. Though the song has no overt political message, its talk of people coming together fit well with Hayden's political philosophy.

When Jesse Jackson ran for president in 1984, he received the overwhelming support of the black community, which also included various popular black musical artists such as Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, and even many young rap stars. At the time in 1984, rap and hip hop music was fairly new to the general public, so seeing rap stars rapping with Jesse on the campaign trail was a refreshing sight for many Americans. One of the more popular rap artists during that time named Grandmaster Melle Mel even recorded a rap song entitled "Jesse" in honor of Jackson. The song not only was a hit on black radio but also became the unofficial campaign song for Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign.

Sometimes the impetus to join a political campaign is not the artist's idea, but rather the idea of a bigwig in the radio and record business. "Instead of artists volunteering their services to a politician, they found themselves being volunteered by powerful figures in radio and the record business."<sup>11</sup> The Allman Brothers did not join Jimmy Carter's campaign by their own free will, it happened because the head of their record label asked them to. Phil Walden, the head of Capricorn Records, not only asked the Allman Brothers to do this, but he himself joined the Carter campaign full-time.<sup>12</sup>

Paul Drew is another example of a music industry leader helping out a political campaign. Drew was head of record programming on all RKO radio stations, and was a big supporter of Jerry Brown's campaign. He had the power to make or break a record because he made the programming decisions at RKO radio stations, so if he did not play a song it would most likely be a failure. With this power many musical performers found it hard to say no to Drew when he asked them for a favor. Drew asked many recording artists to support Jerry Brown's campaign and thus "managed to bring together an impressive roster of performers to support Brown, and at the same time to dissuade other artists from helping Tom Hayden."<sup>13</sup>

Jerry Brown's Chief of Staff fondly noted the importance of the support given by entertainers to the Brown campaign by stating that "entertainers can attract contributions, particularly smaller ones, which would not otherwise be available to a candidate.... People go to one of our concerts basically to see the Eagles perform. Frankly, we'd have trouble getting one-fifth the people there just to see Jerry."<sup>14</sup> Jerry Brown's finance chairman also noted that "There isn't much difference between plugging Donna Summer



or Jerry Brown. You have a product to sell and you do it.”<sup>15</sup> Thus the politicians and the record executives each get what they wanted out of the relationship; the politicians get a greater influx of campaign contributions and the support of highly visible and popular performers, and the record executives gain influence and power in the political establishment.<sup>16</sup>

When politicians use music and musical performers in their political campaigns it reduces politics and music to “their lowest common denominator.” Street states that for the “individual politician, the music itself is marginal; it is just a device. The politician is parasitic upon the music. Politicians borrow its powers to bring people together; they do not use that community or create it. The music’s popularity has only a tangential bearing on the politicians’ political populism.”<sup>17</sup> The politician gains not only financial support from these performers but also a populist appeal. A politician will not gain popularity just by having a popular musical act on his campaign, it is not that simple, yet it can help give the politician a little more creditability with some voters if it seems that the politician truly enjoys the musical act. If the public senses that the politician is just using the performers to gain attention and votes, it will backfire on the politician. No one ever doubted Jimmy Carter’s love of the Allman Brothers, or George Bush’s love of country music, those were genuine displays of musical appreciation by those candidates.

The populism of the New Deal reemerged in the mid 1970s when politicians such as Jerry Brown and Jimmy Carter tried to reflect a populist sentiment in their political campaigns. Jerry Brown in 1976 used many Southern California musicians in his bid for the Presidency. Artists such as the Eagles, Linda Rondstadt (whom Brown was also

dating), and Jackson Browne not only lent their songs to Brown during his campaign, but also actively supported and campaigned with Brown. Jimmy Carter on the other hand had many Southern Rock groups campaigning for him, most notably the Allman Brothers.<sup>18</sup> It is rumored that Jimmy Carter gained confidence and felt a new sense of purpose in his campaign after seeing an Allman Brothers concert. In fact Jimmy Carter became so close to the Allman Brothers and they would eventually play at his Inauguration when he became president. The fact that Carter had the Allman Brothers over to the White House on many occasions after he was elected proves that Carter was a true fan of their music. Politicians do not always use musicians in some sort of Machiavellian plot, sometimes they truly like and enjoy the music they used in their campaigns. Carter also met with Bob Dylan when he campaigned for president in 1976 and afterwards “spoke of Dylan as his friend and recalled Dylan’s songs in his speeches.”<sup>19</sup>

Politicians use popular music to “legitimate themselves and tie themselves to tradition” says George H. Lewis.<sup>20</sup> Lewis states that politicians such as Pat Buchanan, Bill Clinton and William Bennett have “all publicly declared their allegiance to the baby boom’s early rock and roll music (even claiming to be able to recite many lyrics by heart).” He also notes that George Bush has not only attended the Grand Ol’ Opry, but has “actually played country music on stage with historical figures such as Roy Acuff and Bill Monroe.”<sup>21</sup> Al and Tipper Gore are well known “Dead Heads,” which is an affectionate term for Grateful Dead fans. Politicians of all stripes want to be seen as being in touch and “hip” with today’s popular culture. The fact that most of today’s

politicians are from the baby boom era, makes it only natural that their favorite music would be rock music from the 1960s and 1970s.

The use of famous tunes as Campaign songs has grown even more popular in recent times. Sometimes the original artists do not like having their songs used for political purposes. In the 1984 Presidential race, both Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan wanted to use Bruce Springsteen's hit song "Born in the USA" in their campaigns. Springsteen did not want his song to be used politically and refused both campaigns the use of the song. The fact that the song is not really patriotic as it seems on the surface was quite embarrassing to both campaigns. Both Mondale and Reagan wanted to use Springsteen's song as some sort of political springboard, trying to gain popularity amongst younger voters. Mondale quipped at the older Reagan's attempt at using Springsteen's song by saying "Bruce was born to run, but he wasn't born yesterday."<sup>22</sup>

More recently in the 1996 Presidential Campaign, Bob Dole's campaign used the famous Sam & Dave soul classic "Soul Man" as the campaign theme song. At every stop on the campaign trail, a band would sing "Soul Man" but with changes to the lyrics to add Bob Dole's name. Rondor Music International Inc., which owned the rights to the song, complained that the Dole campaign's use of the song was copyright infringement and even threatened a lawsuit if the Dole campaign did not cease using the song. By September 1996 Dole's campaign gave in and stopped using the song altogether.<sup>23</sup> The Mondale/Reagan and Dole cases prove that using a hip song in a political campaign does not always help, but in fact can lead to embarrassment and even potential lawsuits.

During the 1992 Presidential Campaign Bill Clinton effectively used music to its full potential on the campaign trail. Clinton, a musician himself, used his talents on the saxophone throughout the campaign. He would many times play his sax at campaign stops to get the crowd into a frenzy. Clinton would usually play a mix of rock and jazz standards on the sax. The image of a young, energized and vital candidate playing the sax to adoring supporters was quite a stark contrast in comparison to the older and somewhat stiff George Bush. One of the more unusual and yet successful Clinton appearances on television during the 1992 campaign was when he played sax on the then popular Aresnio Hall late night talk show. This one appearance did wonders for Clinton's image. He seemed young, hip and cool all at once. Rarely has the American public seen a Presidential candidate so relaxed and in tune with the younger generation. Once Clinton was elected though, his public displays of sax playing dropped off completely, it is now a forgotten aspect of the man. This fact lends credence to the criticism that his sax playing during the campaign was just a gimmick.

Clinton also had his own unofficial campaign song during the 1992 Campaign. His campaign chose the Fleetwood Mac song "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow" as the unofficial campaign song in 1992. The song and its lyrics were joyful and full of hope about the future, a theme that Clinton stressed many times during the campaign. This was a brilliant choice for a campaign song, not only was it a past hit from one of America's favorite musical groups of all time, but the content of the song reflected Clinton's vision for the future, a positive and bright future that he wanted to create. Unlike a hoaky jingle or a rip off of a past hit song, this song not only seemed to invigorate the campaign



staffers and Clinton supporters but it also apparently caught the attention of the undecided voters. When Clinton received the nomination at the end of the Democratic Convention, the Fleetwood Mac song could be heard blaring from the loud speakers throughout the Convention auditorium. Though it seemed insignificant at the time, the mix of the 1970s rock tune with the visual of an overjoyed and revitalized Democratic Presidential candidate seemed to foreshadow things to come. After the Democratic Convention Clinton would never look back, he would go on to an overwhelming victory in the fall over the incumbent George Bush.

The use of popular songs in political campaigns seems to be increasing every year. Whether the candidate has a jingle written especially for his or her campaign, or if his campaign chooses an oldie but goodie tune, it does not matter, the fact that politicians know music can help their campaign is the focus of this chapter. The power of music is undeniable. It brings people together, and creates many memories and images in people's minds. It is foolish for a candidate not to tap into such a powerful tool such as music. Of course a candidate must first have money, people skills, intelligence and a platform to run on, music alone cannot help a weak candidate. Yet using music in a campaign the correct way can help a politician that wants an extra edge to get him or her over the top.

The power of music is impossible to measure, so I cannot provide detailed surveys or statistics that show certain candidates won because they utilized music more effectively than another candidate did. The power and influence of music is not a hard entity, it is translucent and hard to grasp, yet it is there. It is part of an image, the packaging of a candidate. A good candidate with no sense of popular culture can win, but

if he or she can use and mine the popular culture to his or her advantage, they will certainly be in better shape to win an election. The fact that slick packaging and seemingly inconsequential items such as music, looks and flashy campaign commercials seem to hold so much power and influence over the public today might be troubling to some. Yet that is something a sociologist can study, whether it is good or bad for the future of society is not my locus here. If it is a sad indictment of our society and culture that such seemingly trivial things like looks, music and slick packaging help get a candidate elected, that is too bad, but if a candidate wants to win, he must use all resources at his disposal, and music is one of them.

I have tried to show how various candidates have utilized music in their political campaigns, especially in the last 30 years. Not all the candidates who have used music and musicians in their campaigns have won, this is true, but like anything in the political world, there are no guarantees. If a politician can utilize music and use it smartly in his or her campaign it will help them in the long run. The power and influence of music surrounds every person daily, and music has been an important factor and cultural artifact in times of peace and war, and will continue to be in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> John Street, Rebel Rock, (Basil Blackwell Inc, New York, 1986), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.46.

<sup>3</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.46.

<sup>4</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.48.

<sup>5</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.47.

<sup>6</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.49.

<sup>7</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.49.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Larry Sabato, The Rise of Political Consultants, (Basic Books, New York, 1981), p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.49.

<sup>10</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.49.

<sup>11</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.49.

<sup>12</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.49.

<sup>13</sup> J. Klein and D. Marsh, "Rock and Politics", Rolling Stone, 9 September 1976.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by N. Polsby, Consequences of Party Reform, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983), p.206.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Larry Sabato, The Rise of Political Consultants, p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.50.

<sup>17</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.50.

<sup>18</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.48.

<sup>19</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.47.

<sup>20</sup> George H. Lewis, "Bringing it all Back Home", Continuities in Culture. Ed. Ray B. Browne and Ronald J. Ambrosetti. (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, OH, 1993), p.68.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, Continuities in Culture, p.68.

<sup>22</sup> Street, Rebel Rock, p.47.

<sup>23</sup> The New York Times, Sep 14, 1996 v145 p8(N) p9(L) col 5 (4 col in).

## CHAPTER 3

### MUSIC AND WAR

Music has been utilized by politicians for centuries, especially in America. Music has not only been used by politicians to help boost their political campaigns, but it also has been an important part of the cultural fabric of American society. Music and song have proven to be a very important cultural item during times of war. In this chapter I will focus on how music has been used during various armed conflicts in which the United States has been involved during the 20th Century. The purpose of this study of wartime songs is to show how music can be political, without exactly being used in an election campaign. War songs and revelries are all political in a sense, whether they are overtly so or not, songs that help garner support for a war are political in nature. Though songs have been used in every political/social event of the 20th century, from union songs to Civil Rights anthems, songs during wartime have had the biggest impact on society and politics in general.

“Music is a weapon in all wars, used to bolster morale or to heap scorn on an enemy,” writes Robin Denselow in When the Music’s Over: The Story of Political Pop.<sup>1</sup> Music can both invigorate and infuriate people during times of conflict, throughout history music has led nations and warring factions into battle. Music can bring people together but it can also divide people. Normally music during wartime is meant to unify a nation and a people, to give both the soldiers and the people back home a sense of hope and purpose in what they are doing. Though politicians and leaders tell the country what the goals and reasons are for the various conflicts the nation has been involved in, the

public needs more than just a policy statement or a speech. Only in music can they find a common bond, a unifying agent that can bring them together, or at times break them apart.

B. Lee Cooper remarks that “since 1917 lyrics of war related records have featured themes that have heartened troops, bolstered civilian morale, and defined a unique destiny for American society. The goal of national unity is unmistakable.” Cooper adds that even anti-war, pacifist and protest songs “allude to traditional ideals when challenging specific military involvement.”<sup>2</sup> So even when a song criticizes a military operation overseas, it is still based in a patriotic and traditional guise, songs rarely if ever criticize the actual soldiers. Cooper writes that “the myth of military morality is conjured, circulated and perpetuated in American popular music.”<sup>3</sup> Cooper in his essay “Rumors of War: Lyrical Continuities, 1914-1991” claims that even anti-war songs were based in traditional American ideals and common beliefs. “Even songs that dispute the need for immediate American involvement in overseas imbroglios -- those stressing isolationist sentiments, neutrality arguments, or pacifist contentions--are crafted around the same ideals that, ironically, are championed in pro-military tunes.”<sup>4</sup>

In Cooper’s analysis of war era songs, he has found eleven common themes and ideas that seem to “dominate” the lyrics of war related tunes. Most of the ideas found in these songs are quite recognizable and understandable, especially in tunes made during the first half of the century. Simple themes such as making fun of the enemy and its leaders through stereotypes and puns is quite common during wartime. The first key to rallying the country behind the troops is to make sure that the enemy is identifiable and is



shown as evil, cowardly and aggressive. Usually ethnic slurs and stereotypes were used to belittle the enemy troops, whether they were “krauts”, “nips” or “gooks”, verbal attacks on the enemy were common in war era music.

Other common themes that run throughout war era music are “sympathy for conquered civilian populations and brave allied troops in occupied territories” and “emphasis on long-term historical friendships between the United States, its military allies, and the invaded nations.”<sup>5</sup> To gain support for a military excursion in a foreign land, songs would remind the public what the history was behind the conflict, a sort of history lesson within a song. Two of the most common and seemingly important themes in war era lyrics are the “reinforcement of patriotic beliefs and emphasis on national symbols, previous military victories, and prior war heroes or national leaders” and of course the always faithful “support and admiration for U.S. soldiers” home and abroad. If one theme was the center of all these war time songs it would be: supporting our fighting men (and women) and praising the dedication and sacrifices they made for the United States and our allies. This is one theme that was clear during every war and conflict that the United States was involved in during the 20th Century, even during Vietnam. Whether the song supported the actual military operation or not, there would usually be lyrics noting the bravery and heroism of the troops.

Other themes that Cooper found in these war era songs were “empathy for loved ones-- mothers, fathers, sweethearts, wives, and children--separated from U.S. soldiers.” This theme was also uniformly integrated into all the war time songs, the feelings of being far away from a loved one was a feeling that everyone could relate to, no matter

what their opinions were on the actual military policy. Another common thread throughout war era lyrics was “confidence in U.S. leadership, with special praise for the wisdom of the President and for the courage of American generals.”<sup>6</sup> This theme was quite evident during World War II, when numerous songs paid tribute to Franklin D Roosevelt’s courage and strength. During wartime, the President and many generals would become the primary voice for the American government and its policies, Congress would play less of a role in this area.

Besides supporting U.S. troops, their loved ones and U.S. leaders, another theme in war era tunes focused on American ideals and goals. Cooper states that many of these songs would reflect “support for the idealistic post-war goals of peace, prosperity, and the extension of democratic values abroad.”<sup>7</sup> Once again, this theme was most evident in World War II era songs, when the enemy was viewed as being so evil and dangerous that the whole world’s future depended on the outcome of the war. This theme would mention American ideals and beliefs, the focus was not just on the actual combatants and wishing them a safe return, but rather on what the U.S. was fighting for. Songs that mentioned freedom, liberty and prosperity as being American ideals were popular throughout this century.

The last few themes that Cooper mentions in his essay were the most critical toward the U.S. military and the government’s policies. These themes were not fully explored until the Vietnam conflict arose. Themes such as “cynicism toward the articulated economic objectives and proposed post-war strategies of American politicians” and the “advocacy of resolving international disputes through non-military

strategies such as economic sanctions, political isolation, and the assertion of moral superiority.”<sup>8</sup> These two themes were found most commonly in the anti-war songs of the late 1960s during the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The last theme that could be found in war era songs was actually a backlash against the anti-war theme songs. This last theme found in various songs would criticize anti-war arguments and accuse anyone that was not in favor of the given military operation as being a coward, unpatriotic and “giving aid and comfort to the enemy.”<sup>9</sup> So just like in bars, classrooms, and living rooms across the country, Americans would debate even in their songs about the pros and cons of being involved in a specific war.

These themes can be found in many songs, they are not separated, so one song could have a number of these themes inside its lyrics and message. These themes are not exclusive, they are many times incorporated with each other in a song. The one overall theme that seems to be pervasive in these war songs is explained by Cooper: “throughout the twentieth century popular music has played a significant role in creating and reinforcing the myth of U.S. military morality.”<sup>10</sup> When the United States has participated in wars and conflicts during this century, it has always been under the guise of protecting allies, preserving freedom, and fighting against dangerous foes that could take away freedom from others and the United States. Whether one believes these high moralistic goals were actually the reason for the United States involvement in worldwide conflicts does not matter, it is the overlying theme and template that the majority of war era songs adhered to.

Music and songs, like any cultural device, both reflect and influence the public's opinions and attitudes. War era songs no doubt also reflected and influenced the public's attitudes toward the military and various conflicts in which the U.S. has been involved. The almost impossible task is to try to understand how much the music reflected and/or influenced the public. Since it is extremely hard to quantify the actual influence these songs had on people's views through statistics or surveys, one must study the history of the times and analyze the "mood" of the different war eras. Certainly the World War II era was vastly different from the Vietnam War years. Yet some general conclusions can be drawn from the music and the times from which it came. Overall, most popular songs of this century helped support American military policies, with the exception of the Vietnam War. I will focus on four distinct wars and show how the songs of each era were for the most part supportive of the war effort. The one war that of course had Americans split in opinion was Vietnam, and this was the only conflict where there was a sizable amount of anti-war songs and messages found in music. The four eras I will cover are: World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War and finally the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991.

### World War I

The Great War, if any war had the archetype discography, it is World War I. The popular songs of this era were "overwhelmingly patriotic, upbeat, and supportive of American soldiers."<sup>11</sup> Timothy E. Scheurer writes in his book Born In The U.S.A: The Myth Of America In Popular Music From Colonial Times To The Present that "War Songs as examples of propaganda have traditionally performed one dominant function: to

create a sense (maybe an illusion) of unity and shared purpose.”<sup>12</sup> He continues to say that, upon “reviewing the songs of the Great War, one would hardly suspect that there was anything but the most wholehearted acceptance of American involvement. And this is as it should be. The Tin Pan Alley songsmith’s job was to communicate that sense of unity. The songs do not tell us that the country was divided on the issue of war...”<sup>13</sup> There was little evidence of any anti-war or anti Woodrow Wilson songs during the Great War era, if anything, the songs were all supportive of the U.S. efforts in World War I.

The song that seemed to define the First World War and the whole era was “Over There.” It was not only overwhelmingly popular, with over five different versions of the song recorded between 1917-18, but it also was the unofficial anthem of the war. Three specific themes could be found in World War I songs, they were: “sympathy for Great Britain and France, encouragement for President Woodrow Wilson, and commitment to defeating Germany and its allies.”<sup>14</sup> Songs that conveyed these messages included hits such as “Somewhere in France Is Daddy,” “Lafayette (We Hear You Calling),” and the jovial and pithy “I Think We’ve Got Another Washington (Wilson Is His Name).” Other patriotic tunes were “Let’s All Be Good Americans Now,” “Just Like Washington Crossed The Delaware, General Pershing Will Cross The Rhine” and the 1915 hit “I Didn’t Raise My Boy To Be A Soldier.” These songs conjured up images of past heroes and battles in American history to instill patriotism and national pride in the public. It is no minor fact that George Washington’s name and heroics are mentioned in many of these war era songs.



Some songs from the World War I era not only were glowing tributes to the United States and its military, but also became anthems for generations to come. Anthems like “The Star Spangled Banner,” “The Stars and Stripes Forever March,” “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “You’re A Grand Old Flag” were very popular during the war and continued to be popular for decades after. Patriotism and freedom were not the only themes these songs touched upon, there were also more personal songs that dealt with family and honor and duty. Commitment and obligation were stressed in tunes such as “Send Me Away With a Smile,” “Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile,” “America, Here’s My Boy,” and the maudlin “(Goodbye, And Luck Be With You) Laddie Boy.”<sup>15</sup>

Songs that emphasized America’s role in helping foreign countries in time of need were popular during World War I. Songs like “God Be With Our Boys Tonight,” “Bring Back My Soldier Boy,” “The Yanks Are At It Again” and “Say A Prayer For The Boys Out There” typified the public’s concerns for their loved ones fighting overseas. Many songs provided lyrics that reflected the viewpoint of the common soldier in battle. Tunes with a fighting man’s perspective included “Oh, How I Hate To Get Up In The Morning,” “Life In A Trench in Belgium” and the perky “Would You Rather Be A Colonel With An Eagle On Your Soldier Or A Private With A Chicken On Your Knee?.”<sup>16</sup> Songs during the World War I era reflected various viewpoints in their lyrical content, whether it was a foot soldier in a trench, a worried mother hoping her son comes back alive or a sweetheart back home, every perspective was covered in a song.

Near the end of World War I songs began to emphasize the conclusion of the war, many tunes were used as time for reflection, to think about the experience of war in Europe. Many songs content focused on American GIs experience in France during the war. “Good-bye, France,” “When Yankee Doodle Learns To Parlez Vous Francais,” How Ya Gonna Keep’Em Down On The Farm(After They’ve Seen Paree),” and “Au Revoir But Not Goodbye, Soldier Boy” all dealt with the U.S. soldier’s experiences in France during the war. Since these tunes came out near the conclusion of the war they were much more light and happy and humor inflected than the earlier songs of the era.

Though the songs of the World War I era covered almost every perspective and angle of the war, there were some obvious omissions in the songs of the era. There were no songs that mentioned specific military battles or peace treaties or any sort of specific reference to U.S. policy. The songs were all about patriotism, heroism and national pride. B. Lee Cooper states that during the era “No references are made to the isolationist position or to fears of entangling alliances with any European powers.”<sup>17</sup> Cooper adds that once the U.S. entered the war “American music seemed to be motivated by patriotic tradition, British propaganda about heartless Huns, and the rules of political commentary dictated by George Creel’s Committee on Public Information.”<sup>18</sup> After the Great War ended, the music and songs changed drastically. The military and national pride songs gave way to a new form of music called jazz that was happy, exciting and “dance-orientated.” Thus the Jazz Age begun and the days of cute and corny patriotic songs were over. Now music stressed romance, sex, booze, gambling and all the other vices that were rampant in the 1920s.

## World War II

The World War II era songs were different in style than the World War I era songs, with all new performers, songs and music genres, but the spirit and tone of the songs were still the same. The Second World War era songs would like their World War I predecessors focus on national pride, patriotism and supporting the U.S. in its fight against the Axis powers. The popular performers of the day were mostly from the musical genre known as swing, or big band music. Swing music was a spin-off from more traditional jazz, instead of small intimate sessions of three or four musicians, swing would incorporate a huge orchestra and big band, and would play romantic ballads and fast dance numbers. Swing music actually did swing, the beat and rhythm were that danceable. The popular musical artists of the era were Glenn Miller, Kate Smith, The Andrews Sisters, Spike Jones, Johnny Mercer, Frank Sinatra, Harry James, and Dinah Shore. These singers, crooners and big band leaders would become world famous, and many of them are still popular to this day.

As in World War I era songs, the Second World War offered songs that attacked and lampooned the enemies that the U.S. faced in battle. This time the targets were Germany, Japan and Italy. Though most of the derogatory songs focused on the Germans and Japanese. These tunes did not mince words, they were direct and blunt in their lyrics and titles. Tunes such as “You’re A Sap, Mr. Jap,” “Mussolini’s Letter To Hitler” and “Der Fuehrer’s Face” sound silly and even downright racist today, but back during the World War II era they fit the mood of the times.<sup>19</sup>

As expected, duty, honor, and traditional American values were the main themes in so many songs of the World War II era. Some of the most popular anthems of the era were “God Bless America,” “Yankee Doodle Boy” and “Remember Pearl Harbor”. Unlike in World War I songs, the Second World War era songs were not shy in referring to specific events and military engagements in their lyrics, so songs such as “Remember Pearl Harbor” were common during World War II. Specific branches of the U.S. armed forces even had songs written about them. The Air Force had such songs as “He Wears A Pair Of Silver Wings” and “Comin’ In On A Wing and A Prayer.” The U.S. Army and the plight of the common grunt everywhere were the focus of such songs as “This Is The Army, Mr. Jones,” “(Lights Out) ‘Til Reveille,” and the ever famous “Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition.”<sup>20</sup>

As always, the troops were the central focus of the songs of the World War II era. Some of the most popular salutes to U.S. soldiers included the classic “White Cliffs Of Dover,” “Johnny Doughboy Found A Rose In Ireland,” “We Did It Before (And We Can Do It Again)” and the Andrew Sisters signature tune “The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy.” Romantic songs were also a hit during the era, “It’s Been A Long, Long Time,” “Cleanin’ My Rifle (And Dreamin’ of You),” and “I’ll Get By (As Long As I Have You)” were prime examples of sentimental tunes about missing a lover due to the war time effort. Missing a sweetheart back home would be a universal theme mined in songs from all war time eras during this century.

As during World War I, the songs of the Second World War shied away from mentioning any controversial events that happened to take place during the war. After the

attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese the United States never looked back, the United States would fight in the war now until the end. After the United States declared war “lyrics remained silent on the Nisei relocation issue, on government enforced infringements on freedom of speech and civil rights, and even on atomic blasts over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”<sup>21</sup> After World War II American culture and society would change drastically, and by the mid 1960s when the U.S. became involved in a conflict in southeast Asia, lyrics in songs would become more critical and even oppose American military involvement overseas.

### Vietnam War

The songs that came out during the Vietnam conflict were very different from those that were popular during the first two world wars. Not only was the style and sound of the music different, going from pop and country songs of the 1940s to the rock, pop and soul music of the late 1960s, but the tone and attitude in the lyrics were far more blunt and divisive. For really the first time, popular music would start to critique and oppose U.S. military actions overseas in lyrics in various songs. Robin Denselow opines that “The Vietnam War was won by the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese, not pop music, but music played an important role in helping reflect and reinforce the anti-war mood in the USA”<sup>22</sup> The degree to which how much pop music influenced or reflected the public’s view on the Vietnam War is virtually impossible to calculate, but it was certainly a two way street. Whether the music influenced the nation’s opinion on Vietnam or the nation’s mood influenced the music, it does not matter which came first, it was an intertwined relationship.



Not all the songs during the Vietnam era were anti-war songs, in fact many patriotic songs were made during the era. Songs that “championed traditional American ideals, lauded nationalism and patriotism, praised brave soldiers, and alluded joyfully to earlier military successes” were also popular during the Vietnam War.<sup>23</sup> Examples of this type of patriotic tune or speech were “Gallant Man,” “Stout-Hearted Men,” “The Americans (A Canadian’s Opinion),” and “Okie From Muskogee.” Even re-interpretations of traditional American songs became popular again, such as “The Star Spangled Banner” and “Seven O’Clock News/Silent Night.”

Though there were examples of patriotic songs, for the most part the majority of songs pertaining to the Vietnam War were against the war wholeheartedly. Even if the lyrics did not mention Vietnam by name, there were countless songs about confusion, bewilderment and paranoia. Cooper suggests that during the Vietnam War “confusion and argumentation thrived in popular lyrics; unrest and agitation swept the radio airwaves; unanswered questions spawned greater and greater lyrical hostility toward military activities.”<sup>24</sup> Songs of this nature included “Eve Of Destruction,” “Fortunate Son,” “Ball Of Confusion (That’s What the World Is Today),” “America, Communicate With Me,” “For What It’s Worth,” “What’s Going On” and “2+2=?.” Never before had popular songs taken such strident and bold stances against U.S. military policy as in these songs. The anti-war songs of the era were distinctively straightforward and questioned authority from all quarters. During World War I and World War II songs never questioned the legitimacy or intelligence of U.S. policies, but during the Vietnam War

such songs became not only commonplace, but they actually began their own sub genre of music: the anti-war/peace song.

Pacifist tunes also emerged out of the Vietnam era, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the hippies and peace and love crowd were at their most powerful. Anthems of the pacifist belief included such songs as John Lennon's "Imagine" and "Give Peace A Chance," "Stop The War Now," "We Got To Have Peace" and "Lay Down (Candles In The Rain)." Cooper notes that pacifist tunes "tended to ignore the complexities of negotiated settlements, national goals, disputed boundaries and political objectives in favor of the immediate cessation of hostilities and the need for worldwide humanitarian healing."<sup>25</sup> Some of the most popular and outspoken singers and performers of the period were Bob Dylan, Edwin Starr, Barry McGuire, Phil Ochs, John Fogerty, Neil Young, Joan Baez, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, The Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary.

Another difference between Vietnam era songs as opposed to past wartime songs was the fact that songs about soldiers became more complex and divisive than in the past. During the Vietnam War there was not the sense of call to arms or duty in serving and protecting one's country as there was in past conflicts, now many men actually tried to get out of serving their country by dodging the draft or by other means. Lyrics in many songs during the era reflected this fact. "The Draft Dodger Rag," "Where Have All The Flowers Gone," "Dear Uncle Sam," "I Feel Like I'm Fixing To Die Rag" and "Billy Don't Be A Hero" were prime examples of songs dealing with the draft issue through lyrics. Unlike in previous wars, there was no sense of immediate danger by the enemy

nor any glamour in the set goals or environment the war took place in. Fighting against the evil forces of the Axis powers in Europe seemed awfully more heroic than fighting in the dense jungles in Vietnam. Other songs that dealt with anti-war and anti-establishment themes were “War,” “The Unknown Soldier,” “Won’t Be Fooled Again” and “Battle Hymn Of Lt. Calley.”

The songs of the Vietnam era were unlike any other before. They were blunt and specific, actual real life events would be mentioned or eluded to in the lyrical content of many songs. Though not all songs from this era were anti-war in nature, the majority dealing with the Vietnam conflict were at least neutral if not totally opposed to the war. B.Lee Cooper states that “the dimensions of lyrical commentary throughout the long and bloody Vietnam conflict were dramatic and detailed. From selective service practices to the My Lai massacre, no topic seemed to escape the composer’s pen or the troubadour’s tongue.”<sup>26</sup> The effects of the Vietnam War were long lasting. The war not only changed American society forever, leaving one of America’s most painful scars in its history, but it also changed the popular culture. The lyrical content of the anti-war songs of the Vietnam era changed forever what songwriters could write and sing about. Songs could now be overtly political in nature and criticize government policies and still be popular. These anti-war and anti-establishment songs were not just fringe tunes that no one heard of, they were very popular songs that would become classics that defined a generation. After the Vietnam War and throughout the 1970s and beyond songs would include much more out spoken lyrics and bolder topics. The topics of songs in the 1970s became much more freer and frank, songs about sex, drugs and violence became more and more blunt

and risqué. Many taboos were shattered and by the end of the decade almost anything could become a hit song, no matter what the lyrical content was. The effect of the Vietnam War was far reaching, but by the time the next war in which the U.S. became heavily involved, the Gulf War of 1990-91, it seemed the tide had changed and songs of patriotism and honor were once again in the forefront.

### The Gulf War

The war in the Persian Gulf in the early 1990s signified a change in course for wartime lyrics and songs. The Persian Gulf War would become one of the most popular and quickest wars in which U.S. led forces ever engaged. The popularity of President Bush and the military were at an all time high, not since World War II had America witnessed such a popular war. The fact that the war was heavily one sided, with few American casualties and was won in short time, the majority of songs from the Gulf War were happy, high spirited and many times satirical and sophomoric. During the Gulf War there were very few new or original songs, the fact that the war was so short had a lot to do with this since it takes time to write, produce, record and release a good song. So the majority of the songs from the Gulf War were “derivative rather than original. That is, images or ideas contained in earlier hit songs were adapted to the Saudi Arabian launching site of Operation Desert Storm.”<sup>27</sup>

Old standards and pop tunes became popular again during the Gulf War. Patriotic tunes such as “God Bless The USA,” “The Star Spangled Banner,” “Thank God I’m An American” were re-introduced into the popular culture. The longing for a loved one to come back home safe was another popular theme explored in songs such as “Somewhere

Out There,” “From A Distance” and “Wind Beneath My Wings.” Even the old Tony Orlando and Dawn song “Tie A Yellow Ribbon ‘Round the Ole Oak Tree” was popular again. Many parody songs lampooning Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Army were made in quick order by local disk jockeys around the country. Many of these parody songs were just re-workings of old classic pop and rock tunes but with lyrics that pertained to Saddam and The Gulf War instead. Songs of this ilk included “The Ballad of Saddam Hussein,” “K-K-Kuwaitis,” “Who’ll Put A Bomb On Saddam Saddam Saddam,” “Bomb Iraq,” “The Beast In The Middle East,” “Iraq is Robbin’,” and “Letter To Saddam Hussein (You Must Be Insane).” Old songs with a Middle Eastern flavor also received renewed interest on the radio, songs such as “Ahab the Arab,” “The Sheik Of Araby” and “Midnight at the Oasis.” Even the U.S. soldiers played certain rock tunes during battles to disorientate the enemy. Rock songs such as “Another One Bites The Dust,” “Welcome To the Jungle,” and “Rock the Casbah” were played during air raids on Baghdad by the U.S. military.

There were a few songs that promoted peace rather than war, including a remake of John Lennon’s “Give Peace A Chance” by an all star cast of musicians. The “Voices That Care” celebrity choir also would chime in during the Gulf War with songs of peace and unity. Very few anti-war songs could be found during the Gulf War, though there were a few. “The Crude Oil Blues” and “Got the Gasoline Blues” were two exceptions, though neither of these songs ever hit the charts or got airplay. The simple fact was that the Gulf War was overwhelmingly popular, and even if there were dissenting voices out



there, the war ended so quickly so they hardly had time to write and record anti-war songs.

The Gulf War was such a quick and decisive victory for the U.S. military that the songs of the era were short lived and quickly forgotten. Unlike songs from the other war eras, no classic song or anthem came out of the Gulf War. Since most of the songs that were played during the Gulf War were merely renditions or parodies of past songs, their appeal and popularity faded quickly. Today many people still listen to the popular music of World War II and the Vietnam War, but very few listen to the “classic” tunes of the Gulf War.

In this chapter I have tried to provide examples of how music and lyrics can reflect the American public’s mood during wartime. I chose not to get into detailed analysis of every song or artist, since that is not my focus here. By just showing numerous examples of song titles from each war era, one can cull from them a certain mood and ambiance of each era. The first two world wars were saturated with songs of patriotism, honor, glory and American values. These two wars for the most part were popular with the American people. There was very little discussion of specific events or policies during the first two world wars, and almost no anti-war songs to be found. The Vietnam War changed all this. As Cooper points out “The Vietnam War is a anomaly.... From the inception of the Conflict, anti-war lyrics burst forth with the same prominence as pro-war tunes.”<sup>28</sup> For the first time there was heated debate over an U.S. led military operation in songs and music.

Songs from four different war eras especially pop songs reflected and maybe even influenced the American public's attitude toward war. It is not too bold to state that many songs could be viewed as propaganda for war efforts, if not overtly so, at least they had the desired effect of having the American public strongly support the war in question. This is not simplifying the matter, one cannot say that songs shaped the public's opinions to any specific degree, but it is noteworthy that the music of the times reflects the people's views. The songs of World War I, World War II and the Gulf war perpetuated traditional American ideals and values and myths. These songs for the most part sustained and repeated "traditional themes that cast U.S. military action as a moral necessity, an ethical obligation, or an historical inevitability."<sup>29</sup> Songs not only shape and meld political campaigns but also entire wars. The power of song and lyrical content is huge, but also immeasurable. Songs do not make or end wars, but they do influence and reflect the mood of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Denselow. When the Music's Over: The Story Of Political Pop, (Faber and Faber, London), 1990.

<sup>2</sup> B. Lee Cooper. "Rumors of War: Lyrical Continuities, 1914-1991". Continuities in Popular Culture. Ed. Ray B. Browne and Ronald J. Ambrosetti. (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, OH, 1993), p.121.

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.121.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.

<sup>5</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.

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- <sup>10</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.122.
- <sup>11</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.126.
- <sup>12</sup> Timothy E. Scheurer, Born In The U.S.A: The Myth Of America In Popular Music From Colonial Times To The Present. (Jackson. UP of Mississippi, 1991).
- <sup>13</sup> Scheurer, Born In The U.S.A: The Myth Of America In Popular Music From Colonial Times To The Present.
- <sup>14</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.126.
- <sup>15</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.126.
- <sup>16</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.126.
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- <sup>18</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.128.
- <sup>19</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.129.
- <sup>20</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.129.
- <sup>21</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.130.
- <sup>22</sup> Denselow, When the Music's Over: The Story Of Political Pop.
- <sup>23</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.131.
- <sup>24</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.131.
- <sup>25</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.132.
- <sup>26</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.132.
- <sup>27</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.133.
- <sup>28</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.137.
- <sup>29</sup> Cooper, Continuities in Popular Culture, p.137-38.

## CHAPTER 4

### POLITICAL CAMPAIGN FILMS

The use of film in political campaigns, especially in presidential campaigns has become an art form in the latter half of the 20th Century. The use of film as propaganda for a certain political cause or candidate is a fairly new idea. Once politicians and their supporters found how powerful a medium film was for conveying ideas, they soon utilized film to its fullest potential. The focus of this chapter will be on the small but ever growing history of campaign films, and how Hollywood and Washington D.C. have come together to make a once purely political event into a multimedia event: the Presidential Campaign Film shown at the Republican and Democratic Conventions every four years. I have decided to focus only on the use of film, and not television spots, because the two are vastly different in style and substance. My intent is to show how politicians and their minions have utilized the art form known as film in their political campaigns. I will also examine how Hollywood movies have portrayed politicians on the campaign trail, and if these portrayals of political campaigns in films have influenced the way politicians run campaigns and how Americans view the political process.

The use of film as a means to promote and advertise a politician and his platform has grown from being a gimmick once used in a California gubernatorial race in the 1930s, to a full blown cottage industry in the 1990s. Film has always been one of the most powerful mediums through which to promulgate and promote ideas, so it did not take long for politicians to figure out that they could use this massive power of film to promote their agendas. Propaganda has a pejorative connotation in today's world, but

film as propaganda is not innately wrong or indecent. Propaganda is just another way of selling an idea or advocating a certain cause or belief. Politicians will use any means they can to get their message out, and film is a logical step in promoting a campaign. Though music was used as a tool in campaigns, film was even more persuasive, as a visual medium, film fills the senses of the audience, both visually and audio wise. James E. Combs and Sara T. Combs write in their book, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, that film “allowed voters to see politicians in action. If those moving images could propagate impressions favorable to the political figure featured, then a visual medium over which that figure had some control could serve propaganda interests well.”<sup>1</sup>

The arena in which presidential candidates could best display their campaign films was at the political conventions of their respective parties. These conventions are always covered by the news media fully, and there is usually extensive live coverage of the conventions on the major television networks. These conventions would attract the biggest audience the candidate would ever reach under normal circumstances, so it was the opportune time to show a campaign film that explained who the candidate was and what he stood for. The campaign film could be one of the few instances in which the candidate could explain himself without interruption or critical remarks and questions thrown at him by the news media. As Combs explains, “the politician and his media team obviously wanted relatively ‘uncritical’ media, so if they couldn’t gain that from independent media organizations they tried to communicate controlled messages.”<sup>2</sup> The



campaign film at the national party conventions was the perfect setting for promoting controlled messages.

The campaign film usually precedes the candidates' acceptance speech, thus it gets the highest ratings. If it was shown early during the convention it would not be seen by as many people, the media gurus who work for politicians know full well that the acceptance speech is the most watched part of the total convention coverage on television, and thus gets the widest audience. Placing the campaign film immediately before the candidate gives his acceptance speech is not only a brilliant political move, but also an artistic one. As the campaign films became more and more sophisticated, they began to be seamlessly woven into the candidates' acceptance speech, many times having the candidate's face on screen in the last frame of the film and then the candidate suddenly appears live at the podium to give his speech. This technique closely resembles the film/video wizardry producers use when shooting live events like music concerts or performances. Today's politicians actually turn into a sort of pseudo rock star at their party's convention, with all the trimmings of wild fans, fireworks, balloons and center stage attention.

Combs details the logic behind showing the campaign film at the convention by stating that:

The coverage of political convention by television networks was independent and critical, but the network news organizations feel obligated to cover certain key events virtually without comment or interruption, including the acceptance speech and accompanying campaign film about his life character, political career and qualifications, and 'vision' for America.<sup>3</sup>

By doing this, the “film circumvents the news ‘filter’ and communicates and unadulterated propaganda message about the sterling leadership qualities of the candidate.”<sup>4</sup> Though the media does skewer and critique the film and speech later on, for those few minutes of air time, the film and acceptance speech can speak volumes to the public. The fact that campaign films are now produced by Hollywood producers is no small fact, the campaign film is a serious and important tool for any candidate who wishes to become President of the United States.

### Origins of the Campaign Film

The history of campaign films is somewhat spotty, because many campaign films have been lost or damaged forever, so there is no huge archive of these films to be found anywhere. Unlike paper, film deteriorates quickly if it is not properly stored. It is known though that campaign films have been around since the 1930s and the sound era of films. Before television became the mass medium for American society, political parties and interest groups associated with parties made campaign films. These early films were not sophisticated, they were simple and self-explanatory. Combs writes that these films: “featured the candidate in the context of what the party stood for, and indeed such films likely were limited in their impact to reinforcing the loyalty of the faithful, since they were shown in forums in which the audience was likely to be already predisposed toward party and candidate.”<sup>5</sup>

Many of the early campaign films were not made by the parties themselves, but by interest groups who had strong ties to one party or the other. Unions have always been

on the cutting edge of promoting their ideas, and one of the few earlier campaign film still in existence is *The Roosevelt Express*, a union made campaign film. This film was made by the AFL-CIO on behalf of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic Presidential Candidate in 1944. "This short film featured the smiling face of Roosevelt as the front of a charging locomotive, which the Republicans would be unable to stop."<sup>6</sup> Combs opines that the film was "a clever and effective piece of propaganda", but that it was shown mostly in "union halls and similar labor gatherings to workers who largely could be counted on to vote Democratic anyway."<sup>7</sup> This is the simple truth about most campaign films until recently, they usually were shown and seen only by people already inclined to vote for the candidate in question. Only recently has the campaign film been used as a tool to win the support of new voters and shape the general public's perception of a candidate.

Another early campaign film occurred not in a presidential race, but in a notorious California gubernatorial race in 1934. It was only fitting that the land of movie magic would be the epicenter of this new use of film as political propaganda. The race for governor of California was between the left wing Democrat Upton Sinclair, and the incumbent Republican governor Frank Merriam. Sinclair ran on an anti-Depression reform program called EPIC (End Poverty in California). This program consisted of proposals for increasing property and inheritance taxes, pensions for the poor and elderly, a highly graduated income tax and a highly controversial tax on Hollywood film studios. Sinclair even proposed putting unemployed people in empty studios to make films for the state. These radical proposals scared the Hollywood moguls greatly and they scrambled

into action against Sinclair's campaign. Many studios even threatened to move to Florida if Sinclair had won.<sup>8</sup> The studios pressured employees of the studios to donate money to Merriam's campaign and movie stars were threatened not to support Sinclair or they would be fired. Only Charlie Chaplin supported Sinclair, because he was independent and did not work for a specific studio.<sup>9</sup>

Sinclair was attacked in various mediums, from editorials which took his own words out of context, to newspaper cartoons and radio shows. One radio show even claimed that if Sinclair won he would uproot swimming pools. Hollywood waged an all-out war against Sinclair, it had all the flair and spectacle of a big budget epic, and by September, the studios were producing campaign films that attacked Sinclair. *Variety* magazine even called for the movie studios to use their power against Sinclair "so far as propaganda is concerned, let the picture business assert itself."<sup>10</sup>

The campaign films that were made against Sinclair were produced by MGM and Hearst Metronome. These films were shown all over California for free and were called "newsreels." In these short films, works of fiction were disguised as real news; the gray line between fact and fiction was totally warped in this campaign, as the movie moguls were desperate in their attempt in defeating Sinclair. Combs details some of these short films:

Many of these had a "man in the street" interview format, in which the studio interviewer would ask questions of "ordinary citizens." The pro-Merriam folks were average and respectable. One little old lady said she would vote for Merriam to save her little home.... Alternatively, the Sinclair opponents were suspiciously vagrant or wild looking as demonstrated by one bearded man with a movie-Russian accent who noted that Sinclair's "system vorked vell in Russia, vy can't it vork here?" Other films showed vagrants--actually actors hired to resemble hobos disembarking from trains--who were going to descend on California and

live off of Sinclair's free lunch at taxpayer's expense. A photo of such an alarming scene of great hordes and droves of social undesirables also appeared in state newspapers, although it turned out to be a still from a contemporary movie, *Wild Boys of the Road*.<sup>11</sup>

After this multimedia onslaught backed by the amassed power of all of Hollywood Sinclair did not stand a chance and was easily defeated in the fall election. The outcome really is not the focal point here, but how he was defeated and what tools were used against him are. For the first time in American history, all avenues of the media were utilized and aimed at a candidate. Newspapers, radio, and film were all weapons in the hands of Sinclair's opponents. Not only was the use of film in this campaign groundbreaking, but the way it was used was too. The short campaign films that focused against Sinclair were not just simple little smear jobs, they were full-blown Hollywood productions with casts of hundreds. These short films mixed reality and fantasy into a potent mix. The "principle that a candidate could be touted or savaged by the use of film was established" by the 1934 California gubernatorial race.<sup>12</sup> Not only did this unique race establish the use of the campaign film as a weapon in political campaigns, but it also established the business aspect of political advertising for future campaigns. "The first campaign management firm Whitaker and Baxter came out of the 1934 race, and the Republicans hired an advertising agency, Lord & Taylor, to administer an advertising and publicity campaign, both portents of things to come" notes James Combs.<sup>13</sup>



## Hollywood's Political Campaign Film

As seen as early as in the 1934 California gubernatorial race, Hollywood has had an influence on politics in America. Whether being directly involved in campaigns as in the 1934 race, or just by making films about politicians, especially politicians on the campaign trail, Hollywood has had an impact on the U.S. political process. Beginning in the 1930s, a rash of films were made in Hollywood about politicians running for office. The portrayal of politicians was rarely positive. They were viewed as shysters, connivers, liars, double crossers, or as bumbling fools and idiots who were guided by polls and campaign contributors. In general, the Hollywood portrayal of politicians was unflattering to say the least. The explosion of political genre movies in the 1930s was no doubt a reaction to the Depression and the handling (or mishandling as some would claim) of the nation's economy by Herbert Hoover. "The political films of the early thirties were cynical about the possibility of improvement. They projected the nation's disillusionment and held out little hope of change for the better" writes Terry Christensen in his book Reel Politics.<sup>14</sup>

Films such as *Politics* (1931), *The Phantom President* (1932), *The Dark Horse* (1932), *Washington Masquerade* (1932) and *Washington Merry-Go-Round* (1932) took aim at politicians and caricatured them as crooks and shysters who could not be trusted. Most of these films were filled with clichés about politicians, often presenting the big boss politicos as fat men, or stick thin evil looking manipulators. For example, in the comedy *The Phantom President*, there are a plethora of clichés including "a close up of a horse's ass fades to a close-up of an orating politician's face. The country is run by

bosses and buffoons, and the people are fools, easily seduced by a ‘musical comedy presidential campaign.’”<sup>15</sup> Another cliché found in these films was what Christensen calls the “good man” cliché, where all problems are solved by one lone man who stands for honor and freedom and what is right.<sup>16</sup> An example of this cliché can be found in the aforementioned *The Phantom President* and in the film *Washington Masquerade* where a Kansas senator fights corrupt “interests” involved in a water project scheme.

The 1932 film *Dark Horse* was one of the more cynical political films of the 1930s, especially in the way it presented the electoral process as “little more than a slick sales pitch bought hook, line, and sinker by a gullible populace.”<sup>17</sup> The film attacked the political convention and campaign process through humor. In the film, an unknown delegate is arbitrarily nominated for governor due to two political factions trying to outwit each other. Instead the two factions accidentally nominate an unknown delegate who happens to be an idiot. When the party finds out their nominee is a complete moron they hire a slick campaign manager to shape the candidate and to “package” him for the public. The film “exposes the sham of campaign pomp and ceremony” explain Jim Purdy and Peter Roffman in their book *The Hollywood Social Problem Film*.<sup>18</sup> The slick campaign manager teaches the nominee to “answer all questions inoffensively, by stroking his chin and saying, ‘Yes.....and then again, no.’”, which was a classic lampooning of politicians way with words no doubt.<sup>19</sup> In the end, the nominee is elected by the people and is carried off triumphantly into his victory parade.

*Dark Horse* criticized corruption in politics, a seemingly gullible public, and the packaging of candidates for public consumption. It was regarded as satire on the highest

level, yet upon further review, the film's message was bleak and unyielding. It basically preaches to the audience that all politics is corrupt, and that political campaigns are "all pretense and manipulation, an unlikely salvation."<sup>20</sup> The cynicism in *Dark Horse* was so unrelenting and heavy handed that instead of trying to make a valid point, it bludgeons the reviewer with insidious clichés and presents the public as a bunch of naive fools.

In the *Phantom President*, political campaigns and the "packaging" of candidates was once again the butt of many jokes. Purdy and Roffman write that in *Phantom* the film claims that campaigning and "the democratic process is nothing but a personality contest."<sup>21</sup> In the film two lookalike characters are used in a campaign. One of them is smart and qualified to be the President, but he lacks any personality or "sex appeal." The other has a wonderful personality but no qualifications to be a leader. The "Party" switches the dry and unfriendly candidate with the engaging and likable lookalike candidate during all public appearances. A similarly themed film would be made decades later in the political satire revolving around a lookalike President taking over the nation in *Dave* (1993). In the *Phantom President*, as in *Dark Horse*, the political convention is once again lampooned and made fun of constantly. In the nominating convention scenes "politician after politician makes the same declamatory speech. The speeches are nothing more than fragments of meaningless clichés: 'And to my friends, I say to you...'; 'Government by, for and of the people.'"<sup>22</sup> As in *Dark Horse* the public is fooled by the polished and packaged candidate and elects him to office. This theme of a gullible public being snookered by slick politicians runs strong throughout 1930s political films.

Not all of the political films of the 1930s were comedies though. Dramas such as the unusual *Gabriel over the White House* (1933) and the classic *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) provided serious views of politics in America. In *Gabriel*, a political hack becomes president by making all the right deals and by being corrupt. This hack pays little attention to the country's needs and only focuses on his own behind the scenes conniving and corruption. Then one day the angel Gabriel shows up and

transforms the hack into a benevolent leader, fully committed to solving the nation's problems by the most efficient means possible. Using radio as his communication medium (A technique FDR was just beginning to exploit), he inspires the nation, gets powers he wants from Congress, which he then suspends, and proceeds to feed the hungry, eradicate unemployment, and end crime by declaring martial law and sending out the army to destroy the gangsters (the only cause of crime) by putting them before firing squads without benefit of trial. He then eliminates war, too, by bullying the rest of the world into joining the United States in a disarmament agreement. When the other nations comply, he blows up the entire fleet of the U.S. Navy. As soon as the problems of the nation and the world are solved, however, Gabriel disposes of the president, presumably to save us from dictatorship.<sup>23</sup>

The film caused an uproar among many, including Republicans who thought the film was pro-FDR. Others did not like the clear fascist tone of the film, where a dictator type figure gets the job done. Whether the character was a "good" dictator did not matter, its fascist implications were not easily ignored. Film critics and audiences loved the film and it was one of the box office hits of 1933. Christensen notes that "film scholars now view *Gabriel* as an expression of longing for strong leadership bordering on fascism. Their case is strengthened by the fact that William Randolph Heart, widely considered a fascist sympathizer, was a principal backer of the film."<sup>24</sup>

The classic *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* was full of clichés about politicians, journalists and the way politics work in Washington. Filled with cynical hack journalists, corrupt political bosses and one lone “good man” hero, Mr. Smith was the archetype political film. James Stewart plays the idealistic young Senator Jefferson Smith who goes to Washington to try to make a difference, but he is soon faced with the harsh realities of Washington as political and media hacks try to make a fool out of him. Through various plot devices the film lambastes the political culture and puts forth a simple remedy for all of society’s ills, this remedy is to have good men elected to office, where they’ll work hard, and help the nation through its problems. The system is not the problem in Frank Capra’s film, but rather the “bad men” who inhabit the system, if we just replace the “bad men” with the “good men,” our troubles will be gone.

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* has been labeled “populist” by Terry Christensen. The film tries to convey a message that for the politics to work, there must be faith in the “people”. Christensen adds that the film “presents a prototypical American view of politics, with messages and a style that recur in other movies about politics.”<sup>25</sup> Purdy and Roffman state that the film stands by the age-old cliché that “political malfunctions are attributed to a super-shyster who controls a machine extending from business to the press to Congress.”<sup>26</sup> These clichés about politics continued to be evident in Hollywood films throughout the decades and are still alive even in today’s political films.

Films that dealt with political campaigns were rare in the decades after the Depression. Not until the 1970s and 1980s did films about political campaigns start to crop up again. Films such as *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *The Distinguished*



*Gentleman* (1992), *Bob Roberts* (1992) and *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (1979) all deal with political campaigns at various levels in American government. All of these films retain similar themes and clichés from the political films of the 1930s, clichés such as politics is a nasty and cynical endeavor and one must “play the game” with lobbyists, party bosses, the media and the public in general to win. There also seems to be a theme that runs throughout these films that suggests that the public is easily manipulated by the media and politicians, and that it only takes slick packaging to get elected. Whether in comedies like *Bob Roberts* and *The Distinguished Gentleman*, or dramas like *The Candidate* and *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, there is always an underlying cynicism about political campaigns and the political process.

The 1972 Robert Redford film *The Candidate* is a modernized version of the various political films from the 1930s, like the *The Phantom President*, *Dark Horse* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. In *The Candidate*, Robert Redford is an idealistic young lawyer who is running for the Senate in California. His party (The Democratic Party) does not think he has a chance to win against the powerful incumbent, so they basically let him campaign the way he wants to. Once his unorthodox campaigning methods and messages start to give him a boost in the polls, his party starts to get interested in him again and the political machine slowly starts to influence and shape his candidacy. Like the films of the 1930s, this film shows us a bright, young, wholesome, naive and idealistic man who slowly starts to change and lets the political machine and bureaucracy turn him into just another talking head politician devoid of any new ideas or message. In the end, he wins, and Redford’s character asks his manager “what do we do now?.” The

not so subtle message here is that candidates fight so long and hard to win that, when they finally do win, they don't know what to do.

*The Candidate* was hailed as a realistic film about politics and especially campaigning. Many have quipped that aspiring politicians should see *The Candidate* to learn about the campaign process. Terry Christensen writes that “from advertising to winning endorsements and cajoling key groups, *The Candidate* is a veritable campaign primer.”<sup>27</sup> Christensen adds that “as entertaining and seductive as *The Candidate* was, its message about politics was less than encouraging.”<sup>28</sup> Like the films of the 1930s, *The Candidate* takes a naive and promising candidate, and slowly lets the audience see how the power and influence of the political system seduce and overwhelm even the most well meaning of people. Even with this cynical underlying tone, the film continues to be a must see film for anybody interested in running for public office.

A similar film in tone and realism was the 1979 drama *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, starring Alan Alda as Joe Tynan, a young promising liberal New York Senator with an exemplary record. This film is almost a pseudo sequel to Redford's *The Candidate*, whereas Redford's film dealt with the trials and tribulations of trying to get elected to office, *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* deals with what happens to an idealistic politician once he is in office. In the film Tynan promises to an old colleague that he will not lead an opposition to a Supreme Court nominee. Once his aides and outside parties start influencing him into leading the opposition, he breaks his promise and begins to do so. In the film Joe Tynan is politically and sexually seduced into leading the opposition against the Supreme Court nominee, along the way he loses friendships, strains his

marriage and hurts his usually stellar reputation. Yet instead of losing power and prestige, he becomes more powerful and influential and even toys with the idea of running for president. Like in *The Candidate*, this film meticulously shows how good people can be seduced into doing things that are against their principles, and how power becomes the ultimate aphrodisiac. The film is also realistic in its depiction of politics. “More than most films about politics, it rings true on the personal costs of political life, its small compromises and its corruptions,” writes Christensen.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1990s there have been a number of film comedies about politics and political campaigns, including the hard hitting satire *Bob Roberts* and the Eddie Murphy vehicle *The Distinguished Gentleman*. *Bob Roberts* satirized the campaign process and the media in general. In the film, Tim Robbins plays a right-wing senatorial candidate who uses his own folk songs in his political campaign. Bob Roberts is the candidate of the future, he is a one-man multimedia show. The film itself is replete with clichés and stereotypes and is a pure partisan film, yet the film continues the Hollywood tradition of lampooning corrupt politicians and the campaign trail, as well as the generally perceived gullibility of the American public. *The Distinguished Gentleman*, on the other hand, is a traditional comedy with little to offer except the comedic antics of its star Eddie Murphy. Though like *Bob Roberts* it follows a candidate on the campaign trail and delivers the audience the usual roll call of corrupt politicians, sleazy lobbyists and sneering media. The film could have easily fit in with the 1930s political comedies, it has the same structure and characterizations shared by countless other films about political campaigns.

Hollywood's fascination with political campaigns has not stopped. In 1998 alone two major films were released about political campaigns. *Primary Colors* (1998) and *Bulworth* (1998) both received mixed reviews and were not box office hits. They both dealt with the inner workings of political campaigns, *Primary Colors* focuses on a presidential campaign whereas *Bulworth* focuses on yet another California senatorial candidate. *Primary Colors* was based on the Joe Klein novel that was loosely based on his observations of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. The film was very timely in its portrayal of a likable but imperfect Southern governor running for the highest office in the land. The governor (played by the popular John Travolta doing his best Bill Clinton impersonation) must overcome a sex scandal during his campaign. The film has all the usual trimmings of a political film, with the usual characterizations of trusty aides, unscrupulous media and seductive forces ready to influence the candidate around every corner. Like many political films of the 90s, *Primary Colors* had a political slant, which will either increase or decrease one's enjoyment of the film.

*Bulworth* was another comedy about an older senatorial candidate who basically forgets all traditional political wisdom and starts talking to the public truthfully and openly about various topics. In the film, Warren Beatty plays California Senator Jay Bulworth. Senator Bulworth is up for re-election yet is disillusioned with the political system and the corruption in politics, so he hires a contract out on his life. After signing his death wish, he feels he can do and say whatever he wants to during the final days of his political campaign. He starts offending various constituents while "telling it like it is" with various F-words and crass language, all in a rap like fashion. The film has many of

the old political clichés: corrupt politicians, greedy lobbyists, lazy press and a gullible public. Yet that is where *Bulworth*'s similarity with most political campaign films ends. *Bulworth* brings new life into the political film by injecting social, political, and economic diatribes into the mix. They are done to perfection by Warren Beatty, who also wrote and directed the film. Any viewer whatever his or her politics, will find something to think about from watching the film. The film's realism only adds to its flavor, with even the political cable television outlet C-Span making various cameos in the film.

*Bulworth* is an experiment in political filmmaking. While most films about political campaigns have the candidate hiding behind rhetoric and being afraid to offend anyone, thus making his/her public pronouncements bland and indistinguishable from other candidates, *Bulworth* is very different. The film has the candidate talking truthfully from his heart, and if his words offend anyone, he does not care. For the first time the audience sees a politician being totally honest and unafraid to say what he feels. The fact that this is a virtual impossibility in the real world makes the film very humorous. The audience is not really laughing at what Beatty's character is saying, but rather at the audacity and nerve of him for having the guts to speak as openly as he does. Though the public in the film love his honesty, in real life a politician who would dare be so truthful would most likely be viewed as some sort of freak. *Bulworth* mixes old clichés and characterizations within a new paradigm and delivers a refreshing new view on the power of politics and what the cost of being honest is in today's society.

There is no doubt that Hollywood's depiction of political campaigns has shaped the public's opinion about politics in general. Since the beginning, Hollywood has



portrayed politics as a dirty and corrupt business, where fresh young men and women with ideals and honor are quickly turned into just another homogenized politician. Hollywood has been characterizing politicians as being two-faced and sleazy for decades, and that cliché is still strong today. Hollywood's portrayal of political campaigns has varied very little over the past 80 years. Even in 1998, films about political campaigns are full of negative stereotypes about politicians, lobbyists and the media. Campaigns are viewed as being little more than a three ring circus where politicians are influenced and seduced by various factions and where the public is shown as being gullible and simple minded. It is no wonder that most political films fail to become box office hits, because they insult the public with age-old stereotypes about politics. Yet the public feels comfortable watching these stereotypes, because like the media and lawyers, politicians are one of society's favorite targets to lampoon.

Do politicians learn anything from these Hollywood productions? It is likely that any smart politician could learn a thing or two from these films. These films definitely teach candidates what not to do on the campaign trail, and the ever-popular vision of a new straight-laced populist leader emerging from the hinterlands of America is still alive in American cinema. A politician may be influenced a bit by these films, if anything, he/she will at least learn how to beware of corrupt influences and to stay clear of the dangerous seductive powers of money, power and sex that can alter political careers forever.

## Political Campaigning in the Modern Era

Political campaign films did not really explode into production during the 1930s and 1940s for various reasons. One is that movie theaters had become more independent and did not cater to every whim of the studios, so they shied away from becoming politicized. Another reason was because of World War II. As I will detail in the next chapter, film propaganda during this time was aimed at supporting the overall war effort, not any specific political party or agenda. Yet Combs reiterates that “the principle remained that if one owned a medium of communication, it offered the power and opportunity for political advocacy.”<sup>30</sup>

As television became the central medium for news and information in the 1950s, newsreels and campaign films were no longer seen on the big screen. Television’s influence on politics and political campaigns was massive. When television news started to expand its coverage of political conventions in the 1960s, American political conventions would change forever. Political conventions were usually made for citizens who already had a political view and opinion. With the onset of television and extended news coverage of these political conventions, the politicians smartly decided that they could use their own political conventions to actually gain new support and voters from across the country. Instead of just preaching to the faithful, the conventions would now be one big advertisement for the political party and presidential candidate of that party. Combs writes that “Conventions became scripted, arranged, and patterned to conform with the conventions of television. The purpose of this organization of the convention into a TV show was to maximize the positive image the party and candidate could

convey.”<sup>31</sup> American political conventions had become “made for TV” events, a sort of sporting event for political junkies and concerned citizens. The two major party conventions had become the equivalent of the Super Bowl and the World Series of the political world.

Politicians and the media battle over convention coverage all the time. The politicians want as much free and uninterrupted airtime as they can get, and the media wants to do as much on the spot analysis and commentary as they can get away with. In watching political conventions, one can clearly see that the news media has won the battle. There is always constant commentary and analysis by political pundits and talking heads that it drowns out what is going on the convention floor and podium. There are only two times during the coverage of the conventions when the “candidate and party message is fairly unadorned: the acceptance speech and the convention film.”<sup>32</sup>

The acceptance speech has been the core and staple of political conventions throughout American history. It is the pinnacle, the highlight of the entire convention. When the Presidential nominee accepts his party’s nomination to be the candidate for the party (the main function of the convention), it is no surprise that the acceptance speech is placed at the end of the convention. It is no surprise that whenever the candidate gives an acceptance speech, his poll ratings jump up, at least for a short time. The speech is shown live without interruptions or commentary by the news media. Though after the speech the media and pundits go full bore with their comments and criticisms and evaluations of the speech, but at least the candidate gets his one shot at free and unadulterated air time to

speak about himself, his goals and proposals and his vision for the future without being interrupted.

The other time during the convention when the media lay off on any comments or analysis is when the convention film is shown, which is shown uninterrupted. The convention film is a fairly new idea, but has grown in importance over the decades and is now a staple of the convention and the most anticipated event besides the acceptance speech. The convention film came about because of television. With the advent of television and wall-to-wall news coverage of political conventions on the big networks, politicians used the opportunity to advertise their party and candidate to the masses by producing a film about the candidate and his beliefs. Over the years these films have become more and more highly produced and full of emotional impact. Today's convention films are like small Hollywood productions, with actual Hollywood film producers creating works of political propaganda art. Famous sitcom producers Harry and Linda Thomasson produced both of Bill Clinton's convention films, these were viewed as groundbreaking films, in both style and content. The emotional content and tear jerker quality of these films had some critics crying that politicians had become "Oprahized," referring to the popular Oprah Winfrey day time talk show where frequently guests would spill out their emotions and feelings in front of a national audience. The "Oprahization" of the American political culture, where politicians freely admit faults and speak of their tough childhood led many to wonder if we were trying to elect a president or a national whiner.

The convention film itself is “structured as a personal biography, placing the candidate in mythic terms.”<sup>33</sup> He is “often envisioned as from humble origins (Johnson City, Whittier, Plains, Dixon, Hope), as being in touch with the heart of the people, and as possessing the dynamic characteristics and vision of the future that qualifies him for the presidency.”<sup>34</sup> The film is usually loaded with white bread American clichés and images, such as scenes of family picnics and churches and hard working Americans. The format is a collage of still and moving images, with triumphant and stirring music played in the background for emphasis. The convention film really is like a Hollywood film, with a story, romance, humor and even sometimes action and suspense. Combs describes the convention film format as a:

narrative accompanied by a succession of moving and still images of the candidate’s life and work, including placement in local and familial settings such as cracker-barrel encounters with ordinary folks and sunny-day picnics with children or grandchildren, dynamic images of the candidate’s charismatic appeal, and his or her accomplishments.<sup>35</sup>

Other common aspects found in convention films are attempts at portraying the candidate as having a “rags to riches” life story, and any politician with military duty under his belt will utilize any footage of himself during his days as a soldier. George Bush’s 1988 campaign film stressed both these themes heavily. Though Bush came from wealth, his film told “the tale of his venture west into the oil business to imply he had started at the bottom without assets and worked his way up.”<sup>36</sup> His 1988 campaign film also championed his heroic military service during World War II, including showing the famous news footage of a young Bush being rescued from the Pacific Ocean after being shot down on a mission against the Japanese. Whether one was for or against Bush,



seeing the images of him being rescued from near capture or death by the nearby Japanese was truly unforgettable and moving. Americans have become very cynical when they listen to politicians, and even old war stories do not always move the public, but when Bush could actually show footage of him floating out in the ocean with the Japanese just a few miles away, it touches even the most jaded observer.

Like the war films made by Hollywood, campaign films are full of patriotic fervor and grandeur. Patriotic images abound in campaign films and many campaign films look almost like tourist attraction advertisements for the United States. One is almost expecting to hear a voice from the film asking all to come and experience the “American way of life”. These films are full of images of

flags being raised, children playing, marriages, and other joyous occasions, rhetoric about ‘morning in America,’ and montages of a strong, happy, and prosperous land that is now and will be forever. The montage of stills narrated by an authoritative voice, oftentimes the candidate himself or herself, often bespeaks the candidate’s ‘rhetorical vision’.<sup>37</sup>

One example of a candidate narrating his own film was President Carter during his “I see a day” montage, which consisted of “a series of inspiring stills that concludes with a shot of Mt. Rushmore’s facade that fades subliminally into Carter’s” face.<sup>38</sup> Bush’s campaign film from 1992 also used a subliminal effect when, near the end of his film, he is shown walking toward the camera and then the screen on stage lifts up and Bush walks through right on cue, like he had walked out of the film itself. As the importance of these campaign films has grown over the years, so have the budgets for the films. Today’s campaign films cost millions of dollars to produce and utilize actors, extras and special

effects. They truly are Hollywood productions. One expects to see in the future computer-generated effects and morphing techniques in these campaign films.

The growing importance and cost of these films coincides with the fact that the general public now expects these films not only to inform and educate them on the candidate and his goals, but also entertain them. Ronald Reagan's famous 1984 campaign film *Morning in America* was groundbreaking in both its visual style and its content. The film was a virtual love affair with Reagan's past, present and future. The film had grand visions of history making accomplishments during his first term, heart wrenching drama and tons of Reagan's feel good charm and humor. In the film Reagan was shown "relaxing in a hammock, reflecting on his brush with death from the assassination attempt and vowing that whatever time he has left, pointing upwards, 'belongs to Him,' presaging the holy conduct of his second term."<sup>39</sup> The film treated Reagan like the celebrity he was. He was not only the President, but a larger than life figure in American society. It is no coincidence that the former actor shown at his best in the campaign film, yet nothing about him ever seemed staged or fake as he came across authentic and real, which was a major factor in his popularity. Bill Clinton is another President who has garnered much support and popularity more from his personable ways and charming personality than from his actual proposals or accomplishments.

The Reagan *Morning in America* campaign film was revolutionary in the fact that it became the "core document of the visual propaganda effort of the campaign, often shown in its entirety in selected media markets and also cut up into spot advertisements.... (the) film became the basis for several spots."<sup>40</sup> This tactic of cutting

up parts of the campaign film and using them as spot ads on television is now used frequently in campaigns. Sort of like a trailer for an upcoming film, these spot advertisements are the highlights of the campaign film. This also makes economic sense, since these campaign films cost so much to produce nowadays. It would be foolish and a waste of money to just show the film once. By editing and cutting up the complete film into smaller segments, it and its message can live on for months and have staying power during the rest of the campaign.

Convention campaign films are not always used just for promoting the candidate and the party. Sometimes they serve other purposes such as paying tribute to a “fallen or successful leader which produces an immediate emotional reaction not altogether desirable from the point of view of present leaders.”<sup>41</sup> The first occurrence of this sort of tribute in a campaign film was at the 1964 Democratic Convention. The convention film that year was solely a tribute to slain president John F. Kennedy. Combs claims that “the Kennedy film set the standard for political tribute to a fallen leader but also served to keep the “Kennedy name” at the forefront of the gathered party.” Not all were enamored with the idea of the campaign film being a tribute to JFK. Lyndon Johnson felt that the campaign film should have focused on him and his goals, like a normal campaign film would. The film only reinforced LBJ’s belief that he was just serving out an interregnum, and that the party was waiting for him to fall.<sup>42</sup> What made matters worse was that, after the film was shown, Robert Kennedy was drowned out by the crowd with thunderous applause. There even was a ground swell of support for putting Robert Kennedy on the ticket with Johnson, something Johnson did not want. To make sure Robert Kennedy was

not added on to the ticket, Lyndon Johnson chose Senator Hubert Humphrey as his vice president. Combs theory is that at the 1964 Democratic convention the film was used for more than just a simple tribute to a slain leader. He believes that it was used as a prod against Johnson, to remind him he was only a temp, and that the Democratic party still was in the Kennedy “camp.”<sup>43</sup>

A similar occurrence happened again at the already turbulent 1968 Democratic Convention. Besides having to worry about riots and inner squabbles at the Convention, the Democratic Party had to deal with another controversial convention film. Like in 1964, the convention film was a glowing tribute to a slain leader, this time the film honored Robert Kennedy and the Kennedy family in general. With Johnson out of the race, Hubert Humphrey was the likely candidate for the Democratic ticket in 1968. Yet as in 1964, the convention film stirred up trouble and emotion among the delegates, and spawned a movement to nominate Senator Edward Kennedy for president. Combs deduces that “like the 1964 film honoring his brother, the 1968 film was shown in a volatile political setting, conjuring up memories and associations that again gave credence to the Kennedy family’s claim on the presidential throne.” Combs contends that both films were actually attempts at mythmaking at the grandest level:

both films did not serve the interests of the candidate of the party but rather the interests of a family whose political sons were successively promoted to instant immortality, but whose death and transfiguration put the nominee in the difficult position of being merely mortal and a poor substitute for the fallen gods.<sup>44</sup>

It was already an arduous task for any nominee to try to fill the shoes of the slain Kennedy brothers, having to be reminded of that fact at the convention where one was supposedly to be the focus only made it that much more difficult.

Campaign films are not always a positive force in a campaign. If they are not made with at least some sense of decency or intelligence, they can actually hurt a campaign severely. This was the case in 1964 when an independent pro-Goldwater group produced a campaign film for Goldwater entitled *Choice*. The fact that this campaign film was neither produced nor endorsed by the Republican party was a sign of the times in the mid 1960s. By the mid 1960s it was common for independent groups to make campaign films for candidates and parties whom they supported and agreed with on policy and issue matters. The political parties more than welcomed the participation of these independent groups, like unions, civil rights groups and conservative organizations to create campaign films for their candidates. The flip side to their participation was that they did not always make stellar campaign films. In fact in the case of the pro-Goldwater film *Choice*, it was a total embarrassment to Goldwater and the Republican Party.

*Choice* was shown on local television stations all across the nation, this was also a new idea, buying time on local stations to show campaign films to a wider audience. Unfortunately for Goldwater, it would have been better if no one ever saw this film. *Choice* stirred up a huge controversy because of the way it depicted Democrats and their ilk. The “choice” they refer to in the film is Goldwater: he was “a choice, not an echo” the film rang out boldly. The film portrayed the Democrats as

the party whose rule had produced black rioters, protected pornographers, and furthered corruption in government and drinking and driving: an opening shot



shows a large car roaring down a country road, driven by a man in a Stetson hat who suspiciously resembles Lyndon Johnson, who throws a beer can out the window.<sup>45</sup>

The film was poorly made, not only in production value but in content. It was beyond negative, it was insulting and outrageous. It was the butt of many jokes and was lambasted and criticized all throughout the country, by both the media and both major parties. Democratic chairman John Bailey condemned it as “the sickest political program to be conceived since television became a factor in American politics.”<sup>46</sup> Even Goldwater himself was outraged by the film. He stated that “this is a racist film,” and asked for it to be withdrawn. *Choice* did much harm and no good for the Goldwater campaign. It was not just an embarrassment, it actually became an issue itself in the campaign. Instead of talking about serious issues like foreign policy and taxes, Goldwater had to spend time on repudiating and deflecting the negativity this film caused to his campaign. It not only made Goldwater supporters look racist and evil, but the film was so poorly made that it was lampooned for its ineptness too. *Choice* proved that sometimes a campaign film can do more harm to a campaign than good.

Though when a campaign film hits all its marks and is made with passion and sincerity, it can not only help a campaign, but can be remembered for years to come as an historical document. Two such films rise to this greatness. Ronald Reagan’s 1984 campaign film *It’s Morning Again In America* and Bill Clinton’s 1992 *Man From Hope* campaign film. Both were slick and well produced films with Hollywood influences in each. Both focused on the humble roots of each candidate, and on the importance of family and communal life in America. Both also surrounded the candidate in a mythical

aura almost. Reagan as the last good cowboy, ready to serve his country one last time and lead America into a bright future. Clinton was portrayed as a wonderboy, who was destined to become President. From the famous photo of him meeting JFK, to his years in public office, the film made us believe that Clinton was special, yet an everyman too, because of his rough childhood. Neither film wallowed in negativity or strife, both were uplifting and looked to a better and brighter future.

Yet each film had distinct qualities apart from the other. Reagan's campaign film was for his second term. It was his farewell and it was to show the world he could lead America for one last time and make it better than ever. Clinton's film was on the other hand for his first run at the White House, and it focused more on his personal history and his agenda for the future. Reagan's *Morning in America* film was more of a victory lap, showing all the accomplishments the Reagan administration ushered in his first term. There very few specifics or policy proposals mentioned in Reagan's film, it was more of a feel good film, asking Americans if they felt better off than they did four years ago, and whether they wanted to give the Gipper one last term to complete the job. Clinton's film was filled with proposals and a clear vision for the future of America. After the first half of the film focused on his upbringing and life story, the second half was geared more toward policy and issues. In the end, both candidates were elected by wide margins, and many pundits saw a Reagan-like quality in Clinton, in the way he could transfix a crowd with a speech, and as his term went on, in how he could sneak out of trouble that would ruin other politicians. Both films will be remembered as being more than just convention films, but also as important documents in American history.

The campaign film is an ever-changing entity. In the 1990s it seems that these films have sought to humanize the candidates, make them seem like “one of us.” The campaign films of 1992 and 1996 all had this humanistic quality about them. Both of Clinton’s films had that humanistic touch, making him seem like an everyday Joe, who can feel our pain and can relate to all of us. Even the stately George Bush went the humanistic route in 1992, with a film that focused on his extended family and through all his struggles and tribulations of his life and years in politics. When the usually tough and hard Bob Dole’s campaign film in 1996 had this humanistic and sensitive feel to it, one could see that this was more than just a fad, but was here to stay. Dole who always prided himself in working hard and who never whined or used his handicap to his advantage looked seemingly out of place in his 1996 campaign film. Though touching and heart moving as his life story was, it seemed odd to see this ornery politician forced into taking the “Oprah” route and having him discuss his war experiences and war injury in his own campaign film. Many critics found it sad, not sad in the sense of his life story, but that such a proud man could be forced to take the “sympathetic” route in his own campaign film. It is clear that today’s politicians want to be more than just populist, but also humanistic. The campaign films of the 1990s all have had this humanizing quality about them, trying to have the politicians “relate” to the public. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues in the next presidential election, or if there will be a backlash and the public will want a candidate who is not just like us, not a regular Joe, but an actual leader, someone who is not average but extraordinary and capable of leading the country into the 21st Century.

The campaign film is a powerful tool in the American political process. It has grown from being a side show event to one of the highlights of any political convention and presidential campaign. Now millions are spent on presidential campaign films, not because the film is a fun piece of entertainment, though it can be, but because it does shape and influence the public to some extent. A campaign film may not elect a President, but a poor one can sure hurt his chances greatly, as in the case of Goldwater in 1964. The American public is living in an ever-visual society, where perception trumps fact and where looks and a facade are what are important. Americans read newspapers less and less and turn toward television and now the Internet for their news and information. People now go by what they see more than what they hear or know to be true. With the advent of technology and computer generated visuals, it is now possible to create life like visuals, so life like that they can even fool the best trained eye. All of these societal and technological changes lead me to believe that the campaign film will become even more important in future presidential campaigns. As people spend more and more time on non-political events and activities, they will want a nice and concise form of information about their candidates they can digest quickly and easily in the comfort of their “busy” lives. It will be most interesting to see how future campaign films are produced and presented to the American people.

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Combs and Sara T. Combs. Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, (Garland Publishing, New York, 1994), p.107.

<sup>2</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.107.

<sup>3</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.107.

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- <sup>4</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.107.
- <sup>5</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.109.
- <sup>6</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.109.
- <sup>7</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.109.
- <sup>8</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.109.
- <sup>9</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.109.
- <sup>10</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.110.
- <sup>11</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.110.
- <sup>12</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.110.
- <sup>13</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.110.
- <sup>14</sup> Terry Christensen, Reel Politics. (Basil Blackwell Inc, New York, 1987), p.31.
- <sup>15</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.32.
- <sup>16</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.32.
- <sup>17</sup> Jim Purdy and Peter Roffman, The Hollywood Social Problem Film (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1981), p.36.
- <sup>18</sup> Purdy and Roffman, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, p.37.
- <sup>19</sup> Purdy and Roffman, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, p.37.
- <sup>20</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.32.
- <sup>21</sup> Purdy and Roffman, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, p.38.
- <sup>22</sup> Purdy and Roffman, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, p.39.
- <sup>23</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.34.
- <sup>24</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.34-35.
- <sup>25</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.48.
- <sup>26</sup> Purdy and Roffman, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, p.57
- <sup>27</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.130.
- <sup>28</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.131.



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- <sup>29</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.171.
- <sup>30</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.110.
- <sup>31</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.113.
- <sup>32</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.113.
- <sup>33</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.113.
- <sup>34</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.113.
- <sup>35</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.113.
- <sup>36</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.113.
- <sup>37</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.114.
- <sup>38</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.114.
- <sup>39</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.114.
- <sup>40</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.114.
- <sup>41</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.114.
- <sup>42</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.114.
- <sup>43</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.115.
- <sup>44</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.115.
- <sup>45</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.115.
- <sup>46</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.115.

## CHAPTER 5

### WAR FILMS

Film, like music, has been an integral part of American history in this century. As I have detailed in previous chapters, music not only has become important in political races, but has also been both a factor in war propaganda and a form of entertainment during war times. In this chapter I will discuss how Hollywood has influenced and reflected the American public's perceptions and feelings about war. This chapter is divided into three sections. Each section will focus on a different war time era: World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. I will not be reviewing these films for their entertainment value but rather, will show how each war time era had a distinct style and flavor and how war films reflected this.

Movies are “parasocial vehicles revealing the very parameters of human society” and are helpful in providing “iconographic shorthand for political communication” states Robert Savage.<sup>1</sup> Though the debate rages on about how much film reflects or influences society, there is no question that films have had an impact on American political discourse and communication in the 20th Century. As Savage contends, film can and has been used as a form of political communication. This fact can be seen most clearly during wartime. The importance of political communication is at its zenith during times of war and armed conflict. During war, a nation's leaders must use every form of communication they can to inform and persuade the public that the nation is at war for good reason. James and Sara Combs call this use of film by the government “propaganda.” According to them political authorities came to recognize “the importance

of movie propaganda in perpetrating the war effort, and in many cases formed a symbiotic relationship between a private industry and public agency in producing and distributing the kinds of supportive films that the government at war required.”<sup>2</sup>

They go on to say that “Film quickly proved to be highly adaptable to the requirements and aims of propaganda, bringing to the project of war propaganda the visual spectacle and kinetic energy peculiar to the medium.”<sup>3</sup>

There is evidence that at times the American government and the film community did join forces to make war films that were supportive of various U.S. war efforts around the world. I do not share, however, the grand proclamation by the Combs that war films in general are “propaganda” for the government’s war efforts. When one discusses the impact of cultural items such as song and film, one must be careful not to make sweeping comments about the influence and intent of these forms of art. Films have been influenced by the U.S. government’s wishes at times during this century, but there is clearly no overarching conspiracy to control the output out of Hollywood. As movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn once said, “Messages are for Western Union.” For decades many in Hollywood lived by Goldwyn’s rubric that movies were meant to entertain, not to educate, pontificate or influence the public. The producers in Hollywood found that movies with a message normally flopped at the box office, so Hollywood in general stayed away from moralizing message films. This applied also to propagandistic war films. Terry Christensen notes in his book Reel Politics that, “with few exceptions, the propagandistic wartime movies were flops.”<sup>4</sup>

## Governmental Oversight of Hollywood during Wartime

Once the government knew it was going to intervene and join the fray of World War I, there was a pragmatic shift from Wilson's peace and "too proud to fight" rhetoric to a wartime mentality and even a "war fever" sentiment. This war fever mentality and support for the armed forces going into battle into World War I was also reflected in the nation's films. The government worked hand in hand with Hollywood to "sell" the war to America.<sup>5</sup> The government agency that headed this effort was The Committee on Public Information (CPI). The director of this agency, George Creel found that Hollywood was "eager to help" in the war propaganda effort. The CPI's main goals were to "maintain the official view as the dominant one, demonize the enemy, exalt the inevitability of victory and the sanctity of war aims, uplift public morale and contributions, and interpret in a favorable light all immediate war news."<sup>6</sup>

Hollywood was heavily involved in the war effort during World War I. Hollywood wanted to prove to the nation that it was patriotic and supportive of the nation's fighting forces. Some of the ways in which the movie industry helped included having major Hollywood stars tour the nation on "Liberty Bond" drives. Trailers were made with big stars like Fairbanks and Chaplin selling bonds, and movie theaters also let Creel's men sell bonds before and after movie showings. Movie newsreels like the *Pathe Weekly* would use footage and "story lines" from the CPI in an effort to salute and promote the American war effort.<sup>7</sup>

Feature films would become Hollywood's biggest contribution to the war effort in World War I. The CPI would coordinate and approve all films during the war, to make

sure they did not send the wrong “message” to American audiences. Combs writes eloquently on the power of film over American audiences during The Great War:

In the emotional climate of opinion during American entry, movies became a great source of learning for audiences eager to believe. The doubts and fears of so many during the long period of national neutrality could now be exorcised in the cathartic expressions of patriotic confidence and admiration for heroics depicted on the screen. Audiences “unlearned” their previous reservations by projecting their identification with the action and the values unreeling on the screen.<sup>8</sup>

The films that Hollywood made during the Great War had recurring themes, such as patriotism, honor, morality, selflessness, responsibility, heroism and a general support for the war itself. Young men who were reluctant to join the military were portrayed as wimps, slackers and cowards in these films, whereas men who joined and served their country during a time of crisis were portrayed as true heroes and men of the highest morals and character. Combs states that:

Patriotic impulse was heightened in the movies with visions of the camaraderie of barracks and bivouac life with comrades, the prospect of the sights and girls of France, and of combat heroics.... The war films could only offer positive reinforcement of a new mindset, one that deemed it necessary for social acceptance and world progress to support without doubts or even for some recent memory the conduct of the war.<sup>9</sup>

In their effort to propagandize and lend support to the war effort, these films often glamorized war. The films of this era for the most part made war seem like an adventure, almost making it seem like a fun outing and a vacation. In these films, wounds are always clean and neat, the enemy is tough, but in the end the “good guys” always win, and triumph and victory was inevitable. These fantasy images of war often created massive disillusionment amongst men who had seen these films and thus joined the military to serve their country and join the “adventure.” The disillusionment came rapidly when



these men saw the real horror of war and that it was not a neat little adventure but actually a horrific nightmare. The disillusionment and the promotion of skewed reality was not the concern of the government or the filmmakers, for as Combs suggests “propaganda is about immediate motivation, advocating and inducing thought, emotion, and action towards a determined goal. Second thoughts or dashed illusions later on are of no moment.”<sup>10</sup>

During World War II, as in World War I, the U.S. government did try to influence Hollywood into making films supportive of the American involvement overseas. In 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt created an entity known as the Office of War Information (OWI). The Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) became part of OWI’s domestic branch. More importantly, in June 1942, the government issued the Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry. The manual was a blueprint for Hollywood. Brian Neve describes the manual’s goals:

The manual has been seen as “the clearest possible statement of New Deal, liberal views on how Hollywood should fight the war”. It stressed that the “people’s war” was not just a fight of self defense but also a fight for democracy and the “Four Freedoms” against the forces and values of fascism; it also encouraged Hollywood to publicize the efforts of the Allies and of resistance groups in Norway, Yugoslavia and elsewhere in occupied Europe.<sup>11</sup>

The OWI and the manual were created for the most part to deflect, “rule out or tone down themes which might imply criticism of American society or institutions” during wartime.<sup>12</sup> The manual did have an impact on movie studios and the production of films during World War II. The OWI did not mind if films showed domestic problems on screen, as long as the film showed “how democracy solved them.” The OWI did have a

strong influence over Hollywood during the years 1942-1943. Koppes and Black contend that the OWI's influence over the film industry was "an influence over an American mass medium never equaled before or since by a government agency."<sup>13</sup>

One of the earliest examples of the influence the OWI and the BMP had on a Hollywood production was with the Warner Brothers film *Action in the North Atlantic*, which came out in 1943. A treatment for the proposed film was reviewed by the Hollywood office of the BMP in July 1942. The office reviewing the treatment had mixed praise and criticism for the script. It was praised for showing American Navy crews as being like America itself, with men of all races and creeds on board. The BMP also criticized the script as being patronizing, for its "emphasis on the antipathy of the merchant captain towards the Navy, and the negative characterization of a negro pantryman."<sup>14</sup>

The script was reworked to meet the standards the BMP wanted and in September of 1942 an OWI reviewer claimed that the screenplay kept the best parts of the original treatment while correcting all the mistakes from before. The black character was totally eliminated from the screenplay altogether. When the final print of the film was reviewed in May 1943, the OWI reviewed the film positively. The overseas office of the OWI thought the film was a "powerful and heart-warming proof to foreign peoples that Americans are delivering the goods, that our power and determination will prevail against the enemy and all his weapons, and that we are truly a working, fighting part of the United Nations."<sup>15</sup> Any criticism of America or its armed forces or mention of American domestic troubles was stripped from the script totally. The BMP and OWI for

the next few years would routinely review and censor and delete any negative and Anti-American sentiments found in Hollywood scripts.

The BMP in 1943 “considered that there had been a decided change in the outlook of the industry in the period since the Hollywood office had opened in May of 1942.”<sup>16</sup> The office saw how Hollywood evolved from making war films just for economic reasons and only caring about box office success, to caring about how their films will be received and whether they will support the U.S. war effort at home and overseas. The Warner Brothers studios were the most “prominent in the field of war propaganda.”<sup>17</sup> In 1943 Jack L. Warner stated that he wanted the studio to be in the “production of pictures which will help the people to understand the peace and the victory.” Warner war films such as *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *Action in The North Atlantic* (1943), *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), *Casablanca* (1943), *Watch on the Rhine* (1943) and *Edge of Darkness* (1943) all promoted and supported the American war effort in World War II.

One of the more interesting aspects of the OWI and the way it reviewed films was the fact that it would not tolerate any negative stereotyping of ethnic or religious groups in America. The OWI tried to delete any references to racism, classism, sexism or any other “ism” found in American society. The OWI believed that any portrayal of America’s social problems would be fodder for the enemy. So movies made during World War II had almost no social stereotyping at all. Instead America was presented as a land of various creeds, races and religions that all lived in harmony. Though a nice goal, that image shown on the big screen was as much a fantasy as the *Wizard of Oz*.

Even films that dealt with the problems of juvenile delinquents were cut and re-shot as a result of heavy criticism by the OWI. The film *Youth Runs Wild* (1944) for example, went under severe editing and re-shooting because the OWI objected to the film's "portrayal of the problem of juvenile delinquency without sufficient emphasis on the steps being taken to redress it by federal, state and community agencies."<sup>18</sup>

The OWI's attempt to make sure Hollywood films presented America as a unified and multiethnic nation had positive and negative repercussions. Under the OWI, Hollywood did make some films that included non-stereotypical roles for blacks, such as in *The Talk of The Town*, *In This Our Life*, *Casablanca*, *The Negro Soldier* and *Sahara*. For most of Hollywood's history blacks had been presented in stereotypical and negative roles, either as maids, bums, slaves or crooks. At least during the Second World War this outright negative portrayal of blacks ceased under the helm of OWI's reviews. Not only were there positive portrayals of blacks in wartime films in the 1940s, but also Jewish Americans as well. In films such as *Mr. Skeffington*, *Pride of the Marines*, *The House I Live In* all had Jewish characters portrayed in an heroic light.<sup>19</sup>

Yet these films were knowingly misrepresenting the truth about America and the way it treated minorities. These films presented America the dream, not America the reality. By having Hollywood portray America as some perfect nation with no real problems, it did a disservice to every American, and was an insult to blacks and other minorities who knew that what they saw on screen was not true. In the government's attempt to show America off as the beacon of freedom and democracy in the world through its films, it tended to go overboard in its positive portrayal of America.

Film has been used in times of war as propaganda, whether it has been government sanctioned propaganda or just coincidental, throughout American history films have largely been pro-American. This is even truer during times of war, but even after the war has ended, very few times have there been films that were critical of the war effort and the government's policies during war. This is not to say that all war films are pro-war. While some war films have glorified war and the heroics of fighting men, it is more for sheer entertainment value, not a political statement made by the filmmakers in support of war. As I examine the films from various war eras in the 20th Century, it will be evident that even in the beginning filmmakers straddled the line between supporting the nation's efforts while still denouncing war itself as a form of resolving conflicts. From the silent film classic *Wings* (1927) to 1998's blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan*, war films reflect how American society views its priorities and its political system.

### World War I

The power of film was evident even before the advent of sound in films. By the time America entered World War I, film had evolved enough to be able to captivate an audience and keep their attention for long periods of time. Better narratives, bigger action and bigger stars all combined to attract huge audiences. By this time Hollywood was beginning to learn what the audience wanted. Hollywood, like other forms of mass media, "had to gain and hold the attention and thus confidence of large numbers of people who could be counted on to come back again."<sup>20</sup> Films during "The Great War" era were not all alike, many had opposing themes. There were two basic competing beliefs and attitudes in these films. One type of film was the anti-war film, which



denounced war as evil, immoral and something that must be avoided at all costs. The other type of film warned against foreign aggression and supported the idea that America must be prepared to defend itself at anytime. These two archetypes were both presented in “political rhetoric and as a narrative theme with topical relevance in the movies.”<sup>21</sup>

Even before America entered the fray of “The Great War” there were American films that delved into the issue of war and global enemies. Two prime examples of films from this period were J. Stuart Blackton’s *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), and Thomas H. Ince’s *Civilization* (1916). These two films displayed the stark contrast between a film that promoted military readiness and action and another that preached that war just brings destruction and an end to civilization as we know it. Blackton’s film *The Battle Cry of Peace* was based on the Hudson Maxim<sup>22</sup> book Defenseless America. Like the book, the film conveyed a warning and message to America to beware of foreign enemies and to be militarily prepared in case of attack. In the film a defenseless America comes under attack by an invading army which ravages, rapes and pillages people in New York and other American cities. Though there was no mention of the origin or nationality of these invading armies in the film, they were no doubt portrayed as Germans, with full stereotypical regalia in the form of spiked helmets and “Kaiser Bill” mustaches.<sup>23</sup>

The film attracted noteworthy support from many prominent politicians and leaders including Theodore Roosevelt and Admiral George Dewey. Blackton utilized the expertise of many military advisors to make the invasion scenes as realistic as possible. Amazingly Roosevelt persuaded General Leonard Wood to give Blackton 2,500 actual troops at his disposal to give the war scenes authenticity. Wood allowed the use of U.S.

troops without the permission of the government or President Wilson, something that would never occur in later years. Blackton thus had his own personal army to play around with and direct according to his wishes. The film was a phenomenal success around the country. The spectacular battle scenes and the underlying message of military preparedness seemed to attract huge crowds to the film.

*The Battle Cry of Peace* created a firestorm of controversy, with many prominent Americans calling it a pro-war film. Auto tycoon Henry Ford took out full-page advertisements in numerous newspapers denouncing the film as propaganda for the weapons industry and calling director Blackton an advocate for “merchants of death.”<sup>24</sup> Ford apparently had a personal hatred for Blackton after Blackton hired a plane to drop thousands of leaflets promoting the film over Ford’s estate. The feud continued when the movie studio that released *Battle*, Vitagraph, sued Ford for libel, apparently to gain even more free publicity for the film.<sup>25</sup> As the Combs illustrate in their book Film Propaganda and American Politics, “Blackton and other movie entrepreneurs pioneered the idea that politics, propaganda, and promotion could be a heady and lucrative combination.”<sup>26</sup>

In the highly charged atmosphere that *Battle* created it did not take long for a film to be made which presented a totally different view on the issue of war. Thomas H. Ince’s *Civilization* which premiered in New York City in 1916 was the ideological opposite of *Battle*. Though Ince and his film did not share anything in common with Blackton’s beliefs and political agenda, Ince himself was as brilliant at attracting media attention, if not more so than Blackton was. Ince tried to court many influential figures in American politics and society into supporting the film openly. One of Ince’s brainstorms

occurred at the premiere of *Civilization* in New York City when he had actress Billy Burke “faint” in the theater, “out of sheer emotion” because of the powerful nature of the film.

Ince even got President Woodrow Wilson to see the film. Wilson was also invited to see *Battle*, but declined. Wilson was more inclined to enjoy the non-inflammatory and peaceful intentions of Ince’s *Civilization*. Wilson saw the film during his re-election campaign in 1916, the film’s pro-peace theme tied in beautifully with Wilson’s campaign slogan of that year, “He kept us out of the war.” So both Wilson and Ince had something to gain from having Wilson see the film. Afterwards, Ince claimed Wilson enjoyed and supported the film. Ince went as far as to circulate photos of himself and Wilson together after the film to promote it even more. After Wilson won re-election in the fall some Democratic Party operatives actually claimed that *Civilization* helped him defeat Charles Evans Hughes, though there was no proof for this claim to be found anywhere.<sup>27</sup>

The film *Civilization* itself was a parable about the futility of war and how it should be avoided at all costs. In the film, two mythical nations go to war with each other and end up destroying not only each other but also their civilized ideals and values and beliefs. Thus the moral of the story is that once nations go to war, they lose their civilized status. The film mirrored many real life situations. The aggressor nation in the film is clearly meant to be Germany, though it is never stated directly. The pacifism and religious imagery in the film is very direct and to the point. In one sequence in the film Jesus Christ comes down and enters the body of one of the main characters and starts preaching about peace and pacifism. The director Ince combined Wilsonian ideals of

morality and moral superiority with the religious beliefs of Christianity to preach to the audience that war was useless and destructive. Though the film was popular and was heavily linked with Wilson's presidential campaign, it did not seem to sway many opinions. By early 1917, the American people and Wilson himself knew that America could no longer be just a bystander in the war in Europe. America was now ready to intervene.

The films that dealt with the war during this time portrayed the Germans as militaristic, evil, and corrupt. Americans on the other hand, were prepared and ready to fight. To avoid any militaristic notion surrounding America's motives, the films promoted the notion that America was fighting the "war to end all wars." One of the early clichés that was found in many of these World War I era war films was the melting pot unit, where troops of all different ethnic and religious backgrounds fought in unison and got along well together. Whereas the German troops were presented as being all the same, as one big monolithic group of mind numb robots. Films that presented the American melting pot military unit in action like *The Lost Battalion* (1919) and *The Unbeliever* were very popular at the box office. In *The Lost Battalion*, the battalion that is the focus of the story is made up of mostly New Yorkers, and among them is a mix of economic, ethnic and religious groups. Yet they all fight well together and easily overcome their differences in order to win the war. In *The Unbeliever*, there are many scenes where men of different religious backgrounds come together to fight the evil deeds of the Germans. In one scene a Jewish rabbi comforts a dying Catholic soldier on the battlefield, and Christ appears suddenly in the mist of the fighting.<sup>28</sup> These

Hollywood efforts to promote America's melting pot were full of good intentions but lacked any real sense of reality or believability.

Many of the war films of this era portrayed the Germans as the epitome of evil. One actor, Erich von Stroheim became a staple of many of these war films, he often was presented to the audience as an evil and cruel Prussian officer killing babies and raping mothers. In the film *The Heart of Humanity* (1919), Stroheim plays a German officer who among other evil deeds executes women and children and bayonets wounded soldiers.<sup>29</sup> There was even a film series that focused on the destructive deeds of the "Kaiser". The Kaiser film series portrayed the Kaiser as an "archvillain or fool, enjoying the suffering and torment he had inflicted upon the world or basking in a beery world of idle palace life."<sup>30</sup> The Kaiser film series consisted of the original *The Kaiser* (1918) and two sequels, *Beast of Berlin* (1918) and *The Kaiser's Finish* (1918). This film series was very popular in the heyday of World War I. These sorts of films demonized the Germans and made it easier for Americans to support the war effort in Europe because they would "see" how mean and cruel those Germans really were.

Big name Hollywood stars also would play in war films during World War I. One of the biggest stars of the period was Mary Pickford. Her wartime film was *The Little American* (1917) where she plays a brave woman who steals German war plans and is chased by German officers throughout the film. Charlie Chaplin also made a supportive war film in the charming vehicle *Shoulder Arms* (1918). Chaplin takes many comical swipes at the Germans throughout the film, including a scene where he throws limburger in a German trench, and there is the usual display of sex crazed German officers and a



foolish Kaiser running amuck in the film.<sup>31</sup> Both of these war films had a lightness and brevity about them, where wild and fun antics could occur during times of war.

The famous director D.W. Griffith actually went to the Western front and used actual British troops to film mock battles for his film salute to World War I, *Hearts of the World* (1918). This war romance film had the usual stereotypes and clichés that most of the war films of the era had, including the usual assortment of villainous Germans, sexual attacks on French women by German officers, and a budding romance between a soldier and a nurse. What made this film different from most was Griffith's attempt at making the battle scenes as real as possible. Unlike most World War I war films that had sanitized battle scenes that often made war look like an adventure, *Hearts of the World* was gritty and realistic in its depiction of war. The British government fully supported the film, lending Griffith the use of real British troops. The British government hoped the vivid details and realism of the carnage of war would help motivate the United States into joining the war effort against the Germans. By the time the film came out though, the U.S. had already intervened and joined the battle head on. The film itself was still a shocking one for most to see at the time. Griffith's film did not have the shiny gloss or fakeness that other war films had at the time. Griffith's war film was in fact too real for audiences. The film was realistic in its depiction of "trench warfare, exhausting fighting and physical pain, the individual subordinated to the war machine, madness and fatigue, with no prefix about war aims or suffix about the promise of victory" Combs concludes.<sup>32</sup>

The film was promoted as a war romance film, but its underlying depiction of the horrors of war was what made it controversial. Both President Woodrow Wilson and his wife panned the film strongly. The Wilsons' major complaint with the film was that its brutal battle scenes did not stimulate the "right attitude of mind or the right national action". Griffith later would write an apology letter to Mrs. Wilson stating that the public was a "very stolid animal" which must be "hit hard to touch them."<sup>33</sup> Griffith's film was one of the first to be criticized for being "too real," and the fact that his film showed the true atrocities of war angered many in the nation who feared that it would hinder the war effort. Griffith himself later criticized his film by saying that his stereotypical portrayal of all Germans as sex crazed madmen was wrong. He was quoted as saying "war is the villain, not any particular people."<sup>34</sup> Griffith tried to redeem himself years later by making the film *Isn't Life Wonderful?* (1924), which dealt with the aftermath of war on Germany and the plight of its citizens.

As the war came near an end, war films became less and less popular. After the war ended, war films were the least popular genre of film. The public had seen and heard enough about war, they wanted a reprieve from it. When Griffith's *Hearts of the World* was re-released in 1921, it was a box office bomb. The American people were sick of any sort of film that was realistic and/or dealt with war and destruction. In the 1920s, people wanted to see more happy and fun loving fare. For a long time after World War I, war films, especially realistic ones, would be unpopular at the box office.

What the Hollywood film community and the government did learn from war films during the World War I era was that film was now a legitimate medium for the

display and promotion of ideas and ideals to a large audience. Film could now be used to propagate a set of beliefs and themes to large masses of people all over the country. “War became a designed experience for movie audiences” Combs argues.<sup>35</sup> For the first time, millions of people could see and experience a shared visual. Though each person takes away from the experience his own set of memories and opinions from the experience, the film still influences people’s thinking. Whether these war films influenced the public greatly is still hard to say, but there is no doubt that they did have some impact on how Americans viewed politicians, war and the world around them. The filmmakers and the government also learned a lot from the war era films of this period, and some of what they learned would later be used in the war films during World War II.

### World War II

World War II was not only the biggest and most encompassing war ever, it also became the most prolific war to ever be depicted on the silver screen. More films have been made about the history and the battles of World War II than any other war ever. In fact more films have been made about World War II than of all the other wars combined. During World War Two, the war was used as a topic or backdrop for hundreds if not thousands of films. Between the years 1942-1945, twenty-eight percent of Hollywood’s production dealt with the war.<sup>36</sup> Not only were there many films made about the war during the war, but also after as well. World War Two continued to be a big source for film ideas and plots over the decades. Only in the 1980s and 1990s did World War II films become almost extinct as a genre. Yet with the box-office success and critical acclaim for Steven Speilberg’s masterpiece *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), World War II

related films are a hot topic again. In fact many World War II related films are in production or planned for release in the future.

The grand scope and immense stakes of the global conflict known as World War Two make it ripe for film ideas. Not only were there an endless amount of combatants, locales and historical battles from which a filmmaker could chose from for film ideas, but just the monumental impact the war had on the world alone makes it the biggest story of the 20th Century. I will focus mainly on the World War II films that were actually made during the war in this section. My main inquiry into these films of the World War II era is to show the different themes and ideals these films promulgated to the American public and to the world. As I noted before, the government and Hollywood worked hand-in-hand to craft films that supported the war effort and boosted the morale of the American people and the troops overseas.

It is widely known that the vast majority of films made during America's involvement in World War II were supportive of the Allies and the war effort. What is surprising is how supportive Hollywood was of the Allies before America officially intervened in the global conflict. In the pre-war years of 1940-1941, America itself was divided between isolationists and interventionists. Hollywood itself leaned toward intervention in World War II. Many films were made in 1941 that supported the idea of Americans fighting with Allies to fight the Axis powers. Many isolationist Senators saw this pro-involvement theme in Hollywood films and they wanted it to be stopped or muted. One of the leading isolationist senators, Senator Nye, proposed a Senate resolution to investigate "any propaganda disseminated by motion pictures which was

designed to influence public sentiment in the direction of participation by the United States in the European War.”<sup>37</sup>

There was real reason for isolationists to think of Hollywood as promoting U.S. involvement into the war. Hollywood produced many films in 1941 that, if not blatantly pro-intervention, at least supported American characters who joined the army and fought with the British overseas. In 1941 many Hollywood films were released with the primary theme of Americans preparing to get ready to go to war or joining European forces to battle the Nazis, such as *A Yank in the R.A.F.* (1941), *I Wanted Wings* (1941) *Sergeant York* (1941), *Flight Command* (1941) and *Dive Bomber* (1941). There were also war comedies and musicals such as *Great Guns* (1941), *Navy Blues* (1941) and *Caught in the Draft* (1941) that came out in 1941. One of the most popular war comedies that was released in 1941 was *Buck Privates* (1941), which starred the ever popular comedy team of Abbot & Costello as bumbling civilians who accidentally enlist into the United States Army. These war films of 1941, whether they be dramas, action vehicles, comedies or musicals, all promoted a sense of duty and a support for military preparedness. Combs argues that, like the films from World War I, these war movies conveyed the message “that democratic values were furthered in military life, that class differences could be overcome, that military life was kind of fun, and that once everyone was committed to the cause, the camaraderie, heroics, and girls are great.”<sup>38</sup>

The war films of 1941 that came out of Hollywood were in a way recruitment films for military service. These films portrayed any character that enlisted in the military as an honest and brave soul, whereas any character that did not enlist or scoffed at others



who did was portrayed as a cowardly and weak man. These films made war almost look fun and enjoyable. Enlisting in the military was like joining some sort of vacation package tour, where the possibilities for traveling around the world and meeting pretty gals were endless. None of these 1941 war films conveyed any sense of the horror of war in the rest of the world. Once America joined the fray officially in December of 1941, Hollywood would begin production on countless war films that promoted the American effort overseas.

Every film genre was exploited somehow by World War II. There were World War II related films that were dramas, spy thrillers, action films, comedies, musicals, and even Westerns. In the Western *Wild Horse Rustlers* (1943) Nazi Cowboys roam the West trying to steal horses in order to use them in the German army for Hitler's European forces! Musicals like *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), *This Is the Army* (1943) and *Hollywood Canteen* (1944) were very popular with the public because they presented a cavalcade of stars performing and dancing, all for the war effort.<sup>39</sup> One of the most popular and endearing musicals of World War Two was *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) starring James Cagney. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* was not exactly a World War II film, it was a musical biography of George M. Cohan, but with its patriotic fervor and flag waving joyfulness, it was very popular during and after the war. In the film, Cohan is shown as using music as a weapon itself in the battle against evil. He even talks to President Roosevelt (whose face is never shown on camera, but only eluded to), trying to convince him that his music "is as powerful as a cannon." The film tried to bring back a

sense of history and yet spur patriotism and a renewed faith in the American heritage and way of life.

Far fetched as it may seem, many other films had World War II themed films even if they made no sense or were not based in reality at all. Many popular film series and characters such as Sherlock Holmes, Boston Blackie, The Bowery Boys, Tarzan, and an array of Western stars and cartoon characters were in World War II themed films.<sup>40</sup> The British even did a remake of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) entitled *Pimpernel Smith* (1941) where the villains were German Nazis in Berlin instead of French revolutionaries in Paris like in the original film. The general public did not seem to mind that time and reality were heavily skewed in these films, they enjoyed seeing their favorite Hollywood stars and characters battling the Axis powers. Even Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck were enlisted in the fight against the Axis forces. Many Warner Brother cartoon characters fought against the “krauts” and “Japs” in these war time cartoons. Decades later these same cartoon characters would become popular daytime television viewing for children, so many of these World War II era cartoons were omitted from the usual cartoon rotation in fear of offending viewers.

The war films of World War II clearly put an evil face on the Axis powers. The Italians were presented as dumb, inept buffoons, and of little threat to the Allies in the war films of the era. On the other hand, both the Germans and Japanese were depicted as the epitome of evil on earth, yet with glaring differences. The Germans were portrayed as cruel, vicious and with ideas of global conquest, yet they were presented as being sophisticated and even classy. Whereas the Japanese were shown as savage barbarians,

who were not only depraved and maniacal, but had little respect for human life, even their own, as seen in many kamikaze scenes during the era. The Germans were just as evil, yet Hollywood made them look like high society types, whereas the Japanese were just pure brutes who killed and raped their way around the world. Since Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps during the war, Chinese American actors played Japanese characters in various films. Some American films tried to “teach” the audience about the cultures of the enemy forces, it was no surprise that these “lessons” were skewed in the most negative way possible. In *Destination Tokyo* (1943), Cary Grant gives a primer on Japanese culture, stating that the Japanese “train their children in the martial arts, give them guns and daggers at an early age, sell their daughters to factories or into prostitution, and don’t even have a word for love in their language.”<sup>41</sup>

Films that portrayed the Japanese as dirty villains included *Cry Havoc* (1943), *God Is My Co-Pilot* (1945), *The Purple Heart* (1944), *So Proudly We Hail* (1943), *Flight for Freedom* (1943), *Blood on the Sun* (1945) and *Across the Pacific* (1942). Many times in these films the Japanese are seen mistreating and raping white women, like Allied nurses in *So Proudly We Hail*, or Amelia Earhart in *Flight for Freedom*. By the time the war was near its conclusion, American films were portraying the Japanese in the most negative manner, what some might even call racist depictions of the Japanese. Two John Wayne films, *The Fighting Seabees* (1944) and *Back to Bataan* (1945) could not be described any other way but racist in their depictions of the Japanese.<sup>42</sup>

The German society was presented as geared toward one goal: world domination. In films like *Hitler’s Children* (1942), *Hitler’s Madman* (1943), *Tomorrow The World*

(1943) and *The Hitler Gang* (1944), the Germans create their super soldiers from an early age, and turn their own citizens into robots who will obey any command Hitler gives. The German people are portrayed as mind numb zombies who follow the will of Hitler, and if they do not, they are executed on the spot. Like the Japanese, the Germans are shown training their children at an early age to fight and kill, there is no innocence in the Axis power countries, just evil and tyranny.

The raw propagandist films that skewered the enemy and had no real story or sympathetic characters were rarely successful at the box office. There were fine quality war films made during World War II. The war films that were hits had to offer more than just a bad guy vs. good guy plot line, there had to be quality actors and a smart story line for the audience to follow. Films such as *Casablanca* (1942), *Mrs. Miniver* (1942) and *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) were very popular and critically acclaimed and are still considered classics even today. One of the few quality films which was anti-fascist but not anti-German was *Watch on the Rhine* (1942), starring Paul Lukas as a German freedom fighter who comes to America to escape oppression in Germany. Once in America he plans to return to Germany with money to help resistance. While in America he has to battle a Rumanian who plans to tell the Nazis at the German embassy all about his plans. The film was different from most war films made during World War II because it was subtle. Terry Christensen writes about *Watch on the Rhine* stating unlike other anti-fascist films, "it couldn't be labeled anti-German because the hero was German and it was clear that there were others like him. In sharp contrast with the other anti-fascist films, *Watch on the Rhine* made a modest attempt to understand the enemy."<sup>43</sup>

Another anti-fascist film that was sympathetic to German people was *Tender Comrade* (1943), starring Ginger Rogers and Bette Davis as women waiting for their returning husbands who are fighting overseas. The film cast a positive light on German-Americans and focused on the “tragedy of the murder of German democracy.” *Lifeboat* (1944) was another quality film that was subtle in tone, yet still anti-fascist in its outcome. This Alfred Hitchcock drama focused on a group of survivors of a cruise ship that was sunk by a German submarine. The assorted characters are assembled on a lifeboat, drifting at sea after their ship has sunk. A wealthy industrialist assumes a leadership role on the boat. Later on, the group begins to rely more on a German U-Boat Captain they rescued from the sea. As things worsen, the group finds itself not only drifting out in the ocean, but drifting towards fascism in their little lifeboat community. The subtle yet powerful anti-fascist statement of the film was clear and unnerving.

President Roosevelt asked Hollywood to make more films about the Asian front and particularly the Russian front as the war waged on. Hollywood was more than happy to oblige. Jack Warner states that Roosevelt requested that he make films to “flatter” Stalin and “keep him fighting” in the war. The film that Warner Brothers came up with per the request of FDR was *Mission to Moscow* (1943). Directed by Michael Curtiz and written by Howard Koch, the men who made *Casablanca*, *Mission to Moscow* was roundly criticized as pure propaganda and a really bad film. The film starred Walter Houston as Joseph E. Davies, the real-life American Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1936-41. The film tried to be preachy, educational and entertaining all at once, and failed on all counts. It instead became a controversy in itself. Critics did not like the



film's "sloppy history" and its overly positive portrayal of Russia. Others called it a "mishmash" and "a lot of rot." Many did not like its "cuddly, reverential treatment" of FDR. The film was a box office bomb, the fact that it was specifically made because of President Roosevelt's request did not help it at all. "The Hearst press and Republican presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey condemned its pro-communism, while liberals objected to its Stalinist portrait of Trotsky," and the U.S. Congress was irate at being labeled "a hotbed of profiteering isolationists" in the film.<sup>44</sup>

Other pro-Russian films that came out of Hollywood during World War II were *The North Star* (1943), *Song of Russia* (1943) and *Days of Glory* (1944). All of these films portrayed Russia as America's ally and friend. These films pushed an agenda that was backed by FDR, this agenda was to have Americans in roles that support, trust and adore Russians. Like *Mission to Moscow*, all these pro-Russian films were dismal flops, with mixed reviews from the press and critics. The failure of these films proved that Hollywood was not always the best messenger for Washington's propaganda.

One of the few quality films made near the end of World War II was *Wilson* (1944). The film was an epic, with a then unheard of budget of \$5 million and a cast of thousands. Released by 20th Century Fox, the film was more about the treaty that ended World War I than it was about Wilson the man. Produced by movie legend Darryl Zanuck, the film tried to stress the importance of international cooperation. The film argues that "the League of Nations and collective security might have prevented World War II." The film "postulates that isolationism is no guarantee against war and that the pacifist cause is best served by international unity." Woodrow Wilson's (Alexander

Knox) defense of the League against its detractors and his warning that it is “the only hope the world has to avoid wars in the future” is clearly meant to mirror the post-World War II era.<sup>45</sup>

*Wilson* was a serious and thoughtful film, it tried to handle politics with some sort of reverence and respect, which was rare for a Hollywood film. It was a box office hit and critically acclaimed, winning multiple Academy Awards. Many Republicans and isolationists disliked the film greatly though. Like the film *Mission to Moscow*, *Wilson* was criticized as being propaganda for Roosevelt’s re-election campaign. The controversial film was not shown to servicemen at military screenings because it was deemed too partisan. This move made the film even more controversial, thus it attracted bigger audiences. In the end though, it did not make a profit, the \$5 million budget was just too steep for the studio to make any money from the film. The film was surprisingly political for its time, especially during war, when films were supposedly less political, at least less political on the domestic front.

The war films made during World War II tried to convey messages that would guide the American psyche through the war. The early war films in 1940-1941 urged American participation and intervention into the war. Once America joined the war in December of 1941, the films out of Hollywood began to stress recruitment, and pride and love of country, patriotic themes that are always present during times of war. During the years of 1942-43, war films demonized the enemy, boosted the morale of the troops and served as a pick me up for the morale of all Americans. When the Allies were starting to win the war in 1944 and 1945, and peace was seemingly around the corner, films started

to focus on the future of world politics and how America would fit in the post world war era. Though there were some exceptions, most of the war films during World War II tried to support a theme of pride in country, and a sense that America was part of a global community and could not stay isolated anymore.

### Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was unlike any other war this century for America. It did not have clear and defined goals, there was significant and open public opposition to it, and it would change American culture and society forever. It is no surprise then that the films about the Vietnam Conflict were more contentious and controversial than films about other wars. Unlike other war film eras, during the Vietnam War there were almost no films made about the war. For the first time in American history, Hollywood shied away from producing films about an ongoing war. Even during the Korean conflict there were many action type war films produced, but during the Vietnam War, only one major film about the war was released in the 1960s.

The film was *The Green Berets* (1968) starring John Wayne. *The Green Berets* was more of a cowboy film than a serious film about the Vietnam War. The film was a huge advertisement for the heroism and bravery of the Green Berets, and was more geared more toward action scenes than drama. Instead of cowboys versus Indians, the film had the Green Berets versus the Viet Cong. Besides the jungle environment and modern weaponry, there was little difference between this film and other John Wayne cowboy vehicles. John Wayne wanted to make a film that supported the war effort in Vietnam and he did so with *The Green Berets*. The film earned a profit and was a

moderate success at the box-office even though it received bad reviews and anti-war protesters picketed theaters where it played. Yet besides a handful of documentaries and one or two cult films, no other major studio film about the Vietnam War was released during the war.<sup>46</sup>

Hollywood did not touch the Vietnam War as a subject for films for various reasons during the late 1960s and early 1970s. For one thing, the war was not supported by the American people like past wars were, so Hollywood was wary of making films about a controversial and unpopular war. Though there is a perception that Hollywood enjoys making films about controversial topics, this was not the case in the 1960s. Another reason why Hollywood shied away from making Vietnam War films was because the public saw the war on their television sets every night, and no film could do the raw reality of war justice. Unlike past wars, the public was instantly updated on the Vietnam conflict and saw the horrors of war constantly. Any film that tried to depict the war on screen would come off as either too sugar coated or exploitative. The only reason why *The Green Berets* was made was because John Wayne had so much clout in Hollywood that he could make any type of film he desired. Hollywood could not make a patriotic musical or comedy about Vietnam like they did during the past world wars, it just would not have seemed appropriate. So instead Hollywood basically ignored the war completely until the early to mid 1970s. Even then, not many Vietnam War related films were released in the 1970s. It was a good ten years after the end of the war before Hollywood came out with a plethora of Vietnam War films. It seemed like Hollywood was holding in for so long the trauma and pain of the Vietnam War experience that, when

they started making Vietnam War films, they just could not stop. More films based on the Vietnam War came out between the years 1984-1989 than during all of the 1960s and 1970s put together.

Many have studied why there was a lack of films based on the Vietnam War for most of the 1960s and early 1970s. Many experts have written that the Vietnam War could not be easily formatted into a typical Hollywood war film template. Leonard Quart and Albert Auster opined that “Hollywood could neither fit the Vietnam War into any of its old formulas nor create new ones for it.”<sup>47</sup> Stephen Prince writes in his book, Visions of Empire: Political Imagery in Contemporary American Film, that Vietnam was more difficult for Hollywood to make war films about because “the enemy did not wear a uniform and was often indistinguishable from the ostensibly friendly forces that the United States was there to assist.” He adds that “the crucial visual distinctions that conventional war films relied upon in distinguishing, at the most basic level, friend from foe were not available for representing the conflict in Vietnam.”<sup>48</sup> Prince notes that another reason why the Vietnam War was difficult to translate to the silver screen in the traditional Hollywood manner was because the war “was not a war fought by seizing territory. It was a conflict whose successes were measured by the number of hearts and minds converted and the number of bodies counted.”<sup>49</sup>

There were no real films made about the Vietnam War or its impact on American society until 1977. In 1977, the suspense thriller *Twilight's Last Gleaming* starring Burt Lancaster took the first stab at incorporating the aftermath of the U.S. intervention into Vietnam into a movie plot. Lancaster plays a general who takes over a missile silo in



Montana and threatens to launch the missiles unless the real “truth” about the United States involvement in Vietnam is told to the American people. The film’s premise that the real “truth” about the Vietnam War had not been revealed yet to the American public left a sour taste in both critics and audiences palettes. It may have been too soon for most people to see a film about the “truth” about Vietnam in 1977, and making the first film related to Vietnam a suspense thriller seemed to lack tact or class.<sup>50</sup> Hollywood portrayed Vietnam vets as crazed psychos in various films throughout the early and mid 1970s including films such as *Magnum Force* (1973), *Skyjacked* (1972), *Rolling Thunder* (1977), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *The Stone Killer* (1973). The year 1978 would be a different story though, with a number of quality dramas about the Vietnam War and how it affected veterans and the people who loved them.

In 1978 both *The Deer Hunter* and *Coming Home* were released, and both received critical praise and moderate box office success. In fact both films swept the Oscars that year, showing that America could now discuss Vietnam openly at least through the camera lens. *The Deer Hunter* was a star-studded film directed by Michael Cimino and starring Robert DeNiro, Meryl Streep and Christopher Walken. The film focused on a group of working class men before, during and after the Vietnam War. *The Deer Hunter* was the first film to portray the horrors of combat during the Vietnam War in a serious but yet dramatic manner. The famous Russian Roulette scenes involving the Vietcong shocked and horrified audiences. Instead of being repulsed, the critics and public embraced the film’s serious tone, it dealt with Vietnam and the aftermath of the war in a realistic way. The film respected the veterans of the Vietnam War, the first film

to do so. Before *The Deer Hunter*, Vietnam Vets were constantly portrayed as crazed gun happy lunatics in grade B action films, *The Deer Hunter* instead showed audiences how Vietnam changed the lives of average working class men forever.

*Coming Home* on the other hand dealt with the effects the war had on wives of men who fought over in Vietnam. Starring Jane Fonda, Jon Voight and Bruce Dern, the film told the story of a woman (Fonda) who started living a fresh new life while her husband fought in Vietnam. She soon falls in love with a paraplegic Vietnam vet played by Voight. The film concludes with her husband (Dern) coming home from Vietnam mentally unstable and confronting Fonda and Voight about their recent anti-war activities. The film was praised for its tenderness and subtly, but left others wondering if it was entertainment or a propaganda piece for Fonda's anti-war sentiments.

Also in 1978 came two combat films about the Vietnam War, *The Boys in Company C* and *Go Tell The Spartans*. These two films were more of a throwback to the World War II era war films that focused on the G.I. in training and in combat. *Go Tell The Spartans* is still one of the few films about America's early involvement in the Vietnam War. Set in Vietnam in 1964, Burt Lancaster plays a military advisor in Vietnam who questions the reason for the United States involvement in Vietnam. In the film, the U.S. military was only in an advising role in Vietnam, but Lancaster's character can see the tide change and worries about the future when the U.S. will obviously become more than just advisors but actual participants in the Vietnam War. *The Boys in Company C* was most like the World War II war films following fresh recruits through basic training and then on to actual combat later on in the film. Like many of the World

War II combat films, the unit that is focused on in the film is made up of various ethnic groups, to provide a tapestry of multi-cultural fighting men for the audience to see. *The Boys in Company C* was the first Vietnam War film to be formatted in an old-fashioned combat film style. There were little if any political statements or diatribes like in other Vietnam War based films, this film simply focused on a unit of men and how they grew and fought together.

In 1979 came the much anticipated and controversial Vietnam War epic *Apocalypse Now*. Years in the making and way over budget this Francis Ford Coppola film was the Vietnam War film which was really not about Vietnam. The film was based on the Joseph Conrad novel Heart of Darkness but set during the Vietnam War. The plot was meandering, the visuals were a kaleidoscope of colors and surreal images and the soundtrack boomed Doors and Rolling Stones songs. It was like no other war film ever made and it was popular among the general public and critics alike. The film followed the wild adventure of army Officer Willard (Martin Sheen) as he tries to hunt down Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) who has slowly gone mad and has formed his own private army and community deep in the jungles of Vietnam. The viewer is taken on a surreal journey with Kurtz as he goes deeper into the dark and dangerous jungle. Images that seem out of place for a war film are proudly on display as the viewer sees men surfing while in battle, Playboy bunnies dancing for the troops in the heart of the jungle and one Colonel Kilgore who loves to rattle the enemy by playing Wagner's "Ride of the Valkaries." The film was more of a jungle adventure than a serious attempt at depicting the realities of Vietnam. Instead, Coppola tried to metaphorically display what Vietnam

was like by having the film be confusing, humorous, mesmerizing, maddening and horrifying all at once.

In the 1980s, a new genre of Vietnam War related films surfaced. These were action films that presented Vietnam vets as honorable and brave men and filled the audience with the notion that there were still P.O.W.s and M.I.A.s in Vietnam. These “bring em’ back alive” type films were nothing like the films of the 1970s which tried to present the war realistically. These new action films depicted the North Vietnamese as America’s enemy who were still holding Americans in prison camps. The formula for these films was simple and succinct: a bunch of Vietnam vets would train together and set up a mission to free buddies or relatives still held captive in Vietnam, the final third of the film would be the actual mission and they would always find actual M.I.A.s and rescue them. These films were tinged with a revenge factor highly reminiscent of the 1970s vigilante films, but instead of getting revenge on criminals, the protagonists were seeking revenge against the Vietcong. Films that fit this genre included *Missing in Action* (1984), *Missing in Action 2* (1985), *Braddock: Missing in Action 3* (1988), *Uncommon Valor* (1983), and the most popular of the genre *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985). An overlying theme that was pervasive in these films was that, if we could not beat the North Vietnamese during the war, we could beat them now with super soldiers like Braddock and Rambo. These films, especially the blockbuster *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, tried to stir patriotic feelings about America and its fighting men who served in Vietnam. The *Rambo* film’s message that America could have won the war if it only tried harder was lost among the pyrotechnics and explosions that the film delivered nonstop. The film’s

sentiments can be easily explained by a question Rambo utters before he goes on his mission, he asks the colonel who sends him on his reconnaissance mission, “Do we get to win this time?.” Popular with the general public but panned by critics and liberals, no film had stirred emotions about Vietnam as much as *Rambo* did. Countless articles have been written denouncing the film as right wing pro-war extremist propaganda, yet most of these critics failed to realize that the film was a simple action yarn with a twist. No one took the film as seriously as many liberal critics did. In the end, *Rambo* will be remembered as a groundbreaking action film, not a serious attempt at making thoughtful comments about the Vietnam War.

In the late 1980s, a glut of films based on the Vietnam War or related to the war came out.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the early and mid 1980s action vehicles, these were serious and thoughtful dramas about the reality of the war and its influence on American culture. Between 1986-1989, twelve films based on the Vietnam War were released. Starting with the Oscar winning *Platoon* in 1986, a massive amount of Vietnam War films were produced and made by some of the biggest names in the movie industry. During 1987 alone a number of Vietnam related films came out including *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Hamburger Hill*, *The Hanoi Hilton*, *Gardens of Stone*, *Dear America* and Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*. In 1988 and 1989 even more Vietnam war films were released such as *Off Limits* (1988), *Bat 21* (1988), *Platoon Leader* (1988), *Siege of Firebase Gloria* (1989), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Casualties of War* (1989), *Jacknife* (1989), *84 Charlie MoPic* (1989), *In Country* (1989) and *Welcome Home* (1989). After the deluge of Vietnam films released in the late 1980s, Hollywood wisely



backed off from the topic in the 1990s, with only *Flight of the Intruder* (1990), Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* (1993), *Air America* (1990) and parts of *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *Dead Presidents* (1995) as the few exceptions.

The Vietnam War films of the late 1980s were often more sensitive and respectful to the veterans of Vietnam. Oliver Stone's *Platoon* was the first film to really try to depict what it was actually like being in combat and on patrol in Vietnam. The film pulled no punches in its realism, but it still respected and honored the men who fought in Vietnam without being jingoistic or exploitative like past Vietnam War films. Other films like *In Country*, *Gardens of Stone*, *Jackknife*, *Welcome Home*, and *Born on the Fourth of July* focused on Vietnam vets back home. These set of films were often poignant and tender while still respecting the Vietnam vet. Hollywood was making up for its past sins of the 1970s when it portrayed Vietnam vets as crazed madmen on the loose by producing intelligent and thoughtful films about vets in the late 1980s.

Though the Vietnam War was America's most controversial and gut wrenching war of the 20th Century, the films based on it still followed most of the traditions of past war film eras. Hollywood decided that it could not really make any serious films about the Vietnam conflict, so they basically ignored it for almost ten years until the first crop of serious Vietnam war films was released in 1978. As in other war eras, most of the films made about the Vietnam War were patriotic and supportive of the troops who fought there. There were the usual action and combat films made, just like in World War I and World War II, only this time the films were far more realistic and graphic in their violence. After the real Vietnam war was flashed across TV sets during the 1960s,

Americans began to become desensitized to violence and gore and thus accepted and even demanded more graphic realism and violence in their movies, especially films based on wars. Unlike past war eras, however, Hollywood made many films about how veterans of the war in Vietnam coped with life back home and the contentious atmosphere they had to endure. The Vietnam War changed American society and culture forever, including American films.

The war films of the three eras I chose to examine have constant themes running through them, especially those of patriotism, honor, pride in America, and love of country. All three eras had films examining the lives of common troops on the front lines and in battle, as the years went on these films became more and more graphic, especially in the last twenty years. Many of the films of World War I and World War II focused on how America was in a global community, and that America could not hide from conflicts and stay neutral any more. Both World War I and World War II films justified the wars they depicted, as a battle between the forces of good and evil in the world. Only the Vietnam War films questioned the legitimacy of the conflict in which the U.S. was engaged. This happened only because the Vietnam War was the first war that would generate heavy opposition and resentment from the American public. War films are a mirror of society. A respect and admiration for the service men of all wars runs throughout all the war films from every era. When a war is unpopular, as in the case of Vietnam, the society will reflect that feeling towards a war through its culture. Yet, as in music, filmmakers know not to go too far in insulting the sensibilities of the American public. Just like music

shapes and reflects America's beliefs on politics and war, so do films reflect and shape America's attitudes about politics and war.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Savage. "The Stuff of Politics Through Cinematic Imagery: An Eiconic Perspective." In Politics In Familiar Contexts, ed. Robert savage and Dan Nimmo. Ablex Publishing Corp., Norwood, NJ, 1990. p.119-20.

<sup>2</sup> James E. Combs and Sara T. Combs. Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography. (Garland Publishing, New York, 1994), p.18.

<sup>3</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Christensen. Reel Politics. Basil Blackwell Publishing, New York, 1987. p.71.

<sup>5</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.28.

<sup>6</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.28.

<sup>7</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.28.

<sup>8</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.29

<sup>9</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.29.

<sup>10</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.30.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Neve. Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition. Routledge, New York, 1992. p.68.

<sup>12</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.68.

<sup>13</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black. "What to Show the World: The Office Of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945", Journal of American History, LXIV, 1977-78, p.103.

<sup>14</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.69.

<sup>15</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.69.

<sup>16</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.71.

<sup>17</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.71.

<sup>18</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.75.

<sup>19</sup> Neve, Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition, p.79-80.

<sup>20</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.23.

<sup>21</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.25.

<sup>22</sup> Hudson Maxim was the brother of Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the Maxim machine gun.

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- <sup>23</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.25.
- <sup>24</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.26.
- <sup>25</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.26.
- <sup>26</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.26.
- <sup>27</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.26.
- <sup>28</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.30.
- <sup>29</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.31.
- <sup>30</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.31.
- <sup>31</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.32.
- <sup>32</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.32.
- <sup>33</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.32.
- <sup>34</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.32.
- <sup>35</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.33.
- <sup>36</sup> Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy. The Hollywood Social Problem Film, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1981), p.219.
- <sup>37</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.53.
- <sup>38</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.54.
- <sup>39</sup> Ronald Reagan hosted *This Is The Army* (1943).
- <sup>40</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.56.
- <sup>41</sup> Combs, Film Propaganda and American Politics: an Analysis and Filmography, p.57.
- <sup>42</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.69.
- <sup>43</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.66.
- <sup>44</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.68.
- <sup>45</sup> Roffman and Purdy, The Hollywood Social Problem Film, p.222.
- <sup>46</sup> One other action film entitled *To The Shores of Hell* (1966) and a biker film called *Nam's Angels* (1970) were the only other Vietnam War based films made during the war.

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<sup>47</sup> Albert Auster and Leonard Quart, How the War Was Remembered. Hollywood and Vietnam. (Praeger, New York, 1988), p.34.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Prince, Visions of Empire: Political Imagery in Contemporary American Film. (Praeger, New York, 1992), p. 117-118.

<sup>49</sup> Prince, p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> The action film *Rolling Thunder* (1977) about a crazed Vietnam vet who uses the skills he learned in the military to fight his own personal war back home seemed tacky and insulting and was not a box office hit neither.

<sup>51</sup> Not only were there a massive number of movies about Vietnam released in the late 80s, but also a whole host of new Vietnam war related TV shows were produced too. Television shows such as *China Beach* (1988) and *Tour of Duty* (1987) and mini series and specials like *Dear America: Letters From Vietnam*(1987) and *Sword of Honour* (1987) seemed to ride the renewed interest into the Vietnam War bandwagon in the 1980s.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to link the importance of film and music for both political and military campaigns in American society during the 20th Century. The conclusion will focus on the importance that film and music has in American society and how both cultural mediums have been used for propaganda purposes during times of war and during political campaigns. I chose to study the power of film and music in politics and during times of war because both political campaigns and wars need the popular support of the American people for them to be fully successful. In this conclusion, I will analyze my research and discuss the limitations and problems I had in finding useful information for my thesis, and I will discuss the difficulties I had in researching and writing my thesis due to the biases of the resources on this topic. The few books and articles I could find about the effects that entertainment had on political and war campaigns were politically biased, which made them more difficult to use. I duly note that my narrow focus also has narrowed the resources I could use for my research. Finally, in this conclusion I will tackle the tricky dilemma I had in measuring the influential relationship between entertainment and the public. I have been cautious in not stating that film and music has a direct influence on the public's opinions and views, but it is clear that there is some sort of influence that film and music holds on the American people.

I have explained how both political and military campaigns utilized popular entertainment to win support for their endeavors and causes. The striking similarity in

which they have used film and music is remarkable. Both have tried to use popular musical artists of the day to promote their campaigns, whether it is a campaign for the Governor of California or a war campaign in a foreign land. Both have utilized the power of film to promote and promulgate certain messages they wanted the public to embrace. From political convention campaign films to the countless war films released during American military campaigns in various 20th Century conflicts, film has been used as a powerful tool in reflecting and influencing the American public's views and perceptions of politics and war.

I chose to narrow my scope to political and military campaigns because both need the input and support of a majority of Americans to succeed. I did not want to do a generalized review of how film and music reflect/influence the American people because that would have been too broad a survey. By focusing on political and military campaigns I wanted to illustrate how politicians and the government realized fairly quickly how influential film and music are with the general public. If they could not directly influence the people's hearts and minds, they at least could put a more positive face and timbre to their political/military campaigns. I do not fully subscribe to some scholars' opinions that music and film were used solely as propaganda by politicians and the government. James and Sara Combs book, Film propaganda and American Politics : an Analysis and Filmography, goes to great lengths to suggest that every war time film was part of a conspiracy to shape the public's opinion on various wars the U.S. was involved in during this century. Though their book provided a wealth of information on these films, and was one of the few books to do so, their hypothesis was a bit too severe to be persuasive. The

government clearly tried to influence and shape the public's opinion during times of war, but it did not always work (as in the case of the Vietnam conflict), and the Combs do not take into account that the movies could have just been reflecting the public's attitude toward the wars. I doubt any anti-war film made during World War II would have been successful. The fact that Hollywood basically ignored the Vietnam conflict during the war attests to the fact that they knew the public was divided about the war, so any film supporting or denouncing the war would have been a box-office failure. What the Combs and so many other scholars seem to forget is that movie making is big business first, and not one entity can control and manipulate Hollywood, not even the U.S. government. Sure, during World War I and World War II the government was heavily involved in censoring and trying to shape how Hollywood films were made, yet this does not prove that films automatically dictate how people will think on a given subject. I have tried to ride the fine line between saying films and music shape or influence the public, without saying that films and music dictate or automatically influence people. It is a two way street. The way the public feels about a given topic is also reflected in music and in movies. Musicians and filmmakers could make endless films and songs about the positive aspects of a 100% tax rate, but the public would never share that opinion. This issue of how much cultural icons and items influence the public is a difficult one. I personally think music and films can influence people's thinking in minor ways, but it cannot dictate whole beliefs or political theories. I also think the public influences musicians and moviemakers, because after all, musicians and moviemakers are citizens too.

What I have found consistent throughout the war eras is that both the music and the films were very patriotic and supportive of the troops, if not always supportive of the government's actions. The culture during wartime will rally around the soldier and support him, even if his mission may not be as fully supported as the government wants it to be. Throughout World War I, World War II, and even the Vietnam Conflict, the majority of songs and films about the particular war were on the whole supportive of the troops or at least neutral as in the case of Vietnam. Rarely were there songs or films that openly criticized the troops, to criticize fellow citizens who were only following orders and doing their duty would be insane. So if an artist wanted to make a statement about the horrors of war, he would mask it as much as possible. Though some intelligent songwriters and filmmakers could both support the troops while still delivering an anti-war theme in their work. During World War I and World War II the music and films of the time were fully supportive of the war efforts, although some films did show the horrors of war, they mostly were patriotic and upbeat films. The music was almost uniformly upbeat and positive during these times. Music was a sort of pick me up for the public, to help them deal with the everyday stress of living in wartime.

When it comes to the use of film and music in political campaigns, there was more control over the music and films because they solely were made to support or attack a political candidate. To call films and music used in political campaigns propaganda is correct in the truest sense of the word. I chose to focus only on campaign films and films used at political conventions because it fit well into the symmetry of my thesis. I felt delving into political television advertisements would be off-track on my original

purpose of the thesis. I feel television and political television ads are a whole other topic entirely and would ruin my finely tuned focus on film and music. I find the political campaign film is a unique piece of propaganda all by itself. It began as a simple pep rally device at conventions and has turned into a full-blown Hollywood production, not so different from a Hollywood feature film. Even the importance of the convention film at the two major political party conventions has grown immensely in the last thirty years. It now resembles a Hollywood premiere at the conventions and is the highlight of the convention for many viewers. Politicians and their aides know the importance of music and film in campaigns and how people can feel more in touch with the candidates if music and film are utilized. The main point I have tried to convey about the use of music and film in political campaigns is that it is primarily utilized as a way of showing off the candidate in a more positive and populist light. For many candidates, especially presidential ones, the musical fanfare during campaign stops and the convention film are the two main ways the candidate tries to present himself/herself as a man/woman of the people. When George Bush professed his love for country music during his presidential campaign he was trying to make himself seem more like a regular Joe than a blue blood. Bill Clinton used his sax playing and love of 1960s and 1970s music as a way to further his populist appeal. I think the use of music and film in political campaigns will only grow in the near future. I will not be surprised if politicians hire famous songwriters to write political campaign songs for their upcoming campaigns. The convention film has been turned over to Hollywood professionals, the music will be next. On the dawn of a new millennium, politics, like everything else will utilize technology as best it can to



create a multimedia campaign front. This multimedia political campaign of the near future will utilize film, music, television and the Internet to try to reach as many voters as possible.

One interesting aspect of the use of film and music in political campaigns is that, in recent times, the campaign films and music are used primarily in a positive way, with very little negative campaigning. Unlike television ads that seem to be mostly negative or at least confrontational, the music and film used in political campaigns focuses on the candidate, not his/her opponent. This was not always the case. Political campaigns in the early part of this century utilized film and music to attack opponents. Songs that ridiculed the opponent were not uncommon, and even in the case of the California gubernatorial race in the 1930s where films were made to rip apart the other candidate's credibility and lie about his intentions. Today a song written to criticize or lampoon another candidate would seem childish and tacky to many, so it is mostly avoided. Since negative television ads seem to work so well anyway, writing negative songs or making negative films would seem redundant. Music and film are best to promote a candidate, not to defame or attack an opponent.

In trying to embark on a fresh idea I also have learned that there are scant scholarly material on the power of music and film in political campaigns. There was more information to be found on the music and films during war eras, but still not a plethora of resources to cull information from. I was surprised to find such little information on the role of campaign films and convention films in periodicals and in books. Most coverage of recent convention films in magazines like Time, Newsweek,

and others are cursory at best and usually were nothing more than a mini film review. There was a lack of any serious discussion or analysis of campaign films to be found anywhere. When it came to music used in campaign films, there was not just a lack of insightful information but just a lack of any information at all. I should feel somewhat satisfied in the fact that I seem to have chosen such a new focus of study for political scientists and sociologists that there was little valuable information on my topic out there. I also had to use fewer resources as I had planned, but I used as many as would fit into the narrow scope of my focus. I hope others will look into the importance of culture and politics in the future.

I have attempted to keep my thesis disciplined and structured as possible. When discussing the relationship between culture and politics, it is easy for one to fall prey into making wide sweeping statements and seeing causal effects in even the most unlikely places. I do think there is some cause and effect dichotomy between our popular culture and our political system, the actual degree of influence these two cornerstones of our society have on each other is impossible to calculate or measure with statistics. I have tried to be grounded and not go off on wild tangents seeing political propaganda in every film or piece of music. In today's world, one can say anything is political and get away with it without much support. When it comes to analyzing and evaluating art for its political content, each person sees something slightly different in the same film or song. So instead of just running amuck in my thesis by claiming that certain films have political intent even though on the surface they don't seem to, I chose to stay focused on films and songs that actually had to do with political events.

Many books I read for this thesis were quite interesting, yet were written in a partisan manner that they offered little for my thesis. I was looking for books and articles that analyzed the relationship between politics and culture. What I found mostly were books that reviewed films politically, but not objectively. Both authors from the right and the left were guilty of this, and it is their right to write whatever they feel they want to say, yet partisan reviews of films were useless to me. From the right came the humorous Richard Grenier book Capturing the Culture: Film, Art, and Politics in which Grenier basically shoots poison tipped barbs at liberals of stage, screen and television. Though a fun read, insulting reviews of Jane Fonda and Robert Redford films were not helpful to me. From the left came many books that criticized Hollywood for making “conservative” films that were propaganda for the “military industrial complex.” Countless books and articles alone attacked the Rambo films of the 1980s as being jingoistic, racist and the epitome of the “evil” Reagan era. Books such as Cinema, Politics, and Society in America edited by Philip Davies and Brian Neve, Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, Movies and Politics: A Dynamic Relationship by James Combs, Stephen Prince’s Visions of Empire and especially James and Sara Combs’ Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography all took a distinctively critical view of films from a slightly left leaning view. Though I still utilized many of these books, because some did offer neutral and open-minded analysis and information of the film/politics dichotomy I was looking for. None of these authors is a sycophant to a political ideology, but their

books tended to stray into more ideological movie reviews than a neutral analysis of films and politics.

In Terry Christensen's Reel Politics for example, he writes about the Reagan years this way:

Nearly six years of self-congratulation culminated in the 1986 rededication of the Statue of Liberty, an orgy of patriotism produced in the lavish style of a Hollywood movie. And much of this patriotic frenzy is reflected in a group of films produced during Reagan's presidency.<sup>1</sup>

Christensen then goes on to list various films he deemed to be "Reaganite,"<sup>2</sup> such as *Rambo: First Blood Part Two* (1985), *Red Dawn* (1984), *Missing in Action* (1984), *Invasion U.S.A.* (1985) and others. He writes disdainfully about these films in an unprofessional manner without really analyzing them for their deeper meaning to the culture and politics of the 80s. He writes in a smug tone describing films as being "crude," "dumb" and "macho." His review of *Top Gun* lays out his opinion succinctly and brutally, he snipes that *Top Gun* was "slick and shallow, it was the essence of Reaganite cinema."<sup>3</sup> Christensen's reviews may be on target, I am not one to argue with him. I found countless books and articles like this, which rather attack and vilify films than analyze their political content.

I have tried to stay balanced in my study of the films and music I have incorporated into my thesis. I tried to leave out as many personal feelings and views as possible, though the temptation to write on the spot music and film reviews was very tempting, it would have been useless to the true nature of my thesis. I have tried to stay focused on how both music and film have been used for important campaigns in America

during the 20th century. Whether it be war campaigns or political ones, the power and influence of film and music can not be ignored. I think more studies into the relationship between entertainment and its effect on the public's opinions and views is needed. No one will ever be able to scientifically calculate how much we see and hear in the form of entertainment influences us, nor will they ever know exactly how much the public influences the musical artists and filmmakers in our society. Yet if further studies and surveys and analysis were done on this topic it would prove most informative and would certainly help future politicians in their political campaigns. If a politician can learn from these studies how to bring forth his/her message to the public through music and film, it would be quite revolutionary for the political world. Though politicians have been using music and films in their campaigns for decades, I don't think the true potential for the use of music and film in politics as been reached.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Christensen. Reel Politics, (Basil Blackwell Inc, New York, 1987), p.199-200.

<sup>2</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.201.

<sup>3</sup> Christensen, Reel Politics, p.204.



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