University Press of Kentucky

Chapter Title: Introduction

Book Title: We'll Always Have the Movies
Book Subtitle: American Cinema during World War II
Book Author(s): Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry
Published by: University Press of Kentucky. (2006)
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcnh0.4

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

University Press of Kentucky is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *We'll Always Have the Movies*

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Read up to the section break on p5.

Introduction

> History is not always a matter of record—facts in dry books and smashing sensational headlines.
>
> —Opening narration, *Destination Unknown*

> Oh, you mean propaganda. Aw, that's for Japs and crooked politicians.
>
> —Lucky Matthews (Lloyd Nolan) in *Manila Calling*

BY MIDWAY THROUGH THE 1942 wartime classic *Casablanca*, relationships among the characters have reached a state of crisis. American expatriate and Moroccan gin-joint owner Rick Blaine, having drunkenly insulted his former lover, Ilsa Lund, the night before, has been rebuffed in his attempts to apologize. Rick becomes bitter and, as his waiters note, drinks too much. Ilsa and her husband, the Czech resistance leader Victor Laszlo, in a morning meeting with the French prefect of police, Captain Renault, and the Gestapo's liaison to Casablanca, Major Strasser, have been informed that the authorities won't allow Laszlo to leave Casablanca. Laszlo and Ilsa turn to the black market but have no success in obtaining the exit visas that would get them to Lisbon and then to the United States. One visa might be obtained for Ilsa, but Laszlo can't convince her to go without him.

That evening, they all gather at Rick's Café Américain (after all, everybody comes to Rick's), where things only get worse. Yvonne, the young French woman Rick rejected the night before, comes into the bar on the

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

arm of a German officer. Sacha, the Russian bartender, disapproves, and a French soldier insults Yvonne, precipitating a fight with the German. Rick steps in, separating the combatants and telling them, "Lay off politics or get out." Shortly thereafter, Laszlo meets with Rick in his office to offer to buy the genuine, unchallengeable exit visas Rick is rumored to have, exit visas stolen by the thief Ugarte but not found on him when he was arrested at Rick's. Rick admits that he has the visas but refuses to sell them at any price. When Laszlo asks why, Rick responds, "Ask your wife."

But at this moment of anger, bitterness, confusion, division, and separation, something magical happens. Rick and Laszlo are interrupted by the sounds of Major Strasser leading the other Germans in "Watch on the Rhine," a military anthem. The two men watch from the top of the stairs, Rick seething with impotent anger. But Laszlo takes action. He strides downstairs to Rick's orchestra and orders them to play the "Marseillaise." The musicians look to Rick, who uncertainly nods his approval. With Laszlo standing tall and shining in his white suit, stiffly marking time with his clenched fist, the orchestra plays. He and Rick's Spanish guitarist and vocalist lead the singing, and the patrons join in—even Yvonne, with tears in her eyes. Ilsa gazes at Laszlo with love and admiration. Their singing is soon so loud that the overpowered Germans give up, to the disgust of Major Strasser. At the song's conclusion, cheers and shouts of "vive la France!" ring in the saloon, and customers and employees crowd around Laszlo seeking to shake his hand or clap him on the back.

This scene is successful not just because of its high, triumphal emotions, not just because of its important role in the sequence of plot events, but because in its words and images it implicitly plays out several other stories, fundamental narratives about World War II. These narratives, which are enacted within the larger, more specific narrative of *Casablanca*, are intended to explain the war to American moviegoers: why it was being fought; how it should be fought; how it concerned Americans.

Most obviously, the "Marseillaise" scene and the scenes leading up to it act out a narrative of pulling together. Rick's Café Américain is practically a United Nations, offering temporary shelter to representatives of many countries at war with or occupied by Germany: the many French, of course; Laszlo, the Czech; Sacha, the Russian; Berger, the Norwegian; Jan and Annina Brandel, the young couple from Bulgaria. The absence of a major British character emphasizes that these individuals all represent countries that were (when the film was released) at least in part occupied by Nazi Germany. Other characters—the Spanish guitarist and the Ital-

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Casablanca: Resistance leader Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) leads the orchestra and patrons of Rick's Café Américain in the "Marseillaise."

ians, Ugarte and Ferrari—represent countries suffering from fascist rule. That the selfishness of these characters and the bickering among them are overcome by their singing of the "Marseillaise," and that their many conflicts are overshadowed by just one conflict—the one with the Germans—suggest a narrative of nations coming together and rising above their many differences and rivalries to succeed in defeating a common enemy.

That they will succeed is also implied in this scene. The Germans are presented not only as bad but also as defeatable. Major Strasser is a petty little man, in love with his own power. He enjoys bossing around his subordinates, but, as seen in his conversations with Captain Renault, he is suspicious of their loyalty. He likes to give orders, but, as evidenced by his continually changing plans for dealing with Laszlo, he can't lead. The other Germans, Strasser's staff officers, are overweight and stupid. In the "Marseillaise" scene the Germans are shown in one alcove of the saloon, apparently shunned by the rest of the patrons, one of them pounding crudely on Sam's piano. While the camera offers us expansive shots of Laszlo and the others singing, their numbers swelling to the size of a soccer crowd,

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the Germans are presented in tight shots, emphasizing both their separation from the others and their comparatively small number. The Germans are basically bullies, powerful because they have managed to make everyone else afraid of them. The scene suggests that they can be defeated as any bully can be: by good people joining together. The French national anthem here represents not just a love of France but also patriotism in general and the love of freedom. These ideals are the binding elements that bring ordinary people together to overcome the bullies.

The way the bullies can be beaten is also suggested: leadership. Victor Laszlo represents the subsuming of self to cause. He is single-minded in his dedication. He is unafraid, unselfish, and untiring. He is passionately devoted to his cause but also soft-spoken, courteous, and considerate of others. His civilized manner contrasts markedly with the Germans' behavior. In the "Marseillaise" scene we see how these qualities put him in a position to bring all the others together into a force that can overcome the enemy. Whereas Rick despises the Germans but feels he can do nothing about them, and whereas Captain Renault goes along with the Germans out of personal and political expediency, Laszlo acts: he has the courage to challenge the Germans publicly. In so doing, he provides an opportunity for the great mass of less courageous, oppressed people to express their true feelings and to realize how numerous and strong they are; he also strips away, at least temporarily, the Germans' veneer of power to show them for the bullies they are. This, perhaps, is the most important quality of a leader: to make his people think of themselves as better, braver, stronger than they really are. Interestingly, *Casablanca* doesn't ask us all to be Laszlos; Ilsa's adoring gaze suggests that he is a man beyond most others. But the film does tell us what to look for in a leader and assures us that with the right kind of leadership, we can overcome the fear within us and the external forces that threaten us.

We recognize Laszlo as being superior to us, but we find it easy to identify with Rick, the representative American. In fact, Rick practically becomes a symbol for the American nation and its people. Like America, which had fought a war to end all wars, Rick has been idealistically involved in foreign conflicts—running guns to the Ethiopians, fighting against the fascists in Spain—and like isolationist America, he has withdrawn into himself, no longer willing, as he repeatedly points out, to stick his neck out for anyone. Indeed, in his meeting with Laszlo, his bitterness about the past and his unwillingness to try to solve the world's problems motivate his refusal to sell the exit visas. Shortly before this meeting, how-

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ever, Rick is presented in a way that undercuts this isolationist position: In a scene that anticipates Rick's meeting with Laszlo, Annina Brandel, the Bulgarian refugee, asks Rick for his advice and help. He rudely dismisses her, but then, in spite of himself, he steps in and, at his own loss (he's right when he tells Laszlo he's not much of a businessman), makes sure that her husband wins enough money at the roulette table to buy the exit visas they need. In addition to foreshadowing the end of the film, when Rick finally gives the exit visas to Laszlo and Ilsa, this sequence offers a narrative about why America should fight in the war. Though they may be right to think that they can't solve the world's problems, Americans are fundamentally too good-hearted to stand by and see injustice done. Having been underdogs themselves, Americans will side with the oppressed against the bullies.

In a few minutes of film, then, *Casablanca*, besides entertaining its audience, has communicated several basic narratives that provide a means of understanding the war. The Germans are bullies who are terrorizing and oppressing much of Europe. They can be defeated by the Allied nations overcoming their own petty differences and joining together. This joining together can be achieved by following true leaders. America, which as a nation loves justice, freedom, and fair play, must shake off its selfish isolationism to provide the leadership the rest of the world needs to defeat these bullies. At the same time, however, the film offers a curious lacuna, an absence that, once noticed, draws more and more attention to itself: Where's Sam, Rick's black pianist and sidekick? Every other character associated with Rick's Café is in this scene. Sam's orchestra is playing the "Marseillaise." His piano is being played by the German accompanying "Watch on the Rhine." But Sam himself is nowhere to be seen. His absence is necessary because his presence would suggest another narrative, one of segregation and exclusion that would undercut this celebratory coming together. In this particular sequence and the narratives it implies, Sam doesn't fit in.

Within hours after terrorists had hijacked commercial airliners and turned them into missiles on September 11, 2001, press reports were comparing the attacks to Pearl Harbor and referring to the site of the former World Trade Center as Ground Zero. These references were cues pointing toward events that marked the beginning and the end of the United States' participation in World War II. By *cues* we mean that these terms, when invoked, imply stories—in the case of *Pearl Harbor*, a story about an unprovoked

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

and treacherous attack on an unprepared America; in the case of *Ground Zero*, a story about unimaginable and apocalyptic destruction—stories that most U.S. listeners and readers recognize, understand, and believe. These cues provide us with a way of connecting newly experienced and not-yet-processed events and information with stories we already know; the cues thus allow us to make sense of the new and not yet understood in terms of familiar stories that have helped us understand the past—in this case, events connected with World War II.[1] Other specific cues and their implied stories drawn from our nation's experience of World War II include *Hitler* (to damningly characterize a brutal tyrant), *Munich* (to argue against any kind of appeasement in foreign affairs), and *Holocaust* (to add moral weight to any large-scale executions based on ethnic, racial, or national identity).

Considering that the events of World War II played out well over half a century ago and that many of us—indeed, most of us—weren't even alive as they were transpiring, it seems amazing that these cues and their implied narratives still have the power to influence our ways of knowing the world. Their staying power may be a sign of the national unity that characterized the World War II era in America and the epistemological homogeneity or shared worldview about the war that arose from it. As we will see in chapter 7, however, this homogeneity probably never existed to the extent we now think it did and may itself be a myth produced by narratives generated during the war. The persistence of the cues, the stories, the myths of World War II is a sign of the astounding success with which the pop-cultural media—everything from news reports to advertising to radio to songs to comic books to movies (especially movies)—articulated and disseminated narratives that would explain the war: why we were fighting it, why our enemies had to be defeated, why our allies deserved our support, how each American could contribute to the eventual victory. The transmission of these narratives to World War II–era Americans through a collaboration of the nation's pop-cultural media was so successful that they became inseparable from the way we still understand the war and were condensed into the kind of shorthand cues mentioned earlier.

Of these various pop-cultural media, Hollywood films played the most important role in promulgating mythmaking narratives about the war, for two main reasons. First, as we will see in chapter 2, because of their status as fiction, films were able to offer completed narratives about the war, whereas, because of their in medias res nature, news reports about the war

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

could not. Reading newspapers and watching newsreels from the war years, we're struck by how infrequently readers and viewers were given a complete narrative. Because of the combination of military censorship, missing information, the general uncertainty about chaotic and protean situations, and editors' sense of what would best serve the war effort, news reports overflowed with incidents but not narratives. Narratives link incidents in a causally based sequence wherein one incident leads to another, which leads to another, and so on, in a developing plotline that eventually reaches some kind of resolution. News reports during the war were necessarily either very big picture (e.g., Patton's Third Army smashes across France) or very up close and personal (e.g., Ernie Pyle's sketches of GI experiences), with little in between to connect them. (Despite advances in technology, the reporting of our own era's war against Iraq, with around-the-clock headlines and embedded reporters, suffers from the same problem.[2]) Hollywood films, because they weren't obliged to stick to facts and because of the conventions of their narrative-based genre, were able to offer complete narratives and thus fulfill a need for viewers that the news could not.

The second reason for films' dominant role in transmitting mythmaking narratives about the war is their greater popularity—popularity to the point of ubiquity—compared with other fictionalizing media, radio, theater, comic strips, and comic books, as popular as these genres were. In the early forties Hollywood produced between 400 and 500 films every year, and 90 million Americans went to the movies every week.[3] A confluence of economic trends contributed to Hollywood's success. During the Depression years, when most Americans had little disposable income, a night at the movies was a cheap and easy form of entertainment. After the United States entered the war, the economy boomed and spending money was more plentiful, but there was little to spend it on. Consumer goods, such as cars and household appliances, were in short supply because their manufacturers were making products for the war; vacations were difficult because gas was rationed, rubber tires were hard to come by, and the railroads gave priority to military personnel. The movies were one of the few easily accessible forms of entertainment for the newly prosperous home front to spend its money on. Because of this, the movies came to play an important role in many people's lives. One such moviegoer reminisces,

> People of my generation lived, breathed, and ate movies. We would see our favorites ten, twelve, fifteen times or more. We would rush to our

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> neighborhood theaters twice a week, whenever the program changed. We saw the A feature and the B feature; cartoons, news, shorts, coming attractions, and sometimes a piece of china or crystal were [*sic*] added as going offers. All for ten cents and later twenty-five cents. We would go "downtown" with our adult relatives and stand in long lines when a popular new film opened. Then, as teenagers, we were permitted to take the streetcar or busses with our friends and see a film when the door opened at 11:00 or 12:00 noon; bring a sack lunch with us and stay in the theater until 5:00 or 6:00 P.M. In other words, every local movie house was part of our experience; the center of our lives.[4]

Similarly, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. recalls how the movies influenced viewers' sense of self: "We went to the movies for entertainment, of course, but almost as much for instruction in techniques of self-presentation. The movies supplied our models and shaped our dreams. Young men sauntered insolently down the street like James Cagney, wisecracked like William Powell, cursed (expletives deleted by censors) like Humphrey Bogart and wooed like Clark Gable. Young women sighed like Garbo and laughed like Carole Lombard and kidded like Myrna Loy and looked (or tried to look) like Hedy Lamarr." Schlesinger sums up, "Film provides a common dream life, a common fund of reference and fantasy, for a society riven by economic disparities and ethnic discriminations."[5] Movies at this time, then, were far more than a means of escape: they were the focus of their audience's fantasies, the generator of their desires, a source of their ideas.

Looking back at Hollywood films made during the war years from our perspective in the early twenty-first century, we might easily condescend to them, dismiss them as propaganda that was more or less successful in rousing their audiences' emotions for the Allies and against their enemies. Indeed, Robert Fyne has written an entire book, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II*, that rates World War II films according to their value as propaganda in this sense. This kind of approach is valuable but goes only so far; it tends both to underestimate the complexity of these films and to grasp only a limited notion of propaganda. There's no denying that the Hollywood films of World War II functioned as propaganda, but *propaganda* is a difficult word; it carries pejorative connotations (propaganda is what the *other* side does), and it has come to be associated with visceral reactions divorced from reason. For Fyne, propaganda addresses "the emotions of the audience, rather than the intellect."[6]

Because of these connotations, we won't be using the word *propaganda*

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

often. However, to understand exactly how World War II films functioned, we return to the way the word was understood by mass-communication specialists in the years leading up to the war; we return, particularly, to an influential book called *Propaganda*, written in 1928 by public-relations pioneer Edward L. Bernays. Bernays argues that emotions that are disconnected from ideas are worthless: "The haphazard staging of emotional events without regard to their value as part of the whole campaign, is a waste of effort." He asserts that propaganda is aimed at getting large numbers of people to think more or less the same thing: "The mechanism by which ideas are disseminated on a large scale is propaganda, in the broad sense of an organized effort to spread a particular belief or doctrine."[7] As his biographer explains, "Bernays's tactics differed, but his philosophy in each case was the same. Hired to sell a product or service, he instead sold whole new ways of behaving, which appeared obscure but over time reaped huge rewards for his clients and redefined the very texture of American life. Some analysts have referred to his methods as strategic or lateral thinking—mapping out a solution based on his client's standing in the wider economy and society rather than on narrow, vertical considerations like how they were faring against other bacon makers or booksellers."[8]

One of Bernays's groundbreaking public-relations campaigns was for the American Tobacco Company, maker of Lucky Strikes cigarettes. His goal was to increase the number of cigarettes sold to women. In what he called a process of "crystallizing public opinion," Bernays capitalized on two ideas current in the culture at large. The first was women's desire to be thin. He enlisted fashion photographers, doctors, and even renowned dancing teacher Arthur Murray to provide testimonials to the effect that sweets and desserts added fat, while cigarettes, as a substitute for dessert, suppressed the appetite. He encouraged restaurants to add cigarettes to their dessert menus and women's magazines to include them in their meal plans. He suggested that kitchens have a built-in place for cigarettes, like those for flour and sugar. He helped some Ziegfeld Girls form the Ziegfeld Contour, Curve, and Charm Club, whose members forswore sweets in favor of cigarettes. The second cultural idea that Bernays sought to make a connection with was feminism. He cast the idea of women smoking, especially women smoking in public, as a symbol of their freedom from artificial and outdated social restraints. To this end, he not only elicited testimony from psychoanalysts (he was Sigmund Freud's nephew) but also planned a classic publicity stunt, the Torches of Freedom. On Easter Sunday 1929 he arranged for several attractive young women to light up cigarettes on

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Fifth Avenue at New York's Easter Parade. The stunt was featured in stories and photographs in newspapers across the country and sparked debate about women smoking. As Bernays summed up his method, "emphasis by repetition gains acceptance for an idea, particularly if the repetition comes from different sources."[9]

That Bernays's public-relations theories could be applied to the broader arena of influencing how the great mass of people think about their world was clear to some of his contemporaries, Walter Lippmann for one:

> Leaders, Lippmann said, couldn't be expected to have a rational dialogue with their constituents about essential ideals like justice, or law and order. That would be too unwieldy, would take too long, and wouldn't ensure the desired outcome. Instead, they should find just the right word or image to capture the popular imagination, the way they had in rallying the nation to war [World War I]. The ideal medium through which to exercise such symbols, he added, was the cinema, where Hollywood could make clear in an instant who were the good guys and who the bad, which ideas were worthy of loyalty and which should inspire anger.[10]

In actual practice, of course, controlling what the public thinks is not so deterministic; the rhetoric above suggests something akin to brainwashing. Nevertheless, as Bernays theorized and Lippmann anticipated, during World War II Hollywood movies played the central role in a pop-culture-wide "emphasis by repetition." There are three points to develop from this. The first concerns the Hollywood film's ability—through words and images—to translate the abstract into something specifically knowable via narrative. Many contemporary thinkers—Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Hayden White among them—have discussed the interconnections of narrative and knowledge.[11] That is, in order to know ourselves, our experience, or our culture, we cast it or have it cast for us in the form of a story: beginning and end, protagonists and antagonists, conflict developed over a series of cause-and-effect related events to some kind of resolution. Narrative structure is basic to our ways of knowing. The classic Hollywood film, because of its widespread dissemination and because its fundamental narrative structure overlaps so perfectly with the structure of human epistemology, was ideally placed in the 1940s to interact with and influence the American moviegoing public's understanding of the world. As we hope to show, it's not going too far to say that films helped make that understanding possible.

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The second point is the practice of drawing on things the audience already believes. As we saw, in his cigarette campaign Bernays used as his starting point ideas that most Americans were likely to accept as true (thin women are more attractive than fat women) or ideas that most Americans would be aware of as current topics in the culture at large (women's rights), even if they didn't accept them. Invoking such commonly known ideas prepares an audience to accept a new, connected idea. We will see in chapter 3 that, whatever Americans believed about the Japanese before Pearl Harbor, after that surprise attack, they believed them to be treacherous; Hollywood films were able to use that belief as a foundation on which to build their characterization of the Japanese as an enemy.

The third point is repetition. That is, no single film (or, for that matter, no single speech, news report, or song), no matter how powerful or popular, can by itself conjure a way of thinking about the world. Rather, it is in the aggregate, through repetition and accumulation of narratives, character types, conflicts, and their resolution, that movies and other pop-cultural media create the possibilities for ways to think. Repeated often enough, narratives are shorthanded into the kinds of cues discussed earlier. Eventually, filmmakers could merely provide a cue, and viewers would fill in the implied narrative. Thus, in our discussion of Hollywood World War II films, although we analyze some films in more detail than others, the goal is to show that many films repeated the same ideas using the same kinds of narrative and filmic techniques and together offered basic narratives by which the war could be known. It is in this sense of propaganda that we are interested: how Hollywood films provided their viewers with ways to think about the war.

Two examples—one from a famous speech made soon after the beginning of the war in Europe and the other from a film documentary overtly designed to explain the war—can help us see how rhetorical cues with their implied narratives and the generic conventions of film can work together to create the means for thinking about the war. On June 18, 1940, after the debacle and triumph of Dunkirk, as the French government sued for peace and Hitler and Mussolini met to mull over terms for the French surrender, Winston Churchill addressed the House of Commons and the British nation in a speech that would be known as "Their Finest Hour." In it, he briefly considers the mistakes that led to the fall of France; expresses his confidence in the superiority of the British army, air force, and navy over their German counterparts; acknowledges the military support of the British dominions and the economic support of the United

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

States; and asserts that Britain's position, threatened with invasion, is far from desperate and is in fact advantageous. He concludes in the famous final paragraph:

> What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour."[12]

This paragraph moves beyond the immediate situation and masterfully provides a way for the British people and the rest of the world to think about the war. Using the elements of narrative, Churchill defines the war in a series of conflicts that cast the British as the protagonists and the Germans as the antagonists and suggests the means for a successful resolution of these conflicts. On the most basic level the good guys–bad guys dichotomy is established with three general, value-laden images. Light, as in "sunlit," is associated with the British, while dark, as in "Dark Age," is associated with the Germans. Similarly, high, as in "uplands," is connected to the British, and low, as in "abyss," is connected with the Germans. Also, "uplands" suggests nature, while the Germans, who practice "perverted science," are unnatural. In each case—light-dark, high-low, natural-unnatural—the first term is culturally preferred and is metaphorically suggestive of goodness and purity, while the second term is suggestive of evil, perhaps even of hell. These general oppositions are augmented as Churchill brings more terms to the conflict, in each case associating the first, culturally preferred term with the British and the second, culturally abrogated term with the Germans: Christianity-paganism, civilization-barbarism, freedom-slavery, historical progress–historical regression, order and rule of law–chaos and lawlessness.

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Having cast the war in terms far more morally compelling than one country fighting another, Churchill suggests the narrative sequence by which these conflicts can be successfully resolved. He calls on his listeners for personal sacrifice; he asks them to put aside differences and pull together. He then cements this vision of a narrative with a happy ending by projecting himself into the future, where historians will be able to look back at this war as a completed narrative; he imagines that in this narrative the British people will have been the heroes of this, "their finest hour."

Prelude to War, the first in Frank Capra's Why We Fight series (documentaries made to educate the armed forces), lays out the conflict in terms remarkably similar to Churchill's.[13] Beginning with Vice President Henry Wallace's statement, "This is a fight between a free world and a slave world," and accompanied by two globes—the well-lit one showing the Western Hemisphere; the other, presumably the Eastern Hemisphere, plunged in darkness—the narrator (Walter Huston) defines the differences between these two worlds. Saying, "Let's take the free world first, *our* world," the narrator connects the words of the world's great religious leaders—Moses, Muhammad, Confucius, and Christ—with the desire for freedom. (Interestingly, the background music, a choir softly singing "It Came upon a Midnight Clear," implies a coming together of the world's religions in Christianity.) He says, "All believe that in the sight of God, all men were created equal, and from that there developed a spirit among men and nations which is best expressed in our own declaration of freedom: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" He tells us that this ideal of freedom has inspired many of America's and the world's great leaders ("lighthouses lighting up a dark and foggy world") and that men have always struggled, fought, and died for it. He intones passages from the Gettysburg Address and Patrick Henry's "give me liberty or give me death" speech, the words accompanied by a montage: the Liberty Bell, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Washington Monument, the Supreme Court, the White House, the Capitol, the Statue of Liberty.

"But what of this other world?" the narrator goes on, as the camera moves to the darkened globe. "Here [the camera shows a cartoon image of Japan, dark ink spreading over it] men insisted that progress lay in killing freedom. Here [ink-stained Germany] they were putting out the lighthouses one by one. Here [ditto Italy] the march of history was reversing itself." The narrator explains how each totalitarian regime rose through the subversion of democracy and the suppression of freedom: "Yes, in these lands the people surrendered their liberties and threw away their

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

human dignity," and "Each system was alike in that the constitutional law-making bodies gave up their power." He tells us that each country abolished free speech, the free press, and labor unions. He especially stresses the stifling of religion in Germany. In a striking image, a stained-glass window is smashed by bricks, and through the holes we see a huge poster of Hitler.

Like Churchill, but using words *and* images, Capra skillfully makes his points by associating *our* side with light, Christianity, freedom, and historical progress. *Their* side is associated with their opposites: darkness, the suppression of religion, militarism, the denial of human freedoms, and historical regression. Thus they are not only made Other—different, by definition, from us—but also identified as a threat to those qualities and institutions that define us. The combination of words, sounds, and images creates a narrative understanding of the war for the audience, informing them and motivating them, providing in essence cognitive lenses through which to see the war.

To sum up, then, through the narratives that exist overtly or covertly within their plots, the narratives that lie embedded in their dialogue and speeches, and the narratives that are implied in their images, Hollywood war films offered ways to understand what the war was all about, what America's place in the war was, why America should hate its enemies and support its allies, what each American's role in the war should be, how the war would be resolved, and what the postwar world would be like. Moviegoers might leave the theater with their emotions stirred, but more lasting and thus more important were the narrative elements—the plots, character types, symbols, and rhetoric—they were supplied with to think and talk about the war. Films combined with other pop-cultural media to create, promote, and disseminate an epistemology of the war that the American public as a whole had to accept if the war was to be fought and won. This is not to say that this epistemology was untrue, but the creation of a societal consensus is a complex process that involves turning truth into a narrative, making what's true a fiction so that it can be grasped and passed on.[14]

Thinking back to our discussion of the "Marseillaise" scene from *Casablanca*, one might ask, if the film was part of an attempt to create a societal consensus, how could the unsettling narrative suggested by Sam's absence be included? From our twenty-first-century vantage point, aren't we simply reading too much into the film, finding a racial issue that really wasn't there? We think not, for two reasons. First, as will become clear

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

later, the fundamental narratives used to explain the war weren't always in sympathy with the long-standing narratives Americans have used to understand themselves and their world. As a result, these films frequently contain, if not contradictions, places of narrative and epistemological tension. Moreover, the narratives used to explain the war sometimes failed to work well with the conventional plots Hollywood was so dependent on—for example, the love story. The resulting narrative confusion can create, as we will see, some interesting interpretive implications. The second reason for the contradictory narrative elements is a more practical one. Auteur theories to the contrary, no Hollywood film of this time was the result of a single artistic vision. Each film was the creation of a veritable army: producers, screenwriters, directors, actors, lawyers, censors, and, after the war began, military and governmental agencies. One might imagine a stew with dozens of chefs, each adding his or her own ingredients; the results might be brilliant or simply awful.

One brilliant stew that was the product of innumerable chefs is *Casablanca*, an ideal illustration of how many voices contributed to a film in the studio system. In her definitive study of the film, *Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of "Casablanca"—Bogart, Bergman, and World War II*, Aljean Harmetz traces the torturous process by which *Casablanca* reached the screen, showing that its excellence and its many narratives about the war were "an accumulation of accidents."[15]

Casablanca was based on an unproduced play, *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison. Burnett was moved to write the play after a European honeymoon during which he saw Nazi anti-Semitism firsthand. Returning home, he wanted the rest of the world to share his horror at what was going on in Europe. Alison seems to have been the more experienced theater professional, shaping the characters and events into a workable drama. After the play was purchased by Warner Bros., producer Hal Wallis assigned Wally Kline and Aeneas MacKenzie to write a screenplay, but apparently nothing of their treatment remains in the film. The play and the Kline-MacKenzie treatment were passed on to twin brothers Julius and Philip Epstein, who, despite being called to Washington to work on the Why We Fight series, were with the *Casablanca* project throughout its production. As the Epsteins finished sections of the screenplay, Wallis handed them over to Howard Koch to revise. Thereafter Koch and the Epsteins would trade drafts, critiquing and revising each other's work, all under Wallis's supervising eye. It was during this process that the film acquired both its political focus and its wit. As Harmetz explains,

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

"Koch rewrote the Epsteins to give the movie more weight and significance, and the Epsteins then rewrote Koch to erase his most ponderous symbols and to lighten his earnestness."[16] In addition, Wallis assigned two other writers to work on the script. Lenore Coffee, a veteran Warner Bros. screenwriter, worked on the film for less than a week. Casey Robinson, however, did significant work shaping the love-story aspects of the plot, especially the Paris flashback.

It is interesting to note the mixture of ideologies that these various writers represented. Burnett intended his play to be an attack on the Nazis' anti-Semitism, and Warner Bros. was the most forcefully anti-Nazi studio, criticizing Hitler long before it was fashionable. The Epsteins were solid FDR, New Deal liberals. Koch, though not a member of the Communist Party, was sympathetic with most of the party's positions. Robinson was a conservative.

To complicate matters even more, people beyond the screenwriters contributed directly and indirectly to what became the final script. When the writers learned that Humphrey Bogart had been cast as Rick, they began revising Burnett and Alison's character to fit Bogart's screen persona. Moreover, Harmetz argues that the available evidence indicates that Rick's tagline, "Here's looking at you, kid," was improvised by Bogart during the filming of the Paris flashback scenes. Another of the film's famous lines, its last, "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship," was written by Wallis and recorded by Bogart weeks after filming was completed. Director Michael Curtiz depended on Bess Meredyth, his wife and a former screenwriter, for advice whenever he made a movie, and evidence suggests that she contributed ideas to the *Casablanca* screenplay as well. And in an example of corporate thinking that was never (thank heaven) acted on, just before the film was set to open, Warner Bros.' New York office, inspired by the U.S. landings in North Africa in November 1942, proposed adding a new ending showing Rick and Renault with the Allied armies liberating Casablanca.

Of course, the stories that a movie tells and the messages it sends depend on more than the screenplay and the words the actors speak. If we broaden our attention to those who contribute to how the film looks and its visual messages, most important is the director. Curtiz was responsible for many of the film's striking visual moments: neither Ilsa's knocking over of the champagne glass during her good-bye to Rick in Paris nor Carl the waiter's hilarious response after being jostled by the local pickpocket was in the screenplay. Curtiz also turned at least one scripted moment into

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

a visual one: he filmed Rick and Ilsa driving through Paris and the French countryside without the dialogue that had been written, letting the pictures tell the story. Beyond this, though, is the composition of every scene and the story those pictures tell. Others contributed to this as well. As producer, Wallis responded to the screenplay and the daily rushes, making suggestions about how the film should sound and look. Another producer, David O. Selznick, had loaned Ingrid Bergman to Warner Bros. for *Casablanca*, so he offered suggestions about everything from her lines to how she was photographed to her costumes. In fact, Harmetz argues that his voice was vital in convincing Warner Bros. not to add the proposed liberation scene.

Another aspect of how the film's story is told is the music, composed in this case by Max Steiner. Steiner tried to replace "As Time Goes By" with another song of his own, but when this proved impossible because Bergman was unavailable to reshoot key scenes, he made "As Time Goes By" the centerpiece of his score. But knowing that melodies tell stories too, Steiner made use of a mélange of popular songs to support and comment on the action. Harmetz explains: "As conspirators, refugees, Fascists, patriots, and desperate gamblers take the foreground [in Rick's], those songs, subliminally, make the café an outpost of America, an oasis in a foreign land. . . . The carpet of background music includes 'Crazy Rhythm,' 'Baby Face,' 'I'm Just Wild About Harry,' 'Heaven Can Wait,' 'Love for Sale,' 'Avalon,' 'If I Could Be with You One Hour Tonight,' 'You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby,' and 'It Had to Be You.' Often the songs underscore the dramatic content. When Ilsa enters the café for the first time, the band plays 'Speak to Me of Love.'"[17]

Beyond all the artistic contributions, the legal and distribution branches of the studio made demands that ultimately affected the film. Movie studios had to be aware of how a film would play not only in Peoria but also in Portugal. Until the late 1930s, 40 to 50 percent of industry revenues were generated overseas. Dorothy B. Jones, who was head of the Film Reviewing and Analysis Section of the Hollywood branch of the Office of War Information from 1942 to the beginning of 1945, noted that once the war started, "most film makers failed to realize that the melodramatic blood-and-thunder combat film, with the American hero single-handedly disposing of a score of Nazis, would bring jeers and hisses in a London movie house, or that a musical singing out that the Yanks had done it once and would do it again would cause a riot between American and British soldiers in a theater in Bombay."[18] Thus the head of Warner Bros.' foreign

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

publicity, sensitive to potential foreign profits, insisted that *Casablanca* depict foreigners inoffensively. So three unsavory characters, the pickpocket, the man who kills the couriers, and the owner of the Blue Parrot, were made Italian; the Spanish singer had to be presented with dignity; and references to Islam were removed. Wallis was also advised that for the "Marseillaise" scene, the Germans couldn't sing the "Horst Wessel" song, because the film would violate the German copyright when distributed in neutral countries.

We could go on and on, but the point is clear. The *Casablanca* we all love is the result of collaboration in the broadest sense. Moreover, although *Casablanca* is unique, the process by which it was created was not: similar if not more complicated collaborations defined the creative processes of practically every Hollywood studio film.

The variety of contributory voices within any given studio was joined by still more voices from outside the studio that sought to control what the film could and couldn't say and to insert certain messages into it. The most important of these for our purposes were the Hays Office, which administered Hollywood's industry-created Motion Picture Production Code, and, during the war years, the military and the Office of War Information. The jumbled and potentially conflicting interests of all these voices are described by historians Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black: "American film makers kept at least three audiences in mind as they made their pictures: a fickle mass audience, the box office, and their own peers, whose approbation they sought. Government propaganda officials represented yet another audience, whose goals potentially were at odds with those of the other audiences."[19]

The Production Code was created by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in response to several things: public outrage at a number of Hollywood scandals; various public-interest groups' complaints that films contained too much sex, violence, and immoral behavior; and especially the threat that individual states and communities might enact their own codes for screen content, thus requiring multiple versions of every film. In 1930 the MPPDA agreed to the "self-discipline and regulation" of a production code that would govern the sort of films that could be made and what could be shown in them. The main idea behind the Code was that "No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin." The MPPDA, under president Will H. Hays, postmaster general dur-

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ing the Harding administration, was required to enforce the Code; it became, in effect, the censor of the industry it was representing. In 1934 Joseph Breen was appointed to head the Production Code Administration, the censorship enforcement arm, although the censorship office was known colloquially as the Hays Office. The Hays Office played an active role in limiting what American movies could show, usually couched in terms of what the public would pay to see. At the 1930 Academy Awards ceremony Hays spoke for fifty minutes on "the connection between morality and business": "Good taste is good business, and to offend good taste is to fortify sales resistance," he told the large crowd.[20]

Adherence to the Code was voluntary, but Breen threatened to withhold the MPPDA seal from any picture that didn't follow its guidelines. Since most exhibitors wouldn't show films without the seal, film studios were forced to comply. The Code urged that "Correct standards of life shall, as far as possible, be presented." More specifically, the presentation of crimes—including graphic depictions of murders, methods of committing crimes, and the drug trade—and the gratuitous use of liquor was to be curtailed. Moreover, because the Code stated that "The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld," adultery, excessive kissing, and seduction or rape could never be more than suggested, and sexual perversion, white slavery, miscegenation, and sexual hygiene were considered inappropriate subjects. Also considered inappropriate were vulgarity, obscenity, profanity, nudity, indecent exposure, and repellent subjects, such as actual hangings, gruesomeness, branding of people or animals, apparent cruelty to children or animals, the sale of women, and surgical operations.[21]

A second major voice contributing to the making of Hollywood's World War II films was the military. The armed forces needed Hollywood to help disseminate their messages, but they insisted on tight control over those messages. Audience interest in the portrayal of overseas battles, military operations, and American technology was high, of course, but to make such films, the studios needed the cooperation of the military due to "their increased need to use military facilities, equipment and footage in film production." As Paul Fussell notes, "Because no film company could be expected to possess its own tanks, bombers, or warships, the services' had to be used, and the services refused to co-operate without approving the screenplay in advance, insisting on changes to make sure that little remained but the bromides of wholesome behavior and successful courageous action." The result was a quid pro quo in which the military provided

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

equipment, battle footage, and technical advice and the studios presented the branches of the service as they wished to be seen.[22]

The military had sought to harness the power of the film industry and influence its output even before the United States entered the war. In early 1941 the Joint Army and Navy Public Relations Committee proposed a system for "complete censorship of publications, radio, and motion pictures within the U.S.A." Thankfully, President Roosevelt rejected this "wild scheme," and by the summer of 1941 a more congenial relationship was established between the studios and the War Department's Bureau of Public Relations (BPR). This was reflected in a mid-1941 memo from the director of the BPR: "the continuous and equitable contact of this branch with the picture industry assures their confidence and cooperation to a remarkable degree." This cooperative relationship assumed new importance after Pearl Harbor. The BPR knew that a stirring presentation of the armed forces was an excellent recruiting tool and so sometimes suggested ideas and provided technical advisers for films that earned its stamp of approval. For example, the BPR approved both *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* (1942) and *Air Force* (1943), despite objections from the Office of War Information about inappropriate racial stereotyping. The Marine Corps was particularly helpful when it came to films that presented that branch positively, even allowing Twentieth Century–Fox to use documentary footage for *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943). The marines also provided five technical advisers, a technical director, and a "wealth of information" to *Wake Island* (1942), which depicted a defeat but glorified the Corps.[23]

The military would also discourage or veto films that showed the services or servicemen in a bad light. For example, the navy stalled on giving approval to Warner Bros.' *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) because the convoy system being dramatized was not faring well in real life. The army refused authorization for *A Walk in the Sun* (1945) because the script had a platoon launching an unlikely World War I–type bayonet charge against a farmhouse. Screenwriter Robert Rossen had to revise the script to show the platoon running out of ammunition for their bazookas, thus justifying the bayonet charge at the end. Sometimes film ideas that presented the armed forces in a less than serious manner were doomed before the production got under way. When the War Department refused to provide assistance to Paramount's proposed *Advance Agent to Africa*, the project was killed. Even after the war ended, the armed forces objected to films that dealt with returning servicemen in a less than positive way, although if the film didn't use military equipment, there was little the military could

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

do to prevent filming. For example, the navy objected to *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) because of its "suggestion that wounded veterans capable of both violence and amnesia were being demobilized and sent forth into the civilian world."[24]

The third major voice influencing Hollywood's films during the war years was the Roosevelt administration's Office of War Information (OWI). Even before Pearl Harbor, the United States had begun strengthening its defenses; thus the movie industry created the Motion Picture Committee Co-operative for National Defense. After the United States entered the war, this committee was reconstituted as the War Activities Committee. Mindful of Hollywood's need to support the war effort, the committee asked for government guidance. In May 1942 Washington set up the Office of the Coordinator of Films in Hollywood. A month later, it was transformed into the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) of the OWI. President Roosevelt appointed Lowell Mellett, former director of the Office of Government Reports, to head the bureau in Washington, with an assistant, Nelson Poynter, in Hollywood.[25] Hollywood studios made many different types of films to support the war, including propaganda shorts, newsreels, documentaries, and educational films, but the type that had the largest audiences and the largest public impact was the traditional dramatic film.

Although the OWI made suggestions and tried to influence the films that were made, technically, its function was only advisory. As one historian stresses, "The motion picture industry had final responsibility for the films produced during the war." The OWI had six aims for the industry to consider when making movies about the war: "(1) The Issues of the War: what we are fighting for, the American way of life; (2) The Nature of the Enemy: his ideology, his objectives, his methods; (3) The United Nations: our allies in arms; (4) The Production Front: supplying the materials for victory; (5) The Home Front: civilian responsibility; (6) The Fighting Forces: our armed services, our allies and our associates." These ideas were articulated in the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, which came out in the summer of 1942. The OWI asked each studio to consider seven questions as they were making their films:

1. Will this picture help win the war?
2. What war information problem does it seek to clarify, dramatize or interpret?
3. If it is an "escape" picture, will it harm the war effort by creating a false picture of America, her allies, or the world we live in?

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> 4. Does it merely use the war as the basis for a profitable picture, contributing nothing of real significance to the war effort and possibly lessening the effect of other pictures of more importance?
>
> 5. Does it contribute something new to our understanding of the world conflict and the various forces involved, or has the subject already been adequately covered?
>
> 6. When the picture reaches its maximum circulation on the screen, will it reflect conditions as they are and fill a need current at that time, or will it be out-dated?
>
> 7. Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda?

Ideally, the manual advocated inserting a "constructive 'war message'" whenever possible:

> At every opportunity, naturally and inconspicuously, show people making small sacrifices for victory—making them voluntarily, cheerfully and because of the people's own sense of responsibility, not because of any laws. For example, show people bringing their own sugar when invited out to dinner, carrying their own parcels when shopping, travelling on planes or trains with light luggage, uncomplainingly giving up seats for servicemen or others travelling on war priorities; show persons accepting dimout restrictions, tire and gas rationing cheerfully, show well-dressed persons, obviously car owners riding in crowded buses and streetcars.[26]

Although all films made during the war were subject to the government's Board of Censorship to ensure that filmmakers weren't releasing military secrets, only about a third of the movies made between 1942 and 1944 were actually concerned with war-related issues.[27] And although the OWI entreated the studios to show scripts and films to the Domestic Branch of the BMP, some cooperated more than others, and at times only grudgingly; the studios were reluctant to go through yet another level of bureaucracy. Although the studios generally wanted to support the war effort, they also wanted to make audience-pleasing pictures and thus didn't want to burden films with OWI-generated discussions of fascism, the Four Freedoms, and the goals of the Allies, turning them into nothing but propaganda—and dull propaganda at that. Some films that the studios allowed the OWI to greatly influence, such as *Pittsburgh* (1942) and *An American Romance* (1944), ended up being aesthetically poor movies and thus poor

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

vehicles for the government's messages. One way around the BMP review, as we have seen, was to get the blessing of the army or navy; then the OWI would have to grant approval, even if it was strongly opposed to the film. Usually, films that showed one of the branches of the military in a positive light (and thus increased enlistments) were approved by the War Department. Bolder studios could simply refuse to cooperate. Paramount was notorious for resisting the BMP. When Preston Sturges refused to submit a rough cut of *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944), the BMP's Hollywood representative sent an indignant letter to Washington headquarters: "THIS IS THE ONLY STUDIO WHICH HAS EVER REFUSED SPECIFICALLY REQUEST OF THIS NATURE. IT IS ONLY STUDIO NOT FULLY COOPERATING AND IS NOT COOPERATING ONE IOTA."[28]

Eventually the OWI inadvertently gained a greater degree of control over the filmmaking process. In 1943 congressional Republicans, concerned that there were too many liberals in the OWI, tried to end its domestic operations. In a House compromise with the Senate, the funding of the Domestic Branch of the OWI was preserved, but its budget was cut by 73 percent. Most of the BMP's film reviewers moved to the Overseas Branch, headed by Ulric Bell, who convinced the Office of Censorship to refuse export licenses to those films not approved by the OWI. Because lack of access to the overseas market would drastically reduce a film's profits, this new arrangement effectively strengthened the OWI's influence over the movie community until the end of the war.[29]

This overview of the many voices—voices inside the studio, voices in the Hollywood community, voices in the military, and voices in the government—that contributed to the making of a motion picture during the war years raises the question of intention. In other words, when we claim that a particular film is making use of a narrative to provide a way of knowing some aspect of the war, are we saying that someone—director, screenwriter, studio head, OWI—made a conscious choice to construct the film in that way and intended for its viewers to get that message? Well, yes and no. There were certainly instances, and we've already noted some examples, when conscious choices were made—whether about having sympathy for our British allies or not wasting rubber. However, in many cases, a film's presentation of the war arose out of other considerations or no conscious consideration at all. Filmmakers were a part of the wartime zeitgeist they were helping to create and were presumably influenced by it. As Hollywood movies generated ways of knowing the war, these ways of knowing were replicated and reproduced, probably unconsciously, by other filmmakers. In any case, what the studios and filmmakers intended

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

their movies to do is less important to us than the films themselves, how their audiences saw them, and what happened to those audiences who saw film after film, week after week, for the three and a half years the United States was at war.

In what follows, we examine the effects of Hollywood's World War II films and how they gave viewers ways to know the war. Chapter 1 discusses the films Hollywood made in the years after the war began but before U.S. entry into the war. The studios performed a balancing act between the anti-Nazi, pro-intervention positions of many Hollywood executives and artists and the public's and many politicians' more isolationist stance. With a few exceptions, prewar films treated their ideas about the war in Europe carefully, but they prepared viewers to think about Nazi Germany as a threat to America and about America's potential role in the war. Chapter 2 examines the many films based on actual events in the Pacific theater after Pearl Harbor and how they link those events into a coherent narrative. They also work together to make the Pacific an extension of the U.S. West Coast and thus something for Americans to fight and die for. Chapter 3 looks at the ways movies constructed the Germans, Italians, and Japanese as our enemies. Filmmakers tended to draw on existing film types that audiences were already familiar with and adapt them for the contemporary situation. Chapter 4 shows how movies presented our British, Soviet, and Chinese allies as nations to be valued for their uniqueness but also—and somewhat contradictorily—for their similarity to the United States. Chapter 5 looks at films about countries under Nazi occupation. Here there is little concern with valuing a particular nationality; rather, they provide the opportunity for Americans to imagine how they would behave under occupation. Chapter 6 analyzes the presentation of American men and women in wartime films; in many ways, this presentation revised traditional film constructions of masculinity and femininity because wartime needs forced a major reworking of male and female types. Chapter 7 looks at films about the U.S. home front, particularly those that broke rank and presented a version of American life at odds with the official depiction promulgated by most films. Chapter 8 discusses films made just after the end of the war. Some of these movies address the anxiety about the type of country postwar America was becoming; some demonstrate the power that Hollywood's World War II films had as a group to influence the way the war would be understood historically.

This influence is the result of the power these films had to take the

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

confusing and chaotic elements of wartime and make them knowable by turning them into narrative, and it is the result of the power of narrative, through repetition and widespread dissemination, to naturalize its fictionalization of the war into a mythic history that transcends and obscures what really happened. In short, this book explores the process by which actual events become film history and by which film history becomes myth.

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

This content downloaded from 128.197.229.194 on Fri, 15 May 2020 17:16:33 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms