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**Heroes on the Home Front:
Heroism and Virtue in Post-9/11 American Cinema**

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Abstract

This thesis is intended to contribute to critical discussion of the American male hero in mainstream American war and action films post September 11, 2001. The thesis investigates how these heroes' behaviour echoes a patriotic, conservative construction of the modern American as created through speeches given by George W. Bush in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. The thesis examines the hero in six primary sources: the war films *We Were Soldiers*, *Behind Enemy Lines* and *The Great Raid* and the action films *Collateral Damage*, *Man on Fire* and *The Punisher*. By analyzing the ideological subtext, political content, visual strategies and generic implications of the films, as well as the binary constructions of a selection of Bush speeches, and by reviewing historical representations of American male heroes on film produced in the wake of political events, the thesis concludes that the six films mobilize the USA's conservative viewpoint towards war and military action, and in concert with the speeches, contribute to an ongoing militarization of visual culture. Both systems echo a dangerous ideological fantasy of American history, life and patriotism.

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Introduction

Although six and a half years have passed since the Twin Towers fell in New York, the events of the 11th of September 2001¹ remain at the forefront of the American consciousness. This is achieved in part through consistent news reports about the event itself, including retrospectives on American intelligence, government actions and new developments in the “war against terror”. Print, radio and television news is also a constant reminder of the current war in Iraq as well as the presence of troops in Afghanistan.

While these news sources maintain a level of public awareness about 11 September, the events of that morning in 2001 are not limited to the public information sphere. The effects have saturated the artistic consciousness of America. A sample of cultural products related to the events of 11 September include a comic book called *Heroes* that was released in 2002 and focused on everyday citizens who participated in the relief effort; *The Guys*, a play about a fire chief who loses eight of his men in the tragedy that met with rave reviews when it premiered in New York a year after the event; and the film *Ladder 49* (Dir. Jay Russell, 2004) starring John Travolta, which was released in 2004 as an homage to New York firefighters. While not directly addressing the events of 11 September 2001, the film clearly celebrated the sacrifices and passion of firefighters who live, work, and love in New York City.

On the literary front, Lisa Beamer, wife of Flight 93 passenger Tom Beamer whose last known words “let’s roll” have become immortalized in the lexicon of 11

¹ Since the thesis investigates how cultural products distributed after the events of September 11 may act as a form of ideological propaganda, terms like “September 11,” “9/11” and “War on Terror” will be replaced with “11 September.” This is done in an attempt to distance the paper from the propagandistic use of the event.

September 2001, has published a book in memory of her husband, titled *Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage*. Neil Young released a song by the same title, which includes the words "no one has the answer but one thing is true, you got to turn on evil when it's coming after you...let's roll for freedom, let's roll for love, going after Satan on the wings of a dove, let's roll for justice, let's roll for truth, let's not let our children grow up fearful in their youth." Country musician Toby Keith wrote a less subtle tribute to the victims of 11 September 2001 with his song "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)," with lines like "Hey Uncle Sam put your name at the top of his list, and the Statue of Liberty started shaking her fist, and the eagle will fly, and there's gonna be Hell, when you hear Mother Freedom start ringing her bell! Oh, Justice will be served and the battle will rage, this big dog will fight when you rattle his cage, you'll be sorry that you messed with the US of A 'Cuz we'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way."

While the medium of expression differs, the messages in these mainstream media echo specific notions of right and wrong, and tend to associate the ideals of freedom, truth and justice with the USA. This is reflective of the surge of patriotism that swept the US in the weeks, months and years following the event. President Bush dealt specifically with 11 September in many of his 2001 and 2002 speeches, often highlighting the firefighters and police of New York City as heroes, and suggesting that the USA deserved to exact swift justice upon the perpetrators of the attacks. After his re-election in 2004, Bush continued to allude to the event as a qualifying motive for the USA's presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and the news media have been equally helpful in maintaining focus on the notion of the heroic, noble American. The actual players of 11

September have been immortalized as national heroes, but it is not enough to stop here in a cultural analysis of 11 September as the previously mentioned works can be categorized as a nation's way of mourning. What is potentially useful, however, is to examine the cultural narratives created or distributed in the wake of the tragedy, as well as the heroes featured in these narratives. Breaking down the behaviour of the hero, his treatment of other characters, as well as the ideological communities that house these heroes in post 11 September America will help to understand the USA's involvement in world politics as well as the country's perception of other nations.

Creative narratives are abundant, however, so a specific form must be identified. Since film is a widely promoted and readily available medium of creative expression, it seems like a promising starting point when considering how the hero is constructed. More so than songs, television programs, news, theatre or print media, film offers entire hero narratives that are not fragmented by serial form. Further, the length of time and number of contributors involved in the development of a mainstream feature film results in more deliberately crafted product. Within film, it is possible to analyze the hero within a restricted environment, as well as to track the hero's narrative progression from an established start and end point.

Within the wide selection of films released post 11 September 2006, I will direct attention towards films that feature male heroes, since the majority of heroes celebrated directly in relation to the events of that day have also been male. Male firefighters, policemen and plane passengers have all been highlighted for their American bravery, so it is fitting to direct critical attention towards the analysis of male heroes in film, and to understand how the women in these narratives are presented in relation to the male

heroes. In fact, the absence of major women characters in these films (or the appearance of “evil” women in narratives where women play a larger role) reveals much about the male characters and the larger American myth. In order to glean analysis from a variety of narratives, my interest therefore lies in investigating the representations of the American male hero by the mainstream Hollywood industry. My goal is to identify how the constructions of the heroic male reveal a militant American consciousness.

My interest in examining this perspective has been fueled by observations made after the events of September 11 and during the lead-up to the US invasion of Iraq. During this time period the Hollywood film industry focused on two variations of the active male hero; first, with a return to the heroes of past wars in films like *Behind Enemy Lines* (Dir. John Moore, 2001), *We Were Soldiers* (Dir. Randall Wallace, 2002), and *The Great Raid* (Dir. John Dahl, 2005) and second with the resurgence of the renegade revenge-seeking hero of the present, in revenge action films like *Collateral Damage* (Dir. Andrew Davis, 2002), *The Punisher* (Dir. Jonathan Hensleigh, 2004) and *Man on Fire* (Dir. Tony Scott, 2004).

I will examine these differing perspectives on the male hero in an attempt to outline the American outlook on the “war on terror”. I will examine the six films outlined above, by performing diagnostic and ideological critiques of their content. To position my analysis within a political context, I will also investigate the content of a selection of the Bush administration speeches to examine how the notions of hero and terrorist are constructed, and how these concepts are connected, or contrasted, with recent Hollywood representations of these roles. I will argue that these films have reflected the Bush

administration's ongoing attempt to garner public and military support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Because my thesis will examine film made in the wake of a political event, I will investigate how the hero has been represented in film in the wake of other US-led wars, and whether previous ideological critiques have been useful in understanding the political situations that fuelled the creation and distribution of such cultural products. My thesis will attempt to negotiate outstanding work in a variety of academic topics, with a view to locate useful texts that may provide direction to the study of the hero in American film. These topics include politics and culture, US politics, film and historical memory, the US military and film, 11 September 2001 and the media, as well as ideological perspectives, specifically the work of Frederic Jameson. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson (1981) suggests that all narratives are reflective of the political landscape and history that spawned them. Jameson stresses the ambiguous nature of political subtext in aesthetic and literary texts, remarking that these subtexts must be deconstructed to reveal buried ideologies, or what he calls the political unconscious. He argues that these narratives work to overwhelm historical conflict and to arbitrate the community who ingests the narrative by offering false solutions to the ideological problems and injustices that exist in reality. The structural and ideological coherence offered by the narrative form (in this case, film), serves to discourage the product's consumer from seeking truth while simultaneously denying historical exploitation or oppression. Jameson describes this technique as the "strategy of containment" and suggests that cultural products be subjected to symptomatic analysis to reveal how they deny or repress history. I will negotiate how the historical truths on which the war films were based, and the political

circumstances from which the action films were created, were renegotiated and transformed in order to produce aesthetic forms that do not account for the impetus of these historical events. I will investigate how America's war history is translated into a purely mythic form, where violence is legitimized through necessity, and victory is the result of unwavering nobility. The specifics of the historical politics associated with these events, I will argue, are dismissed entirely in favour of a select funneled perspective that recaptures a singular moment without revisiting the causal effects of the events, effectively containing the past. This is often achieved by focusing on a particular individual or a small group of individuals rather than on the larger social and political issues contributing to the conflict.

In order to situate my argument within a larger methodological and theoretical framework, an understanding of selected previous work related to democracy, ideology, terrorism, capitalism, film and politics is necessary. This includes texts on the history of the Vietnam War and its filmic incarnations, the history of terrorism in the media, male myths, representations of 11 September 2001 in mainstream culture, and heroism. The first chapter of the thesis, titled "A Review of Related Literature," refers to work on these topics.

The second chapter, titled "The Male Hero as American Surrogate," surveys the history of the male hero in Hollywood war and action film to understand how heroes of past films have represented particular political viewpoints relating to the political climates of the time. This chapter includes a discussion of the patriot hero in Vietnam and World War II films, as well as the justified violence demonstrated by heroes in action films.

Since the thesis aims to examine the aggressive heroes of post 11 September films, it will be useful to understand how these heroes are constructed, and whether they adhere to existing archetypes. The third chapter, titled “Re-sculpting the Heroic Image: Reviewing the Bush Administration’s Speeches” examines the rhetorical construction of the hero and terrorist in a selection of speeches given by George W. Bush in the wake of 11 September. The framing of the heroic concept, the emphasis on Otherness, and the connection between patriotism and heroism will be explored.

The thesis’ fourth chapter is titled “Reclaiming the Past—Hollywood Revisits Past Wars in the Wake of 11 September” and examines the content of several war films released in the wake of the destruction of the Twin Towers. Although some of these films were shot prior to 11 September, I argue that the releases nonetheless encouraged a patriotic revisiting of some the United States of America’s past military battles, and that their focuses on the past reveal much about the country’s present. This chapter focuses specifically on *We Were Soldiers*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, and *The Great Raid*. Each film recreates a past battle and positions American soldiers in a positive and justified light. I argue that such releases encouraged a revitalized patriotism in the USA, promoted a certain version of the US military image, and thus worked to promote the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Following the initial releases of films focusing on former US military battles, a multitude of films were released through the Hollywood studios concerning singular American men reacting in vengeance against acts of violence that had been committed against their families. These films include *The Punisher*, *Man on Fire*, and *Collateral Damage*. The heroes in these films are former military personnel who are personally

attacked by external forces. My argument in chapter five, titled “Justified Revenge—The Renegade Warrior,” is that such films portrayed positive images of American men reacting, with due cause, to threats against their own families. I will argue that the emergence of such renegade heroes in post 11 September American film reflected the Bush administration’s aggressive attitude towards the “enemy” responsible for the attacks of 11 September. Further, I will outline the similarity between the heroes in these new films and the emergence of similarly-inclined masculine film heroes during the Reagan era (films like *Top Gun* [Dir. Tony Scott, 1986] and *First Blood* [Dir. Ted Kotcheff, 1982]) who appeared in the wake of the Vietnam War to re-engage the public’s support of American military intervention.

My interest in this thesis is to investigate the representation of the American male hero in a post 11 September 2001 United States of America. My goal is to identify how these representations serve as a rallying cry to promote support towards US military action in the years following 11 September 2001.

Chapter One: A Review of Related Literature

This chapter negotiates outstanding work in a variety of academic fields, with a view to locate texts that can provide direction to the thesis and to uncover existing academic work on my thesis subject. These topics include the work of Frederic Jameson and discussions of ideology, the marriage of politics and culture, US Politics, film as historical memory, the US military and film, the hero in history, and 11 September 2001 and the media.

I have chosen to perform an ideological analysis of the films at hand. This approach proves useful when considering the work of Michael Ryan (1989), who searches for the political subtext in modern film. Ryan draws from Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" but identifies an absence in Althusser's definition of ideology. He suggests that while Althusser perceived ideology's primary function to "dissolve social conflicts and political contradictions into representations that enact imaginary resolution to those contradictions", ideology can actually do more than simply offer solutions—it reveals much more beneath the surface (Ryan 1989, 111). Ryan argues that cultural products are inherently full of tension, and that this tension in fact "testif[ies] to the very power of the thing[s] [they attempt to] deny" (111). If this is true, then the conservative ideological content of mainstream Hollywood films reveal hidden tensions inherent in the communities that produce them. It is this particular perception on ideology that offers a useful tactic while exploring films released after 11 September. As noted by Ryan:

The Althusserian theory of ideology holds that domination is the primary focus of cultural analysis, but one could argue that ideology is a secondary term, a response to other factors that may be more worthy of analysis.

Those factors are what calls ideology forth as a response, and as things that must be silenced, they are sites of positive political possibilities. (111)

Ryan has extensive experience analyzing films made in political climates such as the Reagan, Nixon and Bush Sr. administrations. Hi work is largely indebted to Frederic Jameson (1981), who outlines the specific link between ideological function, politics and historical events. Jameson stresses the ambiguous nature of political subtext in aesthetic and literary texts, remarking that these subtexts must be reconstructed to reveal buried ideologies, or what he calls the political unconscious. He calls for the exploration and unmasking of cultural artifacts in order to understand them as “socially symbolic acts” (Jameson 1981, 20). In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson emphasizes an inevitable interrelationship between the aesthetic form and the specific historicity of the literary text. He notes that “history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise [yet] it is inaccessible to us except in textual form” (35). Within the aesthetic realm, Jameson suggests that cultural products are capable of universalizing experience through form by repressing oppositional voices and falsely claiming that there is only one narrative or one way to experience history. In this same vein, Jameson refers to Lacan’s notion of the reveal, commenting that while texts demonstrate a relationship to “the Real”, this notion of “Real” is transformed by the aesthetic form in which it appears and becomes available to the community through this form only, eventually overcoming “the Real” entirely and becoming the only source of reference to this once “Real” source, By entering narrative form (which the “Real must do in order to become narrative and representational), it is reworked into a shape with an ideological purpose and function (82). So what is this

purpose and function? The aesthetic form or cultural product can reflect the political environment in which it was constructed.

Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner (1988) investigate this connection between politics and ideology in their book *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. In their examination of 1970s and 1980s film, Kellner and Ryan document the conservative Reagan government's use of film narratives as a way to articulate a pro-war, pro-capitalist agenda (Kellner and Ryan 1988, 290). They suggest that "popular film articulates fears, desires, and needs that are pre-political in character, and that could be channelled in politically progressive directions" (292). Regardless of whether the political has a direct hand in the organic production of cultural products, the political emerges within an ideological construct. Stephen Prince (1992) supports this claim in his discussion of the Reagan years as a period where America's political and imaginary landscapes were blurred. He suggests that this era accommodated not only the political culture of the Reagan period in film, but also that American popular culture facilitated certain social and political representations. While he attributes this in part to the onset of conglomeration and product placement, effectively suggesting that film sponsors preferred to have their products used within the confines of a morally acceptable and recognizable environment, Prince also identifies the blockbuster as a text that is able to support particular political frameworks while denying others. Ernest Giglio (2000) supports this idea, noting "traditional Hollywood...hedges its bets by producing films that promote a conservative political agenda" (Giglio 2000, 11).

Several researchers make a more direct link to the political, by focusing on the ways that political figures contribute directly to cultural production. For example,

Michael Rogin (1987) explores the relationship between film and political ideology by outlining how Ronald Reagan's knowledge of film enabled him to cast the USA and the Soviet Union as players within a film-like myth². He remarks that "Reagan's easy slippage between movies and reality [was] synecdochic for a political culture increasingly impervious to distinctions between fiction and history" (Rogin 1987, 9). He describes Regan's myth of the USA as heroic protagonist and the Soviet Union identity as evil antagonist as "political demonology." He suggests:

The demonologist splits the world in two, attributing magical, pervasive power to a conspiratorial center of evil. Fearing chaos and secret penetration, the countersubversive interprets local initiatives as signs of alien power. Discrete individuals and groups become, in the countersubversive imagination, members of a single political body directed by its head." (Rogin 1987, xiii)

Rogin focuses specifically on Reagan's demonization of the Soviet Union, but the same principles could be applied to Bush's concept of the Arab 'other,' as outlined in his political speeches in chapter four. Rogin's demonology functions to support the notion of a society under threat from foreign invaders, with American families isolated as the victims. He remarks that the Reagan era, and its films, encouraged a return to a mythical, pristine America, freed from the complications of communism, terrorism, gay rights, women's rights and abortion. Writes Rogin, "As one of the ideological engines of modern society, the cinema, therefore, acquires in this perspective a great deal of importance in helping to define and maintain a given political order" (41). Since this order depends on citizens respecting social hierarchy and institutional

² Reagan accomplished this through speeches. He suggested that the Soviet Union was conducting "the greatest military build-up in the history of man (Prince 1992, 51), while describing the USA as a nation who "does not start fights. We will never be an aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression—to preserve freedom and Peace (50).

compartmentalization, Rogin claims that cinema can help maintain the cultural demonizations established by government.

By understanding how Rogin situates his analysis of Reagan era films against a political backdrop, it is possible to draw on his methodological approach to similarly analyze post 11 September cinema. Rogin claims that domestic mobilization was essential to the maintenance of a new Cold War, and that by constructing the Soviets as a recognizable outlaw nation, or “as a country that refused to abide by standards of civilized behaviour and moral law,” the USA attempted to justify increased military power (52). If this demonization of the Soviets was successful in part through the proliferation of film imagery in texts like *Red Dawn* (John Milius, 1984), *Rocky IV* (Sylvester Stallone, 1985), *Invasion U.S.A.* (Joseph Zito, 1985), *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) and others, then a second cycle of pro-war, pro-military films can arguably achieve a similar purpose.

While Rogin, Prince, Giglio, Kellner and Ryan focus their research on films produced during the Reagan era, the same approaches provide a useful template on which to base a similar investigation of post 11 September cinema. In order to accomplish their individual projects, the scholars performed ideological analyses of the content of films released during the Nixon and Reagan administrations. This involved examining character archetypes and associated meaning, narrative trajectories, setting, and political situations. Each of these researchers incorporated Jameson’s ideological approach to situate specific links to American political history.

As each of the films under consideration has been released in the wake of a significant event, this event is a part of the social culture that has birthed them. However,

their translations of this event, whether through simulation of similar actions or symbolic representations, each seem to deny the event itself. Hayden White (1996), in his discussion of the modern event, notes:

Modernist techniques of representation provide the possibility of de-fetishizing both events and the fantasy accounts of them which deny the threat they pose, in the very process of pretending to represent them more realistically. This de-fetishizing can then clear the way for that process of mourning which alone can relieve the burden of history and make a more, if not totally realistic perception of current problems possible. (White 1996, 32)

If such renegotiations of history are possible, then this debate becomes fiercely political. Foucault suggests that memory is “a very important factor in struggle...if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism” (Foucault 1975, 28). Peter Grainge (2003) takes this notion of historical documentation into the cinematic sphere in his discussion of memory and popular film, when he states “Hollywood has functioned strategically in the articulation and codification of the cultural past” (Grainge 2003, 5). Sturken suggests that films offer very specific narratives that work to redefine American history, even if only on an aesthetic level.

Such renegotiations of history have been achieved in films dealing with the events of Vietnam. John Storey (2003) argues that Hollywood produced a new memory of truth about America’s war in Vietnam and that this may have helped garner support towards the Gulf War (Storey 2003, 99). According to Storey, the “political and historical revisionism of the 1980s produced a mythology about why the US had been defeated in Vietnam.... it was a mythology that had more to do with preparing for the future than it ever had to do with explaining the past” (Storey 2003, 100). Storey claims this Hollywood revisionism enabled Bush Sr. to build a case for participation in a new American war. This is achieved in part because of how Hollywood film translates the

Vietnam War into a purely American experience, and one where America becomes the victim. Even *Platoon* (Dir. Oliver Stone, 1986), which has been described as a criticism of American involvement in the Vietnam War, places American soldiers as primary victims. As Storey suggests, “the film’s rewriting of the war not only excludes the Vietnamese, but also rewrites the anti-war movement” (Storey 2003, 111). The discursive space of protest is obliterated to accommodate a singular vision of American history. He writes,

I do not want to suggest that Hollywood’s Vietnam was or is unproblematically consumed by its American audiences. My claim is only that Hollywood produced a particular regime of truth. Film (like any other cultural text or practice) has to be made to mean. To really discover the extent to which Hollywood’s Vietnam has made its ‘truth’ tell requires a consideration of consumption. This will take us beyond a focus on the meaning of a text, to a focus on the meanings that can be made in the encounter between the discourses of the text and the discourses of the reader. That is, it is not a question of verifying with an audience the real meaning of, say, *Platoon*. The focus on consumption is to explore the political effectivity (or otherwise) of [such films]. If a cultural text is to become effective (politically or otherwise), it must be made to connect with people’s lives—become part of ‘lived culture.’ (Storey 2003, 113)

Storey places emphasis on how specific texts are remembered. If *Platoon* is now referenced as a ‘Vietnam War film,’ and is recognized within culture as a national narrative on the Vietnam experience, then Storey counts this over actual audience interrogation.

Other scholars move beyond the concept of film as memory and towards a notion of film as political dialogue. Karen Rasmussen, Sharon D. Downey and Jennifer Asenas (2003) examine Hollywood’s representation of the Vietnam War hero in their essay, “Trauma, Treatment and Transformation: The Evolution of the Vietnam Warrior in Film.” They state that the United States’ war victories have helped form a notion of

“regeneration through violence, venerated by a noble purpose, and embodying what it means to be a hero” (Rasmussen, Downey and Asenas 2003, 134). Thus, they argue that while the War in Vietnam has been reconstructed on film in numerous incarnations, including counter-hegemonic readings in films like *Platoon*, each narrative attempts to reconcile confusion over the loss. This filmic return to war can work to gradually redefine the war experience, while consequently infusing narratives with modern political concerns or issues. While they argue that this is done in part to rewrite the past, it also works to direct national attention to the future. Ernest Giglio (2000) expands on this concept in his discussion of what he calls the “winning the war syndrome.” When speaking of Vietnam films, he suggests that this is achieved in two ways: by recreating the specific Vietnam war experience on film, and by redirecting attention to singular heroes, hence alleviating the American military from blame. He notes “the exploits of the individual superhero—Rambo and Braddock—who single-handedly rescue MIAs and POWs and do considerable damage to the life and property of the enemy” deny the bureaucracy behind military decisions (Giglio 2000, 182). Giglio thus attempts to claim film as an ideological tool employed by a government-influenced Hollywood to sway public opinion over the US’ involvement in war. While his arguments provide interesting analyses of film’s ideological content, he doesn’t quite make a clear connection between Hollywood and government intervention. He notes, “although social scientists have yet to establish a positive correlation between film content and political consequences, the medium has the capacity to influence attitudes and beliefs through the rearrangement of realities that either reinforce or reject current political values” (Giglio 2000, 209). However, he fails to provide substantial proof of this connection. Similarly, Leo Cawley

(1990), Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser (1990), Kevin Bowen (1990), Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud (1990) and others support the idea that film acts as public memory of past events in their analyses of Vietnam War films, and that the popularity of such films serves as a form of evidence of its impact. Dittmar and Michaud claim film allows for national denial of past violence, while Cawley suggests that Vietnam films reinstate the American myth of justified violence by replacing the historical events that led to American participation in the war. Studlar and Desser argue that the Vietnam War film negates the USA's responsibility to apologize for their part in the war. All of these perspectives support the notion that memory is temporal and can be manipulated by cinematic images.

If film can act as public memory, then it is important to identify the sources that feed the content of these films. Kellner and Ryan (1988) examine the connection between political administrations, historical American events and the films released concurrently, including those released during the Nixon and Reagan administrations. They suggest that the USA army found a recruitment partner in Hollywood cinema, and used this medium to promote a particular ideology of war and soldiers. According to Kellner and Ryan, the re-telling of the war myth through cinema allows for the creation of 'just wars' in the place of former failure or tragedy. Kellner's 1995 book *Media Culture* takes this theory another step into the future by analyzing a series of films released before and during the 1990 Gulf War. He suggests that at this time, a revisiting of the Vietnam War hero suggested the USA's inability to understand its own limitations and its ignorance of the "complex mixture of good and evil involved in almost all historical undertakings" (Kellner 1995, 66). Kellner argues that films like *Top Gun* (1986) not only prepared the

USA for the Gulf War by celebrating military heroics and the capitalist notions of success associated with war, but were in fact funded in part by the US Army (77). Kellner suggests that many Hollywood studio films supported Bush Sr. and Reagan's specific foreign policies.

Giglio traces the relationship between film and US politics back to the pre-World War I period, when studio executives were also actively involved in national politics. However, he notes that this relationship strengthened in 1917 as the government asked the film industry to include its star performers as part of the war effort. Then-President Wilson assigned a new head to the Committee on Public Information, granting that department the authority to "sell the war to America" (Giglio 2000, 145). This included distributing official Army and Navy war footage of war as well as producing Hollywood films. A similar relationship was forged during the Second World War. From January 1, 1941 to December 10, 1942 the US Army's Pictorial Division spent over \$1 million in Hollywood. Giglio points to Walter Benjamin's discussion of film as propaganda tool, "because of its ability to lend support to, and provide a rationale for, mass movements" (Giglio 2000, 12). As an example Giglio describes Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series (1942-45). Funded and produced by the Army Signal Corps, this series stands out as the result of a direct relationship between the US military and Hollywood. In an effort to promote morale amongst American G.I.s, *Why We Fight* portrayed the USA as unblemished by issues like segregation, discrimination, poverty or labour strife (Giglio 2000, 12). This lack may be located within the relationship between Hollywood and the US government. Giglio suggests that war films in particular are often dependent on the

assistance of the Pentagon or the Department of Defense, who seek to unify the country by promoting an unblemished home front.

Where Giglio notes the impetus of the relationship between Hollywood and the US Government, Lawrence H. Suid (2003) takes the next step. In *Guts and Glory—The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, Suid explores the cinematic history of the USA military, from its debut in film to its 2002 incarnations. According to Suid, in the wake of the Vietnam War, Navy Secretary John Lehman was directed to actively encourage the Navy's public affairs office to find suitable projects that would benefit the service by portraying Navy life. In the 1980s, after passing on an opportunity to help fund *An Officer and A Gentleman* (Taylor Hackford, 1982), the government arranged close coordination between the Department of Defense and producer Jerry Bruckheimer to "ensure mutuality of interest" while writing and producing *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986). The Navy provided technical advisors, fighter pilots and F-14 jets for the project and the film went on to significantly boost Navy recruitment. Because the film showed fighter pilots defeating unidentified enemies outside of a recognizable war, Suid believes these screen victories reinforced the image of the American military as invincible. He suggests "after Vietnam [the nation's belief in military leadership] was destroyed, but with *Top Gun*, Hollywood's treatment of the Navy in war and peace made a significant contribution to the rehabilitation of the military image. Consequently, when the crisis in the Gulf began in August 1990, the American people once again believed the US military could successfully meet any change and so made it possible for President Bush (Sr.) to take a nation into battle again" (Suid 2002, 502).

In terms of more recent connections between Hollywood and the US government, David Sterritt (2004) outlines a growing relationship. He speaks specifically to a meeting between Karl Rove, one of President Bush's political advisors and a group of entertainment industry executives in the months following 11 September 2001. Sterritt indicates that this meeting was meant to encourage the production of films that would handle the newborn "war on terror" in a way that would support the government's political agenda (Film and Terrorism after 9/11, 68-74). So what is this agenda, and how is it conveyed post 11 September? In his book *From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy*, Kellner (2003) argues, "the Bush administration has arguably exploited the tragedy of September 11 for promoting its own political agenda and interests" (Kellner 2003, 46). Kellner suggests that the Bush government relies on the creation of national Others as a way to cement America's position as victim. This is partly achieved through Kellner's analysis of the Bush administration's speeches. He locates fundamentally Manichean binaries in these speeches, observing that Bush relies on oppositions like good versus evil, us versus them, and civilization versus barbarism. David Zarefsky (2004) offers an academic perspective of the effects of the September 20 speech, noting "the [speech] embodies several decisions about how to respond rhetorically to terrorism: to regard it as war, but war of a different and possibly unique kind; to marginalize the enemy and define terrorism as opposed to world civilization; to force all nations to choose sides; to minimize the sacrifice required of ordinary citizens; and to forecast inevitable victory" (Zarefsky 2004, 147).

Jonathan Markovitz (2004) argues that this need for citizens need to "choose sides" is achieved through the creation of Others that do not share the values and goals of

the patriotic American. He locates this Other in films like *Black Hawk Down* (Tony Scott, 2001). The film chronicles the October 1993 raid in Mogadishu that left nineteen Americans and more than a thousand Somalis dead. Markovitz claims the film converts the Somalis into a “pack of snarling dark-skinned beasts” (Markovitz 2004, 215). He notes, “insofar as *Black Hawk Down* works to highlight American valor, the extent of the killing is presented as an accomplishment worth celebrating. The dehumanization of Somalis is so complete as to be casual and automatic. It is even reflected in the language of the soldiers, who consistently refer to them as “skinnies” (215). Further discussion of the Other that is more suitable in a discussion of film after 11 September is offered by Jack G. Shaheen in his book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Shaheen 2001). He chronicles the demonization of Arab Others throughout history, beginning in the early 20th century. He notes, “from 1896 until today, filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy #1—brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural “others” bent on terrorizing civilized Westerns, especially Christians and Jews” (Shaheen 2001, 2). He suggests the stereotype was birthed from eighteenth and nineteenth century pre-existing caricatures, where the desert was presented a refuge for the sleazy and corrupt, but that it evolved cinematically beginning with Melies’ *The Palace of Arabian Nights* (Melies, 1905). Shaheen indicates that Arabs are often easy targets in war movies, especially in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War. Shaheen claims that their Otherness exists in direct opposition to American super-patriotism, as a way to define the American individual as “everything the Arab is not” (5). The Otherness of the antagonists in the war and revenge action films will be explored in chapters four and five.

So what does this use of Others accomplish? It helps to situate a super patriotic American hero to rebel against this Otherness. Michael Parenti (2004) discusses the idea of super-patriotism and its consequences. He defines it as “the tendency to place a nationalistic pride and supremacy over every other public consideration, including a readiness to follow leaders uncritically in their dealings with other countries, and especially confrontation involving the use of US military force and violence” (Parenti 2004, 53). This type of super-patriotism can be fostered through television and film products. In her article “American Hero meets Terrorist: True Lies and Patriot Games after September 11, 2001,” Suzanne McCorkle applies the social psychological construct called “terror management” to the film *True Lies* (Dir. James Cameron, 1994). Theorized by Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg and Tom Pyszczynski, “terror management” suggests that knowledge of death causes anxiety and terror, that terror is controlled by immersion in a cultural worldview and the belief that one is living up to one’s cultural standards, and that two buffers to terror and anxiety are self-esteem and defence of one’s own culture. In her reading of *True Lies*, McCorkle suggests that terror is achieved because the hero’s family is threatened by an identifiable Other who does not share cultural standards, and that when the hero defends his own culture, thus relying on super patriotism, he is able to justify his violent actions against the Other.

The notion of super patriotism is alarming to Henry Giroux (2003) who sees a “dark side to this newfound call for unity” (Giroux 2003, 4). He suggests:

At its best, patriotism means that a country does everything possible to question itself, to provide the conditions for its people to actively engage [with] policies that shape their lives and others. At its worse, patriotism confuses dissent with treason, arrogance with strength, and brute force as the only exemplar of justice. (7)

Giroux locates part of this dilemma within what he refers to as “an ongoing militarization of visual culture” (4). Highlighting the Bush administration’s effort to meld political rhetoric and apocalyptic discourse, Giroux suggests that post 11 September America is eager to embrace any narrative that portrays the USA as powerful, especially when this narrative bears a patriotic crest. He calls for recognition of the historical events that led to 11 September as well as criticism of current political decisions.

In terms of cultural studies conducted on post 11 September film, there is little extensive work yet published on the topic. However, research has certainly begun. Lawrence Suid (2002) notes that *Behind Enemy Lines*, inspired by the rescue of Air Force Pilot Scott O’Grady, was moved up from a planned 2002 release date to take advantage of the national fervour, but does not pursue an ideological analysis of the film (Suid 2002, 645). Wheeler Winston Dixon (2004) parallels the appearance of films like *Collateral Damage* and *We Were Soldiers* to the wave of filmmaking that arose to promote American involvement in World War II. Both trends depended on “a renewed audience appetite for narratives of conflict” (Wheeler Winston Dixon 2004, 1).

In her article “America Under Attack” Marcia Landy (2004) discusses how *Pearl Harbor* (Dir. Michael Bay, 2001), a film released before 11 September, nonetheless served to jumpstart US patriotism and victimhood. She notes that the criticisms that were piled onto the film upon its initial response, including suggestions that it distorted history, were replaced with favourable reviews after the events of September 2001. She points out that in the wake of 11 September, the History Channel and National Geographic both produced television specials on the events of Pearl Harbor, and the film’s DVD release was highly advertised as celebrating American heroism, even more so than during its

initial advertising campaign. Landy suggests that this interest in Pearl Harbour after 11 September served to “[reach] backwards into American history rather than confronting critically the exigencies of profound global change in which the US plays a predominant role” (Landy 2004, 95). Markovitz sees something similar at work in the narrative of *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001). He identifies it as a self-conscious attempt to “recuperate the collective memory of this raid—to claim it as a success and [to showcase] the valor and heroism of US soldiers” (Markovitz 2004, 212). Both *Pearl Harbor* and *Black Hawk Down* focus on military events in US history and both focus on the human side of the military.

If film is inevitably linked to America’s national and political history, then the way it recalls past events like those visited in these films is evidence of not only a historical event, but of a nation’s memory of that history and its outlook on the present and the future. My analysis of male heroes in the war and renegade films will further reveal the connection between American identity, patriotism and justified violence.

Chapter Two: The Male US Film Hero as American Surrogate

This chapter will survey a selection of male heroes in Hollywood war and action films with a view to highlight how these heroes have behaved in the wake of specific historical periods. This will include a discussion of the patriot hero in Vietnam and World War II films, as well as the revenge hero in action films in the late seventies and early eighties. I will argue that film heroes often serve as surrogates for American political perspectives and their actions reveal much about the nation's state of mind.

How have war and renegade film heroes been categorized in narratives released after violent events in which America played a role? I turn first to the American war film. Because these films tell narratives of a country's past, while retaining editorial control over the hero's behaviour and decisions, it is a genre that offers a very distinct hero: one whose violent actions are legitimated by patriotic necessity. Jenni Calder identifies the relevance of the American war hero by suggesting that modern heroism is often achieved by returning to the past. She notes that "particular [periods] of history can be particularly fertile in producing heroes because that period has special attractions for the present...history itself can become inflated, not just individuals in history" (Calder 1977, 38). This comment is closely aligned with the perspectives put forth by scholars Michael Rogin (1987) and Stephen Prince (1992) in their criticisms of post Vietnam War films. The narratives they study, including *Rambo*, celebrate heroes who, while given some ambiguous characteristics, are ultimately cleansed of questionable attributes because of their connection to an untouchable military standard. The heroes' involvement in past American battles serves to qualify these battles, as well as the heroes, as pure, since they do not include resisting voices or protest. This is achieved in part by defining the heroes

in relation to specific national Others. Because the Others in these films are often shown to be sub-human, viewers are clearly encouraged to embrace the American protagonist. For example, Michael Klein (1990) analyzes the portrayal of Others in *Rambo* (Dir. Ted Kotcheff, 1982), *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Dir. George P. Cosmatos, 1985) and *Missing in Action* (Dir. Joseph Zito, 1984), in his essay called "Historical Memory, Film, and the Vietnam era". He suggests that these films and others dehumanize the Vietnamese and other third world citizens as shadowy aliens and aggressive animals, and in doing so argues that "there is no recognition that the war was hardly an accident but rather a historical development from long-standing, and ultimately counter-productive French and American colonialist and imperialist policies" (Klein 1990, 23). Regardless of the historical context in which events occur, the American hero is justified because the alternative protagonist is hardly recognizable as even human. In this way, "the past seems to be not only legitimate territory for the hero and heroic activity, but territory with greater advantages" (Calder 1977, 49). This is certainly true when the considerably advantageous connection between Hollywood and the US government, is considered. The heroes in war films serve a distinct purpose—to represent the US in a positive way and to smooth over past indiscretions. This purpose can be traced back to heroes in early 1940s war films. Robert Sklar (1975) examines the military hero in government-sponsored World War II films, including those in Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series. According to Sklar, protagonists in these propaganda films took heroic action as a way to not only defend their country, but to combat their own internal dilemmas. War "was less a trap than a solution to private entanglements, a means to transmute one's personal entrapment into sacrifice for a higher cause" (Sklar 1975, 255). Participation in war provided heroes

with an escape from everyday life while additionally offering an instantaneous identity; soldiers became part of a definable organization, and in the process became heroic.

According to Roger Horrocks, part of this interest in identity through militarism can be situated within a particular American myth: the Western. Horrocks suggests that the Western's celebration of violence has perpetuated the American consciousness, producing a nation that celebrates aggression in the name of territorial protection or vengeance. He notes that the Western "can be seen as justifying American imperialism, which has frequently used violence against other peoples, usually cloaked in a veneer of righteousness" (Horrocks 1995, 77). He points specifically to the Western hero as one whose violence is legitimated. This tie between the American Western hero and violence is of particular interest when considering the positioning of the protagonist in Vietnam War films, who will be discussed below. The connection between militarism, the Western myth and the masculine American film hero will also be further explored in relationship to the renegade and war film heroes later in the thesis.

The Vietnam War hero is significant because he exists within a time and place that contains negative memories for the American public. When structured by a dominant cultural manufacturer, this film hero typically follows a narrative that supports a particular viewpoint. It is therefore not surprising that the Reagan administration played a heavy hand in the cultural production of post Vietnam War films, and the heroes within. Douglas Kellner (1995) points to the Reagan era as a period of aggressive military intervention on the part of the American government. He lists the invasion of Grenada, the U.S.-directed and financed Contra war against Nicaragua and the bombing of Libya as examples (Kellner 1995, 75). Kellner writes that Hollywood nurtured this "military

mindset and thus provided cultural representations that mobilized support for such aggressive policy” (75) and this is evident in many of the Vietnam War films released in the early eighties. The influence of this administration arguably resulted in a particular film hero, one who dutifully plays his role within a re-imagined Vietnam War. This hero meets certain criteria: he is an obedient member of the military unit, and yet he also possesses a startling individualism, something that is not a truthful representation of military behaviour, according to Leo Cawley, author of an essay called “The war about the War: Vietnam Films and American Myth.” Cawley claims:

A key feature of the film falsification of war is the importance of the individual, the solitary hero of American myth whose lineage goes back to James Fennimore Cooper’s *Deerslayer*. [This occurs with Martin Sheen in *Apocalypse Now* (Dir. Frances Ford Coppola, 1979) and Robert DeNiro in *The Deer Hunter* (Dir. Michael Cimino, 1978)] The American war film requires that the twin deities of individualism and populism be served. In the Vietnam movie the myth of the solitary combatant or lonesome cowboy seems to be stronger (25).

Certainly, this contradictory behaviour is not unique to the Vietnam War film hero, but it serves its purpose well within that narrative. Rasmussen, Downey and Asenas discuss the notion of the Vietnam film hero as independent protagonist in their essay “Trauma, Treatment and Transformation: The Evolution of the Vietnam Warrior on Film.” They draw on heroes from a wide variety of Vietnam narratives, including *Rambo* as well as *Casualties of War* (Dir. Brian DePalma, 1989), *Platoon*, and *Born on the Fourth of July* (Dir. Oliver Stone, 1989), some of which contain narratives that are critical of the Vietnam War and American military action. Rasmussen, Downey and Asenas argue that regardless of the journey and perspectives followed by the hero, one thing is always the same: the heroes act alone. Each hero “must heed the call, endure the trials, and emerge strengthened by them, armed with insights, skills and truths that benefit the community at

large” (154). They note that “the message clearly is that redress for Vietnam comes when the warrior changes himself, not the system that demanded his sacrifice. Such discourses call for individual, not collective action” (155). When Rambo embraces his military training to impart revenge on a corrupt sheriff (and through him exacting revenge on all of society), he is a singular warrior, and as such is able to break the rules—once again aligning himself with the lone cowboy hero. His narrative serves to legitimize war as a voyage of American self-discovery. Say Rasmussen, Downey and Asenas, “if violent skills are seen as necessary for social safety and if the hero acting alone apparently must use them to achieve independence and freedom from oppression, then the result is not only the passive acceptance of heroic violence, but its very institutionalization as a way of life. We end up in a society where the redemption of earthly paradise is the task of lone, asocial crusaders” (155). There is no institutional accountability, since the survival of the nation and all its liberties is left in the hands of a singular hero, one whose violent tendencies can be excused because they serve a specific purpose: to perpetuate a notion of justified atrocities against various American “enemies”.

This emphasis on the individualism of the war hero is certainly not restricted to the heroes of Vietnam War films. From *Top Gun* (Dir. Tony Scott, 1986) to *Pearl Harbour* (Dir. Michael Bay, 2001), American war films often include heroes with independent attitudes. This vocal, independent, and patriarchal war hero emerged in spades during the early eighties in coordination with the Reagan administration, and in the wake of a decade of respite from criticisms over the Vietnam War. This new hero was not a Vietnam War veteran or participant, but a citizen of a USA that refused to acknowledge its bloodied history and embraced the American military spirit once more.

He was brash, unapologetic and even cocky. David Jackson interprets the timing of this hero's appearance in his book on the influence of popular culture on young adult political socialization, noting that "the revival of the hero in Hollywood film of this period, after such heroes had been put in question in the liberal climate of the late sixties and seventies, plays an important part in cultural mobilization. The strong male hero allowed an affirmative vision to be deployed by conservatives [...] the new hero is an individualist who combines three essential components of the contemporary conservative agenda: he is a warrior, an entrepreneur, and a patriarch" (219).

Heroes like Maverick from *Top Gun* embody all the qualities of the imagined Vietnam War hero without having to acknowledge the war. As a child of the eighties, he embraces capitalism and is fiercely patriotic, and comes from a long line of military men. Yet Maverick is quick to distinguish himself from his father's generation: his military allows him to be undeniably independent, in fact he is able to occasionally reject military rules in favour of personal gain or interest. Like many American war heroes, Maverick is haunted by his past, but in this case it is his father's accidental death that provides his personal tragedy instead of his country's past misgivings. The theme of reconciliation with a father figure is a key theme in 1980s Hollywood film, and serves especially to reinforce the conservative ideologies of an idyllic American past. Douglas Kellner identifies the ideological impact of the film, noting "*Top Gun* was one of a series of films during the 1980s that encoded the Reaganite ethos of militarism, advocating a strong military while celebrating conservative and military values. Like *Rambo* and other return-to-Vietnam films, *Iron Eagle*, *Red Dawn*, and other Reaganite fantasies, *Top Gun* celebrates individualistic heroism, military valor, and conservative American values. Like

these other films it operates in a binary universe where there is a struggle between good and evil in which the enemy is absolutely evil and Americans represent the embodiment of goodness” (75). Kellner’s analysis is particularly interesting when considering the similarities between the Reagan and Bush Jr. administrations as well as the cultural products produced in their wakes.

The heroes in war films released during the Reagan administration were encouraged, for the most part, to embrace an independent and even brash spirit as long as they ultimately performed the duties expected of them by the government. In return, they were rewarded for their efforts and received all the spoils of a conquering hero—a place within the patriarchal, capitalist system, with a faithful woman and a pat on the back for exerting violence on a defined Other. In their book *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, Kellner and Michael Ryan suggest that these heroes served a purpose—namely that the Reagan government used film narratives as a way to articulate a pro-war, pro-capitalist agenda (Kellner and Ryan 1988, 290). Kellner goes so far to suggest that *Top Gun*, *Iron Eagle I* and *Iron Eagle II* helped prepare the US for the Gulf War, “by celebrating the virtues of high-tech weaponry and military heroism, creating an Arab enemy to replace the Soviet nemesis, and promoting the specific foreign policy agendas of Reagan and Bush” (Kellner 1995, 83). The same may be true of the heroes produced during the current Bush administration; this similarity will be further explored in chapter four, with special consideration given to the Other. Without a doubt, the heroes in war films that are released in the wake of US military involvement respond directly to the political concerns of the time. If these heroes were celebrated for their strong conservative perspectives, then this sends a clear message to the American public:

conservatism and heroism are often one and the same, and conservatism leads to a support of the US military. War film heroes are able to ideologically represent the preferred behaviour of American citizens, and in doing so, work to normalize specific reactions to war by promoting a violent yet government-legitimated reaction.

Many of the qualities demonstrated by war heroes seemed to be shared by heroes of American vengeance films. In fact, films like *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* offer heroes who are hybrids. For example, *Rambo*'s John Rambo is a Vietnam veteran who must depend on his army training to undermine a corrupt American sheriff. These vengeance or renegade heroes are almost always former military men who have become regular citizens. Ultimately, it is only because they served their country that they are equipped with the necessary skills to defeat the antagonists; once again, the American military is the source of victory and power. For example, after being falsely arrested, Rambo is tortured by the sheriff and his police force, until he is pushed over the edge and uses his army skills to defend himself from the corruption found in that small town. Rambo as hero relives his nation's experience in a past war, by essentially receiving a second chance to live his war experience and emerge as victor. James Braddock, the hero from *Missing in Action*, experiences a similar narrative path. As a former colonel in the Vietnam War, he must return to the country ten years later to rescue a group of American POWs who are still being held captive. He is given the opportunity to confront a former enemy and destroy him in retribution for past crimes.

Both *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* spawned at least two sequels; clearly the hero's narrative serves an ideological function for the American public. Gregory Waller (1990) explains the purpose of this heroic trajectory in his essay "Rambo: Getting to Win

This Time.” He suggests that when Rambo (and other vengeance seeking heroes) reclaims his place as revered and celebrated hero, he is able to rewrite his nation’s defeat and humiliation. At the same time the sympathetic viewer experiences a cathartic cleansing—his anxieties and apprehensions about Vietnam are dissolved in favour of “the victory chants for the triumphant and just avenger” (Waller, 125). While Rambo and Braddock’s behaviour is intrinsically tied to their military training, they are also clearly separated from the regimented regulations that governed them while they were part of the military. They are no longer part of a larger group with a common goal; they are singular forces left to carry on the work of the military within their own parameters. In this way, the renegade hero of revenge action films is closely linked to the western hero described by Jenni Calder (1970). She notes that the western hero represents essentially American qualities, including rugged individualism, homemade morality and the belief that laws are for the weak and not for the strong. She suggests, “the American western hero is very much a man who does not wait” (96). Instead, the frontier hero acts independently of the law, as demonstrated by Rambo’s vigilante-type mission. He is able to use his military training to become a one-man force; in fact, his former Colonel warns the police squad to prepare the body bags in anticipation of Rambo’s singular skills. When left to his own devices, the renegade hero assumes vigilante action to protect the community without the authority of the law (49). However, such heroes must have first embraced the rigid structure of military life before gaining the knowledge to become vigilantes—it is only through knowledge of the military and a tragic event that the renegade hero is born. This pattern is repeated by each of the renegade hero films under consideration in the thesis: the heroes in *The Punisher*, *Man On Fire* and *Collateral Damage* have all had previous

military or emergency personnel training, and each refers specifically to those skills in order to seek vengeance against a variety of crimes. These similarities will be further explored in chapter six.

Another generic hero who helps to contextualize the post 11 September action and war protagonists is the cop action hero. Neal King (1999) argues that cop heroes “tend to be gruff and self-pitying to the point of social incompetence, they’re pissed off and not much fun to be around (...) and feel that they have been pushed from the homes they want to protect for too eagerly chasing goons and too seldom loving wives” (King 1999, 19). King portrays the cop hero as one who is bound by duty to protect his community, yet has chosen to do so. King’s heroes operate in a world that may be corrupted by crime, but is free from war. He suggests that the cop hero is dissatisfied with the state of American society, yet the texts he studies, including *Lethal Weapon* (Dir. Richard Donner, 1987), *Die Hard* (Dir. John McTiernan, 1988) and *The Last Boy Scout* (Dir. Tony Scott, 1991) do not support this statement. While there may be some tension present in these texts, the heroes are ultimately content to exist within a capitalist culture; for example, *Die Hard*’s John McClane is disappointed with society, but not for its injustices or prejudices. Instead, McClane is unhappy because his wife has pursued a career of her own, and has accepted a job with a Japanese company—his patriarchal and colonial power has been thwarted as American society moves forward. Neither McClane nor the other cop heroes analyzed by King are seeking to make the world a better place for all of American society; their resistance is purely aesthetic—there is no true desire to pursue change, only to maintain the world order that benefits them. For this reason, King’s description of the cop hero serves as a useful type by which to compare the male

renegade heroes in films produced after 11 September, as well as those in American films formerly released in the wake of major US wars or world events. As I will explore in chapter five, the heroes in *Collateral Damage*, *Man on Fire* and *The Punisher* are also willing to defend the current status of their country or community but do not recognize the prejudices and strife that plague its internal structure.

As Rasmussen, Downey and Asenas explain, “for better or worse, the United States [is a nation] linked indelibly to a tradition of sacrosanct narratives framed by the principle of regeneration through violence, warranted by a venerated noble purpose and embodying what it means to be a hero” (Jackson, 134). This obsession with violence is evident in the behaviours exhibited by the war and revenge heroes: from *Missing in Action* to *The Green Berets*, each hero originates as a peaceful, if slightly disturbed, man. It is only through necessity that his capacity for violence is unleashed, and yet it is only through the explosion of this violence that his character can achieve redemption. By activating his violent nature the American hero can cleanse himself of the past and regenerate for the future. As claimed by David Jackson in his book *Entertainment and Politics: The Influence of Popular Culture on Young Adult Political Socialization*, “film representations of the military seem inseparable from national self-esteem [...] for conservatives especially, greatness as a nation means the ability to exercise military power. The strength and courage of the soldiers [represent] male national prestige” (194). American film heroes are often representative of particular political perspectives; they exist to perpetuate belief systems and to act as surrogates for the American public. Whether the public visits to the cinema to watch a war hero save a fellow soldier or to watch a renegade hero massacre the clear-cut Other, it is clear that these types of heroes

emerge during times of national crisis. The next step is to determine why they emerge again post 11 September and what their emergence reveals about the nation.

Chapter 3: Re-sculpting the Heroic Image—Reviewing the Bush Administration's Post 11 September Speeches

Since this thesis seeks to scrutinize the heroic protagonists in a selection of Hollywood films post 11 September 2001, and to interpret the behaviour of these protagonists in relation to political reactions to that event, then these reactions must first be examined. I turn to one of the most constructed and far-reaching products that helped to define the American hero in the aftermath of 11 September: speeches made by President George W. Bush and broadcast to the public. This chapter will examine major speeches given by Bush in the wake of 11 September, including the September 14, 2001 National Day of Prayer Speech³; the September 20, 2001 Address to a Joint Session of Congress⁴; and the January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address⁵. Each of these speeches aired on major US television networks in the days and weeks following 11 September, and was chosen because of its proximity to the event itself. I will argue that the content of these speeches not only attempts to assign particular characteristics to the concept of “American hero” but also defines the terrorist as Other and foreign. Understanding how such a prominent speaker defines both the American community and the Other will serve as an ideal backdrop to the thesis’ discussions of heroes in war and revenge films in chapters four and five.

In the narrative constructed by the administration the American public is cast as the hero against a monstrous Other. This is achieved in part through the government’s ability to reduce complicated historical conflict into a two-toned battle between good and

³ To avoid repeatedly writing out the full name of this speech (September 14, 2001 National Day of Prayer Speech), I will refer to it as ‘JSC 2001’ throughout this chapter.

⁴ To avoid repeatedly writing out the full name of this speech (September 20, 2001 Address to a Joint Session of Congress), I will refer to it as ‘SUA 2002’ throughout this chapter.

⁵ To avoid repeatedly writing out the full name of this speech (January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address), I will refer to it as ‘NDPS 2001’ throughout this chapter.

evil. This battle depends on the demonization of a foreign enemy that the Bush government first defined in generic terms during his September 14, 2001 speech:

In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America because we are freedom's home and defender...the terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children...there are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries...they are recruited from their own nations and neighborhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan where they are trained in the tactics of terror. They are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction. (National Day of Prayer Speech 2001, 2)

This speech set the groundwork for a fable that has continued to build for the past six and a half years, one that focuses on a subhuman “terrorist enemy” that must be stopped at all costs. Rather than being identified or humanized, this enemy is simply defined as “evil” in the most basic and caricatured sense. The political, religious, economic and historical complexities that may have led the terrorists to use violence for their cause are entirely denied in favour of creating a binary between the “evil” enemy and the virtuous and justified American nation.

Ferdinand de Saussure suggests that the words and signs that a society uses on a daily basis construct that society's understanding of reality (76). By introducing specific rhetoric when describing the events of 11 September and the players in the myth of this day (Americans and terrorist Others), Bush is able to construct a specific vision of the American political situation. In his September 20, 2001 speech, Bush refers to the Terrorists as “murderers” and juxtaposes this with the statement that “freedom itself is under attack” (JSC 2001, 2). He also relates the “terrorists” to a particular historical regime, when he states, “We have seen their kind before. They follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and Totalitarianism” (JSC 2001, 2). Here, the “terrorists” are compared

to Nazism and fascism, which carry their own ideologies relating to terror and American victory.

Bush never quotes the “Other” perspective. His mythmaking relies on the firm, if not weighted, distinction between the two players within this myth. This is achieved in part by the signs chosen to describe the two parties. In his September 20 speech, for example, Bush refers to American citizens as “decent, loving and giving people” while describing the terrorists as “murderers...whose directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans” (JSC 2001, 3). He announces in the September 14, 2001 speech, “In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America because we are freedom’s home and defender” (NDPS 2001, 2). The juxtaposition between the two actors within this myth is clearly described—one is clearly evil while the other is positioned as good. Americans are described in clear and certain terms, often through the identification of specific individuals and their heroic deeds, yet Bush describes the terrorists as a united, faceless force. At one time he refers to the terrorists as “animals burrow[ing] deeper into caves” and then situates vengeance as a legitimate obligation.

Bush’s rhetoric here is reminiscent of former Republican President Ronald Reagan, who gave a similarly themed speech in 1986 when urging the USA to support the government’s plan to provide military aid to the Nicaraguan Contras, who were rebelling against the communist Sandinista National Liberation Front (Rogin, 1987, xiii). Reagan carefully positioned the Sandinistas (and in fact Nicaragua as a whole) as a major and unified threat against the USA by linking them with Communism during a time when the Cold War was at the forefront of the nation’s consciousness. During a televised

national address on March 16, 1986, Reagan described Nicaragua as a “Soviet ally,” and as a “safe house, a command post for the international terror” (xii). He went on to suggest that Nicaragua would link with the Soviets to invade Mexico, which would result in “desperate Latin peoples by the millions [...] fleeing north into the cities of the southern United States.” Reagan positioned the Contras as America’s answer to this threat, and “called on Americans to support the freedom fighters” (xv). Michael Rogin suggests that Reagan had a specific intention during his speech, noting:

By making Nicaragua a symbol that condensed all the forces threatening America, President Reagan brought together in a single speech the historic themes of American political demonology. Like earlier countersubversives, Reagan warned against the menace threatening America....he named names...but these names had a misplaced concreteness, for they signified multiplying instances of a single disease rather than discrete people and places with lives of their own. The president attributed magical power to a single, central source by wiping out separate, local initiatives. He imagined a titanic struggle between the forces of good and an empire and evil. (xv)

Like Bush, Reagan presented a very specific version of the players in the international conflict at hand. His description of Nicaragua oversimplified the political situation, denying the country’s complicated political history and factions, and “succeeded in making himself the benign center of America and placing malignancies outside [its] borders” (xvii). Bush has taken Reagan’s lead in terms of justifying American military action based on an ill-defined threat yet he has also managed to make his threat of a foreign Other even more malignant, and even more present, because of his access to the events of 11 September.

As recently as September 12, 2006, Bush repeated the idea of the ever-present enemy, once again failing to define this foe with any particular detail. In his address to the American nation, he positioned the war on terrorism as nothing less than “a struggle

for civilization, [...] the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century and the calling of our generation” (September 11, 2006 speech). In this same speech he continued to describe the terrorist Other as anti-American, saying that the Other is trying to build an empire “where women are prisoners in their homes, men are beaten for missing prayer meetings and terrorists have a safe haven to plan and launch attacks on America and other civilized nations” (September 11, 2006 speech). In contrast, the Bush speech positioned the average American civilian as responsible for the survival of democracy on Earth, saying that citizens must continue to support their government’s action in the Middle East:

We are fighting to maintain the way of life enjoyed by free nations. Whatever mistakes have been made in Iraq, the worst mistake would be to think that if we pulled out, the terrorists would leave us alone. They will not leave us alone. They will follow us [...] our message to them is clear: No matter how long it takes, America will find you and we will bring you to justice. (September 11, 2006 speech)

Bush clearly delineates a hierarchal structure in his speeches, where America and its citizens are given the right to unleash justice at any cost, and where any enemy of America (read: anyone foreign who commits violence against American civilians) is painted as a monstrous villain whose death would be justified. It also suggests the notion of eternal war, and qualifies any US government mistakes as just part of the reality of the “war against terror”.

The Bush speeches cling to a very definite portrait of what it means to be American: unapologetically patriotic, unquestioningly supportive of his or her government (even, apparently, if that means giving up so-called American liberties like

freedom of speech and political choice⁶), and above all a brave soldier of justice and virtuousness. I do not mean to suggest that bravery, heroism and vengeance were not already entrenched in the American consciousness before 11 September, but rather that these qualities were publicly promoted in the event's wake.

While Bush controls the myth, it appears that while one prays, the other kills; while one mourns, the other laughs maniacally; while one is woman, child and victim, the other is madman or animal; while one rebuilds, the other plots; while one responds, the other attacks. It is the contrast that creates the meaning. As Douglas Kellner (2003) suggests in his book *From 9/11 to Terror War*, "appropriating the language of a 'moral community' subordinates discourse of social justice, civil rights, and democracy to pulling together in the name of national unity" (Kellner 2003, 210).

It is clear that the Bush speeches locate a clear dichotomy between the "good" USA and the "evil" terrorist Other. But how is this message relayed to the larger public? The renegotiation of the hero concept within the Bush speeches was a first step within a larger mythological overhaul that played out in film. Whereas Bush continues to make

⁶ In the wake of 11 September, the Bush administration took steps that removed many American freedoms. After talk show host Bill Maher characterized US military use of long-range missiles as cowardly, White House spokesperson Ari Fleisher gave an official news briefing where he said, "These are reminders to all Americans that they need to watch what they say, watch what they do, and this is not a time for remarks like that; there never is" (September 26, 2001 Press Briefing). In the aftermath of 11 September journalists were also targeted for criticizing the administration. *Oregon Daily Courier* columnist Dan Gurtrie was fired for criticizing Bush's reaction to 11 September, and the paper's publisher printed an apology to readers, which read, "Criticism of our chief executive and those around him needs to be responsible and appropriate. Labeling him and the nation's other top leaders as cowards as the United States tries to unite after its bloodiest terrorist attack ever isn't responsible or appropriate" (Hart and Ackerman, 2001). On October 26, 2001 Bush signed into law the "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001", otherwise known as the USA Patriot Act. The act, which was renewed on March 9, 2006, allows the government to, among other things: not be required to disclose the identity of anyone, even an American citizen who is detained in connection with a terror investigation (section 201); obtain credit records and library records without a warrant (section 126, 128 and 129); wiretap without court order for up to 15 days after a terror attack (section 103); extradite, search and wiretap Americans at the behest of foreign nations, regardless of existing treaties (sections 321 and 322); and refuse lawful immigrants the right to a fair deportation hearing (sections 503 and 504) (www.eff.org/patriot). These conditions hardly seem compliant with the land of the free.

speeches referring to 11 September and positioning the USA as undeniable victim, the war and revenge action films also contribute to the myth's survival. Jonathan Markovitz speaks to this in his essay "Reel Terror Post 9/11", noting that "the stark rhetoric of the Bush administration's quest to eradicate 'evil' finds a perfect correlate in films that cast A-list Hollywood stars in battles against the calculating and murderous violence of always highly racialized terrorist 'others'" (Markovitz, 2002). Film helps to abolish the historical complexities that contributed to 11 September. As Barthes suggests:

Myth acts economically. It abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible. It organizes a world that is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes 1972, 143)

Film's role as a perpetrator of the "us versus them" mythology constructed in political speeches is nothing new; just as Reagan used speeches to establish this binary during the Nicaraguan conflict (in addition to other conflicts), 1980s films like *Rambo* and *Top Gun* worked to amplify this messaging and encouraged public support of a dominant American role in subsequent conflicts. Bush himself seems to have consumed these earlier narratives and made the connection between American national prestige and film narratives. His decision to don a flight suit and give his "Mission Accomplished" speech on a May 1, 2003 reveals his familiarity with the *Top Gun* narrative and his recognition of its power. In fact, many of his speeches rely on generic film conventions, as if he is choosing to perpetuate retribution narratives by relying on film narratives that have defined the American hero. In his September 20, 2001 speech he proclaims, "you're either with us, or against us", recalling the generic conventions of the Western film genre.

In his September 14, 2001 speech he states, “Our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil”. By creating clear boundaries between the “hero” and “terrorist,” Bush draws on the myth of the American frontier hero as defined by Jenni Calder. She describes the frontier hero as, “primitive, in the most impressive sense, for he is expressing forces elemental in human nature, instincts of survival, and aggressive protection of one’s own. The hero’s education and gentlemanly behaviour mitigates the crudity of this kind of violence at the same time as helping us to accept its necessity” (Calder 1977, 97). According to Calder, “one of the great attractions of the frontier was that it appeared to be a situation in which the individual was forced at times to take the law into his own hands” (Calder 1977, 87). Indeed, Bush seems to link the post 11 September national character to the genre character of the cowboy, and in doing so seems eager to relieve the country’s tensions and conflicts related to that day’s event. The Western genre serves as an ideal vehicle to assuage public concern; its recognizable elements provide a familiar stage to play out the conflict between the US and the terrorists in a ritualistic fashion that results in the hero’s vindictive salvation of his community. Violent response is thus justifiable within a larger American history that supports heroic action, especially when one’s own land or community is at stake.

Bush’s rhetoric reveals his familiarity with American film narratives, especially as they construct “good” and “evil”. Through his speeches, he echoes past narratives while constructing a particular myth of 11 September. This myth boils down the complexity of 11 September 2001 to its basic elements until there remain only simple archetypes: a white knight hero and a shady antagonist. This simplistic perspective denies a negotiation of the blurred historical boundaries. Only these contrasting mythic concepts

exist, which suggest there is only one natural way to interpret and understand the world. In chapters four and five I will argue that the Bush speeches and the war and revenge films examined in this thesis work as parallel systems to promote a simplification of American history and in turn a justification of American military action. The heroes in the war and revenge films are motivated by absolute justified revenge against an atrocious attack; they have no alternative route to take because what has been done to them is so abhorrent, and the evil is so apparent. This same claim is repeated over and over in Bush's speeches, where he is able to promote a myth that works to support a specific interpretation of the events and actors of 11 September. By comparing Bush's version of the American hero to those heroes populating the thesis' six primary films, I will be better able to comment on heroic construction, deviation and fallacy.

Chapter Four: Reclaiming the Past: Hollywood Revisits Past Wars

In the days, months, and years following the events of 11 September, President Bush and an echoing mainstream press have defined the notion of hero. The heroic ideal has been firmly linked to unwavering patriotism, unquestioned honour, and a fallacy of unblemished heroic action. While this blameless hero is not a new figure in American popular culture, his presence after 11 September reflects a nation's conservative turn and desire for vengeance. Not only is this hero perfectly framed against a horrific event that requires him to defend his fellow citizens against a brutal, malicious enemy, but the enemy himself is an ideal candidate for vilification: foreign, non-Christian and absolute in his beliefs—he appears as an automatic foil that casts the American hero in a glorified halo of justification and positions the dominant ideological beliefs of American society as the preferred standpoint.

These boiled down stereotypes were so quickly embraced by the public that there was no attention paid to the historical complexities that may have contributed to the attacks. The President was clear and the mainstream media were clear: America had been attacked for no reason and deserved vengeance. The attackers were monstrous and deserved to be eradicated (in fact, President Bush referred to the terrorists as “animals, burrowing in their holes” in his September 11 speech). What had been established were the players and plot of a manipulated narrative that would reappear in many publicly accessible forms, one that focused on the goodness and heroism of a justified and fiercely patriotic America. This narrative would soon find an ideal forum: that of the silver screen. What better way to accomplish such a task than through the war film—by returning to past battles where American military forces successfully defeated a known

and recognized enemy? War films, especially those funded by mainstream Hollywood studios, do two things very well: exalt the hero and the military, and praise the past by replacing historical reality with nostalgia and ideological fantasy. Films like *The Great Raid* (Dir. John Dahl, 2005), *We Were Soldiers* (Dir. Randall Wallace, 2002), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (Dir. John Moore, 2001) return to various moments in American military history: *The Great Raid* to World War II, *We Were Soldiers* to Vietnam, and *Behind Enemy Lines* to the late 1990s and the Bosnia crisis. Each of these films serves to celebrate a particular instance of American heroism and to reaffirm the idea that American violence against another nation is legitimate.

These war films deny the complex history framing the war narrative by emphasizing the heroic and justified actions of the protagonist. In doing so, such films perpetuate the myth of American innocence and warranted authority, thereby encouraging the public to support military action against Afghanistan and Iraq in the weeks and years following 11 September 2001. As Douglas Kellner (1995) indicates in his analysis of war and action films released during the Reagan and Bush Senior administrations, “media culture produces representations that attempt to induce consent to certain political positions, getting members of the society to see specific ideologies as ‘the way things are.’ Popular culture texts naturalize these positions and thus help mobilize consent to hegemonic political positions” (Kellner 1995, 59).

In the case of the war and renegade films released post 11 September 2001, this naturalization may be in part a result of direct intervention by the US government. On November 11, 2001, President Bush’s political strategist Karl Rove met with key Hollywood entertainment executives (including representatives from CBS, Viacom,

Showtime, Dreamworks, HBO and MGM) to discuss how the entertainment industry could work with the Pentagon to promote American initiatives throughout the world. The meeting was organized by Rove, Sherry Lansing of Paramount Pictures, and Jack Valenti, then-president of the Motion Picture Association of America and former special assistant to US President Lyndon Johnson (Cooper 2001)⁷. Ken Lisaius, a White House spokesperson described the purpose of the meeting to the press, claiming, "The gathering is to brief studio executives on the war on terrorism and to discuss with them future projects that may be undertaken by the industry. The White House has great respect for the creativity of the industry and recognizes its impact and ability to educate at home and abroad" (Lyman 2001, November 12). Fifty executives attended the meeting and a "general agreement" was reached, with "each of the studios, networks and unions" purported to have designated a executive "to act as a liaison in the effort" (Lyman 2001). Although Rove did his best to distance the government from being aligned with the notion of propaganda, it is clear that he had a particular story that he wished Hollywood to tell. During the meeting, Rove outlined a list of "points and projects" that he hoped would be addressed by Hollywood, including that the entertainment industry "could issue a 'call to service' to all Americans, urging them to volunteer for national and local community service...it could help the administration clarify that this is a global conflict requiring a global response, and that it is a fight against evil rather than a disagreement between nations" (Lyman). While Rove neglected to make an overt call for propaganda, per se, he identified the government's desire for narratives that reflect a particular interpretation of the US role and action in world politics.

⁷ This meaning is reflective of a longer history of US government intervention in the development of war films. See Lawrence H. Suid's *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (2002) and David Robb's *Operation Hollywood* (2004) for a complete history of a relationship that began as far back as 1898.

The November 2001 meeting's agenda was plain: encourage the studios to create films to froth the public's patriotism and persuade support of the government and the military. The effects were almost immediate. John Woo's *Windtalkers* (2002) and Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001) were heavily edited to create final products that presented American military decision makers and soldiers in a favourable light. *Windtalkers*, a film about US marines assigned to protect Navajo recruits whose language was used as code during World War II, received a list of required script changes. The original script included a marine nicknamed "the dentist" taking gold from the fillings of enemy soldiers; this scene was removed and deemed "unMarine" by Phil Strub, the Pentagon's chief liaison to the film and television industry, despite National Archive footage showing soldiers engaging in this very activity (Robb, 2004: 60). One of the characters in *Black Hawk Down* was also changed because of military demands. After a soldier character's namesake was convicted of raping a 12-year old boy back in the US, the Navy demanded that the character's name be changed (91). In this case, the Navy selected the best possible characteristics of a real-life officer, while denying the negative characteristics.

Other already-produced US war films were simply pulled from theatrical release, because their narratives failed to present the military in a positive way. The 2001 film *Buffalo Soldiers* (Dir. Gregor Jordan) was pulled from theatres because it depicted US soldiers stationed in 1980s Germany as black market thieves. The war films that were supported and promoted were those that presented American military heroes performing spectacular feats for the greater good of their country. These films included *The Great Raid*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Behind Enemy Lines*. While two of the films were produced

before the events of 11 September (only *The Great Raid* was produced later), they are nonetheless part of the canon of war films that reflect a militant vibe. Their creation may not have been a side effect of those events, but their content nonetheless promotes a particular view of the American military—one that erases any record of US military fault and denies the possibility that current US military action could be a mistake. Several film reviewers shared this opinion of these war films. Geoff Pevere of the *Toronto Star* described *The Great Raid* as “less like a rousing action adventure than a military-sponsored lesson in invincible patriotic payback”, where “just about everyone is a handsomely chiselled team player for Uncle Sam, and the entire operation is dramatically staggered by the uniform display of patriotic purpose” (Pevere D7). Jeffrey Westhoff of the *Northwest Herald* suggests that *Behind Enemy Lines* “crosses into the ugly side of patriotism, which is jingoism, [where] any non-American idea is an un-American idea” (Westhoff) and Mark Palermo of *The Coast* writes that *We Were Soldiers* uses “jingoism befitting to a forty year old John Wayne film” and that “there's a distastefulness in the film's simpleton view of mass suffering” (Mark Palermo, August 26, 2002).

Each film certainly presents American military action in a heroic light, by featuring noble heroes who are virtuous and just. This image is clearly defined in the character of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Mucci in *The Great Raid*. A stoic and deeply religious man, he is the driving force behind the film, which recounts the story of the January 1945 rescue of more than 500 U.S. prisoners of war by the untested 6th Ranger Battalion from a Japanese POW camp in Cabanatuan. The prisoners, American and Filipino alike, had survived the Bataan Death March through the jungles of the Philippines. As the conflict began to wane, the Japanese were preparing to enforce a “Kill

All” policy rather than release the prisoners. Mucci, played in the film by Benjamin Bratt, was the man charged with freeing the POWs before that policy could be realized. He planned an elaborate rescue and was assisted by 121 rangers and Alamo scouts as well as members of the Filipino resistance.

It is easy to determine why this particular military conflict was chosen as a film subject. Well-known in historical circles, it is of note because the men who carried out the raid were largely untested, and succeeded in their effort because of collaboration with Filipino forces. Despite a lack of battle experience, Caucasian and Filipino fought side by side to defeat a common and clearly defined foe. Their common ground was wishing freedom for themselves and for their fellow man. In fact, this desire for “freedom” is stated emphatically during an early scene at the battalion’s base camp, and is very similar to the binary positioning of ‘freedom’ and ‘terrorism’ presented by Bush’s in his January 2002 speech. Bush states, “it is both our responsibility and our freedom to fight freedom’s fight” (State of the Union Address 2001, 3). This same responsibility for ensuring worldwide freedom is relayed to the entire battalion during a sermon that the battalion attends on the eve of the raid. The preacher states “[this army will] build an enduring peace founded on thy holy laws and upon that unselfish goodwill to all those who love justice and peace which has been given to us through Jesus Christ thine only son our Lord.” Once again the American military is positioned as a vanquisher of evil and as soldiers of God. Just as Bush declared in his September 14, 2001 speech that “[America’s] responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil” (National Day of Prayer Speech 2001, 2) *The Great Raid* seems to support this claim to history—the raid itself is the most successful in US history. Mucci and his

men rescued 511 POWs from the Cabanatuan Prison Camp, and only two Army Rangers were killed in the process. Further, the American soldiers are valiant and respectful of other cultures and communities. Mucci and his men literally exist only as saviors and peacekeepers—these are no rogue troublemakers. Further, these men are embraced as respected heroes upon their return to the United States. The US involvement in foreign politics is appreciated and widely supported. By focusing on a military event that has never been questioned by the public, the film encourages a positive reaction to American participation in war.

The film was shot in 2002 with an anticipated 2003 release date just as President Bush announced plans for the US military to invade Iraq and was calling for both international allies and civilian participation in the US army. Service members and veterans were shown the film before it was finally released in cinemas in 2005, and Gen. Peter J. Schoolmaker, Army chief of staff, gave the following address to this audience before the viewing of the film: “There is perhaps no story that illustrates each and every tenet of the warrior ethos quite like ‘The Great Raid,’ he said. “While one cannot help but be inspired by the story...and those depicted in this film, we must not forget that...there are millions of examples (of such warrior ethos) from the Army's 230-year history (Quigley, 2005). This “warrior” history is revisited in all three films explored in this chapter and it is clear that the film portrays the US military and its allies in a specific way, one that is approved by the military itself. This approval is a result of the way the characters are presented—the portrayal and actions of Mucci and the other characters are favourable. Mucci is first introduced through the narration of Captain Robert Prince, who says, “As a West Point graduate Mucci was one of the most determined men I’d ever met.

He took on what seemed to many like a hopeless task—the job of turning a group of raw untested recruits into a unit of elite soldiers. [The men were] mostly farm hands from small towns and rural areas with little or no combat experience.” In this brief introduction Mucci is described as a hard-working man and is also connected to the American everyman; he believes in the average American and wants to prove that these men can make a difference. Mucci discusses the raid plan with his senior officers he insists on leading the men himself, saying, “I’ve done everything they’ve done, I’ve trained them for this. I feel like they deserve a shot at this and so do I.” The opportunity to fight is presented as an honour rather than a danger and Mucci is shown to be a caring and proud leader who will not hesitate to join his men on the battlefield.

Mucci is also closely aligned with Christianity. After telling his men that they are about to embark on the raid, he tells them to go to the chapel and to pray, noting, “I do not want any damn atheists on this raid. No fakers either. I want you to get down on your knees and swear before the Almighty that you’ll give your lives before you let any of those prisoners die.” This necessary Christianity is a common theme throughout the film. Among the secondary characters are members of the Filipino resistance, including a Lithuanian woman, two Catholic priests and several Filipinos. In fact, the resistance meets in the church, suggesting that salvation from the Japanese menace can be found through Christianity. Early in the film one of the POWs attempts to escape and is captured and hung in front of the camp. Some fellow prisoners untie him later, and Captain Redding, who is the sole cynic shown to have lost his faith, mutters, “The poor son of a bitch still believed in God.” By not believing in the Christian God, Redding separates himself from the rest of the prisoners and even from the Americans as a whole.

It is not surprising that he also attempts to escape and is shot in the head by a Japanese soldier. In fact, his attempted escape results in the deaths of ten other random prisoners who are shot to demonstrate what will happen if the Japanese are disobeyed. It seems that a lack of faith is on par with killing fellow soldiers.

The rest of the soldiers, including both POWs and the rangers who participate in the raid, are shown to be noble, loyal and caring. Daniel is one of the POWs and is the senior officer among his fellow captives. He is called before the Japanese captain, who attempts to bribe Daniel with malaria medicine if he will agree to keep the rest of the POWs at bay. Rather than accept the medicine or the bribe of salvation, Daniel refuses, preferring to stay with his men. As a result of his refusal of the medicine, Daniel dies but his men survive. On the ranger side, the men are equally selfless. One soldier insists on joining the raid despite the fact that he is married and that married men are not required to participate. At one point, the narrator announces that, "We were going to rescue [the POWs] or die trying." The American soldiers are incapable of being selfish. Their military action is justified and they are willing to die to fulfill their roles as soldiers. There is no hint of hostility between these men that might stem from their different cultures, economic classes or military ranks. The military here is viewed as an equalizing force that allows all soldiers to experience a brotherly community free from social economic conflict. They are able to act as a selfless unit united in one common goal: to save their fellow soldiers.

This sacrificial, selfless behaviour can exist without question because of the film's setting. Not only is the conflict set during World War II, a justified war where the heroes and "evil-doers" as Bush might call them today are clearly defined, but the era itself is

one that calls back to American innocence. Part of the film is set in Manila, which is populated with citizens of many cultures. As such, American characters are shown to live side by side with Filipino and British, and it is suggested that they would have continued to live in productive harmony if the Japanese had not invaded. For example, Captain Prince's narration alludes to the conflict-free city of Manila when he says, "In 1941 Manila was considered the Pearl of the Orient—an international city where people from all over the world lived and worked. This all changed when the Japanese took over. They believed that as a conquered people the Filipinos should do what they were told. Those who disobeyed were jailed, tortured or executed." In this way the Japanese are shown to have disrupted not only the Filipino community but also an international community in the making, where Americans embraced other cultures with open arms. This type of portrayal is nothing new: war films like the *Why We Fight* series⁸ of the 1940s presented a similar version of American culture, subsequently denying the realities of racism, segregation, poverty and more. In *American Cinema/American Culture*, John Belton describes early war films like *Crash Dive* (Dir. Archie Mayo, 1943), *Sahara* (Dir. Zoltan Korda, 1943) and *Bataan* (Dir. Tay Garnett, 1943) as deliberately portraying American society as a happy melting pot of various ethnicities and cultures. He argues that "it is the particular virtues of that identity—democratic equality—that will win [the war]....by cooperating with one another [Americans] win the war as well as demonstrate that the idea of America really works" (Belton, 178). Belton goes on to describe the realities of

⁸ The *Why We Fight* documentary series was made with help from the United States Army Signal Corps, but behind the scenes it was a Hollywood affair. Actor Walter Huston provided some of the narration while director Robert Flaherty, and composers Alfred Newman and Dmitri Tiomkin all contributed to the final product. Even Walt Disney Studios had a hand in the production; Walt Disney and his staff created the animated map sequences. Frank Capra directed several of the films. The primary goal of the series was to explain the US government's policy of hastily assembling armed troops, as well as to promote financial support and patriotism from the general public.

racial tensions and segregation in the military, noting that while *Crash Dive*, *Sahara*, and *Bataan* include multicultural military units, African Americans and Caucasians did not actually fight together until after 1948. He also refers to the domestic racism of that era, citing the Detroit riots of 1943 and the zoot suit panic of 1942 as examples of unrest at a time when the nation was being presented as a unified front on film.

The Great Raid achieves a similar reversal. Here, the Americans are shown to be co-victims with the other citizens of Manila. Yet the USA was hardly an unblemished saviour for the Philippines—in fact, the USA had invaded the Philippines in August of 1899 after a conflict following the American purchase of the country from Spain in 1898. The USA had intended to colonize the Philippines at that time while the Philippine nation wanted independence. The invasion occurred after an American soldier shot a Filipino soldier who was crossing a bridge into Filipino-occupied territory. When describing this incident, the administration of then US President William McKinley said, “that the insurgents had attacked Manila” and went on to describe the newly established President of the Philippines (Emilio Aguinaldo) as an “outlaw bandit.” Before this war, the US had helped to establish Aguinaldo as a reward for helping in the transition between Spanish and American occupation, and Aguinaldo had turned over more than 15,000 Spanish soldiers to the US as a way to offer them intelligence (Brands 1992, 46). In 1899 the US invaded. More than 126,000 American soldiers participated in the subsequent war, which lasted until 1902 (although conflicts continued through 1913) and resulted in 4,324 American military deaths, 16,000 Filipino military deaths and over 600,000 Filipino civilian deaths (Smallman-Raynor and Cliff 1998, 24). Many of these civilian deaths were a result of American war tactics, which included torture, execution and the use of

“protected zones”, which have since been recognized to have been concentration camps (Miller, 88). After the Philippine-American “war” ended in 1902, the country became a colony of the US until 1935 when it became the Commonwealth of the Philippines. In 1941, the Japanese invaded and were subsequently defeated in 1945 by allied troops so it was not until 1946 that the Philippines achieved independence from the United States. However, even after 1946 the USA did not close down the many military and airforce bases that it had set up during the initial occupation in 1913. The final bases were not shut down until 1991, yet even today the Bush administration has arranged to have US troops in the Philippine hinterlands. The reason put forth by the US government for these troops’ presence is to discourage and to destroy Muslim terrorist units (Gray 2003).

This history is stunning, especially in light of its similarity to the USA’s history with and subsequent invasion of Iraq. In both cases, the USA first presented itself as a helpful force. The populations of both the Philippines and Iraq looked forward to the end of years of repression from another force (from the Spanish in the Philippines and from Saddam Hussein in Iraq). The US manipulation of Aguinaldo is hauntingly similar to the USA’s relationship with Saddam Hussein, since Aguinaldo, like Hussein, had once served as a US stooge before becoming the leader of an insurgency against the American occupation (Marina 2004). In fact, the USA viewed Aguinaldo similarly to Hussein, since they believed that once they captured him the civil hostilities would cease, and this was not the case (Gray 2003). *The Great Raid* never acknowledges any type of hostility between the USA and the Philippines. In fact, Bush referred to the Philippine invasion as a model for the Iraq war in October of 2003, saying, “Some say the culture of the Middle East will not sustain the institutions of democracy. The same doubts were once expressed

about the culture of Asia. Those doubts were proven wrong nearly six decades ago.” Just like the film, Bush’s interpretation of US-Philippine history begins in the 1940s after the US ended its occupation, and disregards the reality that the 1898 to 1946 occupation of the Philippines by the US was a preemptive, unprovoked war against a sovereign nation that resulted in countless civilian deaths and civil unrest (Gray). This is hardly the type of model on which to base a new invasion so the Bush administration, like *The Great Raid*, has chosen to sanitize the past. In the film, the US occupation is shown to be beneficial, since the Americans went on to defeat the Japanese, who are certainly presented as the Other in the film, despite the reality that American troops committed equally horrific atrocities against the Philippine people just a few years before (Gray). By remembering a very specific American-Philippine past the film is able to focus on the heroism surrounding a certain event. The story here is of the men’s united attack on a common and clear enemy.

So how is this specific past achieved on film? By presenting the international citizens of Manila and the POW camp soldiers in a similar light, portraying the American rescuers as selfless, noble heroes and by accentuating the Japanese soldiers’ cruelty. The first is accomplished by showcasing the effects of the Japanese invasion on the morale of both the citizens of Manila and the POW soldiers through the mise-en-scène. The sky over Manila is constantly cloudy and the colours of the street kiosks, costumes and streets seem to be muted and neutral. In the POW camp, the sleeping quarters are desolate and broken down; there are pieces of wood plank missing, there are no doors on the building, there is dust everywhere and scraps of cloth hang from the ceilings. All of these elements contribute to an overall sense of despair for both parties.

Mucci and his men, on the other hand, wear clean, crisp uniforms and enjoy a base camp that includes a makeshift chapel and a games room. Their camp is very similar to a summer camp, connoting the notion of boyhood innocence and of coming of age. The rangers who participate in the raid have never been called to battle before—this raid is presented to them as a chance for the boys to become men. When announcing plans for the raid, Mucci tells them, “You’re the best trained, least proven battalion in this whole army. This is your one chance to do something about it. How you equip yourself over the next 48 hours will determine how you will be judged for the rest of your lives—as men worthy of serving in this army or as an embarrassment that history and time will eventually forget. It’s up to you.” These soldiers have been leading a quiet existence at the base camp and are suddenly given the opportunity to prove themselves as men and as heroes. The fact that Mucci gives this speech before the most successful raid in US military history is not surprising, especially since only two men perish in the raid and these two men are the only two soldiers who are given the option of not participating, suggesting that in this battle, American heroism and effort will result in victory and accolades. At the base camp Mucci tells Jimmy the medic that he does not need to come since it will be dangerous and another medic could do the same job. Jimmy insists on participating, however, stating, “It’s what I’m here for.” Lieutenant Daly also makes it clear that he wants to be part of the raid, despite the fact that he has a wife waiting for him at home. Captain Prince tells him married men are not required to participate in the raid, but Daly responds by insinuating that his wife won’t miss him. He is therefore presented as a selfless hero who is ready and willing to give his life for his country. Given the outcome of the raid and the soldier’s eager participation in this event, the film

presents American war in a specific light. The grueling everyday life of a soldier is overlooked in favour of an exciting and successful adventure. Heroism is a simple thing to attain and is one of the main incentives for all American soldiers involved. Further, it appears that soldiers are given the choice of whether to participate in battle. The valiant are shown to risk their lives for the sake of their countrymen.

This American compassion is sharply contrasted against the portrayal of the Japanese soldiers. From the opening scenes of *The Great Raid* it is clear that the Japanese soldiers are cruel and even sadistic. The film opens with newsreel footage of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, which is accompanied by a voiceover describing the events leading to the surrender of American and Filipino troops. This use of so-called "official" footage serves as an ideological signifier of truth, thereby dismissing other interpretations of the past. The narrator reminds viewers that the US was in the Philippines to respond to a growing threat from Japanese forces (again, ignoring the reality of the US presence in the Philippines); Pearl Harbour footage is shown, as are clips of Japanese troops brutally kicking at corpses. The narrator goes on to describe the 60-mile Bataan Death March, saying "Men who fall out of line are bayoneted or shot, and 15,000 men perish. The surviving POWs were herded into various camps at O'Donnel, Cabanatuan and Palawan. The Japanese guards, who view surrender as disgrace, treat them viciously." This narration is accompanied by authentic documentary footage showing Japanese soldiers beating American troops, as well as a gruesome scene where the Japanese force American POWs into underground tunnels, and then light the tunnels on fire. Those Americans who attempt to escape are shot.

Later in the film, the narrative includes a scene where Japanese troops shoot two American priests point-blank because they believe that the men are part of the underground resistance movement. They also execute nurses, women and the elderly, and kill ten Americans at Cabanatuan when one attempts to escape. The Japanese soldiers also withhold food from the prisoners; the prisoners discover an entire building full of canned goods and other food and declare, “[The Japanese] were starving us on purpose.” This barbaric behaviour serves to classify the Japanese as cruel and monstrous especially in comparison to the American soldiers. For example, as one POW lies dying of malaria, he is surrounded by friends who stay by his bedside. Further, before Mucci’s men begin the raid, they are told to “swear before the Almighty that you’ll give your lives before you let any of those prisoners die.” The POWs care for one another and are prepared to die for one another, whereas the Japanese are shown to be easily angered even amongst their own men and eager to brutally torture their captives. By presenting the Japanese antagonist in such stark terms the American soldier shines even brighter and US military action is justified.

We Were Soldiers employs a similar strategy by focusing on the heroism of a particular American unit during the Vietnam War. Like *The Great Raid*, the film showcases a very particular type of American hero—one who possesses a wholesome family unit, a strong sense of Christian faith and skill as a soldier. These elements, which will be discussed below, contribute to the overarching picture of the ideal patriotic American soldier that is propagated in military recruitment material even today.

We Were Soldiers tells the true story of the Ia Drang Valley Battle in Vietnam in 1965. The battle marked the first time that American forces engaged in battle against

North Vietnamese troops; 395 American soldiers in the 7th Calvary descended into the valley and were trapped for three days. The film was supported by the US military, and former marine Capt. Dale Dye served as senior military technical adviser⁹. The choice of this particular battle is certainly interesting, given that this was the first American battle in Vietnam. The soldiers are all excited at the chance to participate in the war and the soldiers' families are concerned but not distraught over the men's departure. Instead, they are earnest about America's role in international politics. By focusing on this particular battle the film does not need to address the growing public and military disenchantment with the war, nor the length of the conflict. The film is careful to present American intervention in Vietnam as necessary. This is achieved in a scene between Lieutenant Colonel Moore and his young daughter Cecile. When he reads to her one night she turns to him and asks, "Daddy, what is a war?" His response, "War is something that shouldn't happen but it does. It's when some people in another country or any country try to take the lives of other people and then soldiers like your daddy, it's my job to go over there and stop them." It is somehow appropriate that Moore's rationale for war should be expressed in the form of a conversation with a child—in this way the details can be ignored. Through a father's words, the USA is positioned as the solution to international conflict; it is "their job." Not only does Moore's description of war justify US interference in world politics, but it also positions the USA as world father and denies any reference to the political events that led to war. This sentiment echoes the message outlined by Bush in his September 14 speech, when he stated, "Our (the USA's)

⁹ When a film employs a military adviser, this indicates that the US military has offered their services to a film in return for veto rights on the script and the portrayal of the military. The Department of Defence's media and entertainment division enables this relationship (see Robb and Suid).

responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil” (Address to Joint Session of Congress, 3).

The film finds the perfect character to do just that in Hal Moore. Part independent cowboy and part group-based military man he is a legend before the film even begins. Moore is described during a conversation between two senior officers as “one hell of a leader.” The viewer is informed that he led a combat unit in Korea and that he volunteered to test experimental parachutes. By the time he appears on screen it has been stated that he is a well-established and respected leader who is willing to take risks.

Moore demonstrates three main qualities that support his role as post 11 September hero archetype, specifically the strength of his family, the strength of his faith and his strength as a soldier. The first shot of Moore shows him driving a station wagon that is hauling a UHaul trailer towards an army base. His three sons and one daughter are laughing and singing in the back seat and his wife Julie, played by Madeleine Stowe, is leaning against his shoulder. The next shot shows his daughter marching up the steps to their new home in his army boots, suggesting that the blend of military and family life is a natural thing and embraced by children. This is further supported during a scene when Moore tells his children to “fall in” and they instantly prepare to say their evening prayer—apparently military training complements fatherhood. There is never any suggestion that the children begrudge the army lifestyle nor that they have conflicted feelings towards the war that their father is fighting. Moore explicitly states the connection between family, fatherhood and being a soldier during a conversation with Second Lieutenant Jack Geoghehan, a young soldier whose wife is expecting their first child just as he prepares to depart for Vietnam. A few days before the men depart,

Geoghehan meets Moore at the base's chapel. He asks Moore point blank what he thinks about being both a soldier and a father. Moore's response: "I hope being good at the one makes me better at the other." It appears that rather than being disruptive, the military is the perfect complement to his home life.

Moore's strong family life is based in his Catholicism. He is deeply religious and is raising his children in the same tradition. His religion extends to the battlefield; before leaving for his tour of duty he and Geoghehan pray together in the chapel:

Our Father, before we go into battle each one of us will approach you in his own way. Our enemies too, according to their own understanding, will ask for protection and for victory so we bow now before your infinite wisdom. I pray you watch over men like Jack Geoghehan that I lead into battle. Oh, and one more thing. About our enemies—ignore their heathen prayers and help us blow those bastards straight to hell. Amen again.

According to Moore, America's enemies are heathen and undeserving of God's attention. As an American, he believes that God will favour him and his men. In fact, he downplays the enemies' intelligence by suggesting that even if they were to pray to God, it would be "according to their own understanding." In war, it seems, God favours the USA. This same viewpoint has been echoed by the Bush government in the years since the attacks in New York. In his September 14, 2001 speech he said, "[Nothing] can separate us from God's love. May He bless the souls of the departed. May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country" (Joint Session of Congress, 2). Both Moore and Bush seem to claim God as America's personal deity and deny the possibility that US citizens have various faiths. This whitewashing is curious and reveals another rewriting of the American narrative. By branding the USA as a nation with a singular faith that is present at both the political and military level, internal conflict and complexities can be denied and the US can once again be claimed as a faultless, ideal nation. The conflict is

presented as a religious war of “us” against “them,” which once again recalls Bush’s speeches when defining the Other. As a result, the USA’s economic and imperial ambitions are disregarded.

Moore’s faith is not the only quality that helps to position the US in such a light. His behaviour as a soldier is equally important. Despite being set in 1969 at a time when civil rights in the USA were in upheaval, the film allows Moore to be oblivious to civil unrest. As leader of the battalion he treats each of his men as equals; there is no suggestion of racial tension. In fact, during a rally days before his unit departs for Vietnam, he gives a speech that seems to overemphasize just how equal the army can be:

In the 7th cavalry we’ve got a captain from the Ukraine, another from Puerto Rico. We’ve got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics, Cherokee Indians, Jews and gentiles. All Americans. And here in the states, some men in this unit experience discrimination because of race or creed but for you and me now all that is gone. We’re moving into the valley of the shadow of death where you will watch the back of the man next to you as he will watch yours and you won’t care what color he is.

In the army, it seems, discrimination does not exist. Moore presents participation in the military as a way to escape prejudice and as a way to enjoy brotherhood with other citizens. Yet despite his claims that there are no distinctions between soldiers, he only has personal conversations with Caucasian soldiers. Nonetheless, his behaviour certainly indicates an intentional positioning of the military as a welcoming and conflict-free institution.

Moore is also shown to be a caring and respectful leader. During the same rally speech he tells his men that he cannot promise that they will all come home alive. But he swears “before you and Almighty God that when we go into battle I will be the first to step onto the field and I will be the last to step off and I will leave no one behind, dead or

alive. We will all come home together, so help me God.” He recognizes the reality of war and the probable casualties that will result yet promises to share the experience and to put himself in the same danger. Additionally, Moore takes on a mentorship role with Geoghehan, and when the latter is killed in battle he writes a letter to Geoghehan’s wife thanking her for her sacrifice and telling her that her husband was a true hero. He also writes a letter to the wife of a young North Vietnamese soldier whom he kills during the battle. This parallelism shows that he is respectful of soldiers in general while consequently obscuring the actual relationship that existed between the two countries, as well as overt American racism towards Vietnam.

Moore’s behaviour on the battlefield is not the only qualifier for his positioning as the ideal military hero—his academic prowess is also a focus. During an early scene two soldiers stand across the street watching Moore carrying armloads of books into his new home. One comments on his background, and divulges that he has a master’s degree in international relations from Harvard. This comment provides Moore (and his subsequent actions) with an ideological legitimacy, suggesting that as an educated American he is unbiased and grounded in his views of other nations. On one occasion Moore studies a book about the French conflict in North Vietnam. He makes a list of the reasons the French failed in battle, identifying these reasons as: “did not know the terrain, poor intelligence, underestimated the enemy.” This list is less a summary of what the French did wrong and more a summary of what the Americans plan to do right. The fact that the American military will make the same mistakes is never addressed and despite researching the potential strategic blunders Moore never questions his superiors when he and his troops are sent into a valley that they did not know, against an enemy that they

severely underestimated. While his education may ultimately reveal flaws within the ideological constructs of a “perfect” American soldier, the film’s intent in its portrayal is clear. Moore is established as more than a soldier—he is well educated, intelligent, family-oriented, Christian and an independent thinker; all qualities of the imaginary American soldier that seems to be perpetuated by Bush and his administration in the wake of 11 September.

The heroes in *We Were Soldiers* can be positioned in such a virtuous light because they exist in an American landscape that is void of economic, political or class-based conflict. This is evidenced in both the soldiers’ lives as well as their families’ lives. Each soldier leads a comfortable life with his family on the base. Their houses are nearly identical and are lined up on a long tree-lined street. Each house has a perfectly manicured lawn. The wives and family members are all very conservative: the wives wear long tailored skirts and crisp long-sleeved blouses in neutral colours and the children are exceedingly well behaved. This is especially true of Moore’s children. Although they have just moved to the base, they are shown laughing and singing upon arrival and never protest the move. They seem to slip into the new environment with ease.

As mentioned above, the soldiers’ wives all wear conservative clothing, and this certainly reflects their attitudes towards the war. The film neglects to include any reference to anti-Vietnam protests and not a single character utters a word of disapproval or expresses any rebellion against the status quo. Even the wives accept their fates as widows and resolve to be proud that their husbands fought for their country. In fact, they seem happy to let their husbands fight to improve conditions in a foreign country, even

when their own country is riddled with problems. When several new families arrive on the base Moore's wife Julie invites them into her home to discuss the best places to buy groceries and to do laundry. One young wife named Catherine asks if there is a place on the base to wash her coloured laundry, because there is a sign on the Laundromat in town that says "Whites Only". Julie corrects her mistake and apologizes to Alma, the one and only African American wife. Catherine responds by saying, "That's awful. Your husband is wearing the uniform of a country that allows a place to say that his laundry is not good enough, when he could die...I'm sorry." Rather than agreeing, the Alma simply says, "That's alright. I know what my husband is fighting for and that's why I can smile. My husband will never ask for respect and he'll give respect to no man who hasn't earned it. The rest of his family's the same way. And anybody who doesn't respect that can keep his damn washing machine." The wives all laugh; it seems that in the army tolerance is a natural trait and racism is a foreign concept. The fact that the only place where racism exists in the film is outside the base in "the town" is especially significant, since the film seems to completely deny strife and hostility within the army itself.

Additionally, the film simplifies the American public protests regarding the Vietnam War conflict and downplays any hostility that soldiers may have felt towards their government for engaging in the Vietnam conflict. Galloway finishes his narration by describing the soldiers' return to the United States, and the film portrays a veteran's hospital with one soldier pushing another in a wheelchair down the hallway. Galloway's voice-over says, "There were no bands, no flags, no honour guards to welcome them home. They went to war because their country ordered them to, but in the end they fought not for their country or their flag—they fought for each other." It is interesting to note

that Galloway names “their country” as the instigator of the war, rather than “their government” and that while he recognizes that the soldiers were not welcomed home, he does not identify the reasons why the public were hesitant to celebrate their return. By presenting this tumultuous time in American society in such a positive way, the film is able to portray the US military hero is shown as exceedingly “good.” After all, he has been birthed from a constructed community that lacks strife. By neglecting to mention any conflict at home, the film both denies and reveals an American society that is too good to be true. This fantasy landscape does not allow the hero to question his role as defender—after all, the America where he lives is so valiant that his choice is clear and simple. Even when the hero’s participation in the military results in his death, he does not waver in his support of the cause. When a bullet strikes Second Lieutenant Henry Herrick, an aggressive and enthusiastically patriotic soldier, he rolls onto his back and simply says, “I’m glad I could die for my country.” He is not angered that poor planning and reconnaissance led to his useless death, but rather is happy to once more link his own death to patriotism and defense of his country.

The unrealistic portrayal of US history continues onto the battlefield. Each of the Vietnam War heroes in *We Were Soldiers* appear as part of what scholar John Storey calls “the inverted firepower syndrome, in which the US’s techno-military advantage is inverted.” Instead of witnessing “the massive destructive power of the American military force,” the film focuses on this small group of individuals who are engaged in a battle with the North Vietnamese in which the Americans seem outnumbered and even victimized (Storey 2003, 109). The film presents a false version of the Vietnam War that

does not include the USA's technical advantage or debilitating air strikes. It suggests that American soldiers had a higher casualty rate, but it also positions the USA as a victim.

In the wake of 11 September the US government and the American media acted out a similar re-imagining of history. Rather than glossing over the Vietnam War, however, these voices simply neglected to mention it at all. Marcia Landy summarizes this effort in her essay, "America Under Attack: Pearl Harbour, 9/11 and History in the Media." She writes,

One finds in relation to the media coverage of September 11 [...] the reiteration of innocence violated, the language of trauma, and the expression of the need for retaliation against a faceless enemy who has come to resemble earlier evildoers in the saga of Western civilization against barbarism. Particularly striking, since history and memory are so central to the language of national unity as reported on television and in the newspapers, is the absence of references to the Vietnam War, as if that event were expunged from American history. In other words, America failed to produce the decisive battle in Vietnam and the decisive victory in Iraq during the Gulf War of the early 1990s. With the elimination of reference to Vietnam and the Gulf War, the numerous parallels to Pearl Harbor and victory in World War II have resurrected the sense of a divine mission. Equally striking in the evocation of memories of Pearl Harbor is the absence of questions about and critical commentary on the changed role of U.S. global politics. (Landy, 86)

We Were Soldiers obviously does not go to such extremes, given that the Vietnam War is the subject of the narrative. Like many films about that war, it avoids historical specificity and represses politically sensitive issues both on the battlefield and the home front through the individualization of the Vietnam experience and a complete lack of self-analysis. In doing so, it attempts to rewrite history to replace a legacy of lies, errors, impotence and defeat with a story of self-congratulatory heroic sacrifice. It also neglects to include any reference to the political decisions made by senior government officials, preferring instead to focus on the soldiers' battles. In this way, and particularly through

the film's choice of battle (and as this chapter will describe later, the attitudes of the opposing forces), history is rewritten in a way that can justify the present.

Another war film retells a more recent historic military event. *Behind Enemy Lines*, a film released in 2001, tells the story of navy navigator Chris Burnett, played by Owen Wilson, who is shot down in Bosnia, and the heroic efforts of Admiral Leslie McMahon Reigart, played by Gene Hackman, to rescue him. Based on the much publicized story of US Air Force F-16 pilot Scott O'Grady who experienced a similar incident when he ejected amidst anti-aircraft fire from Bosnian Serb forces on June 2, 1995, the film brings a recent nation-wide war experience to the present.

The rescue of an American pilot shot down during a peacekeeping mission was viewed as such a positive narrative by the studio that the film's release was fast-tracked by two months to capitalize on the wave of patriotism that emerged after 11 September (Robb 2004). Released in April 2002, the film was lauded by Rita Kempley of *The Washington Post*, who wrote, "The thriller couldn't be better suited to the times. With patriotism running at an all-time high, cheering crowds are sure to drown out spoilsports who find fault with the tired scribbling of Zac Penn (*Last Action Hero*) and David Veloz (*Natural Born Killers*) or the formulaic characters they have created" (Kempley 2002).

According to David Robb, the military was quick to realize the recruiting value of *Behind Enemy Lines*. The film's producer, John Davis, describes the film as "*Top Gun* meets *The Fugitive*." Davis suggests,

Films like *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Top Gun* have extraordinary recruiting value for the military....you create these images and young men pick them up and they become important images for them. They want to imitate them...the movie should do for them what they thought it would: to show a brand-new generation that being a pilot is really fantastic, unless you get shot down. This isn't your dad's military. This is what it's like today. There are a tremendous number of high-tech

elements that go into how warfare is waged today. The movie is state-of-the-art. I think in this computer age, it's hard not to look at this movie, and at the end of the day, find this an exciting, heroic life-challenge." (Robb, 181)

Davis' comments are hardly surprising considering the military recruitment material that began to be shown on television and in cinemas in the wake of the events of 11 September. Thirty-second recruitment advertisements for the US Navy and US Army were made up of a rapid succession of shots showing soldiers rappelling out of helicopters, running through woods with guns and performing tasks on state-of-the-art computer monitors. Each of these advertisements recalled scenes from war films from the last decade, and the advertisements were accompanied by music that would fit right into a Tom Cruise action film. According to these advertisements, life in the military is akin to a two-hour action movie—certainly this is an appealing opportunity considering heroes in action films seem to experience exiting adventures and emerge victorious.

Davis admits that in order to emulate this lifestyle on screen in *Behind Enemy Lines*, the military requested numerous script changes. "They are always sensitive about the way the military is portrayed, about the correctness of language, about how behavior fits an officer's behavior," he says. "You just have to go and negotiate it. There were a lot of language changes, the way people spoke, certain changes about how the chain of command works. They don't want you to embarrass the military if you're going to use their stuff" (182). It certainly seems like the military wishes to create a particular image of a life in service: one that includes a hero who demonstrates independence and creative thinking while ultimately proving himself as a dedicated team player. While *The Great Raid* and *We Were Soldiers* focus on military units acting together in actual strategic battle situations, *Behind Enemy Lines* shows a solitary individual who must demonstrate

intelligence, creativity and a sense of honour while alone in hostile territory. Chris Burnett fills this role.

Burnett is introduced as a top-notch navy pilot; his superior officer describes him as having “great potential” and his flight partner Stackhouse describes a time that he “flew upside down.” With blond hair, blue eyes and a slender build, Burnett is shown as an all-American boy next door. He is friendly and affable but he is also shown as a joker. At the beginning of the film Burnett and his partner Stackhouse are stationed on a navy air carrier and are about to head out on a reconnaissance mission through Bosnia. It is four days before NATO has promised to withdraw its forces from the area. Mere seconds before they take off their mission is cancelled. The pair head to the mess hall and speak with a marine, who asks them what they are doing. Burnett replies with a scoff, “What are we doing? What we’re doing here is eating Jello.” This casual remark not only positions Burnett as carefree and charmingly sarcastic, but it also infantilises the very real conflict that the US military was involved in at the time and consequently denies a mature analysis of the political situation. Burnett does not seem to be aware of why his government is involved in the crisis and therefore the audience is also denied access to this complicated information. Further, this comment reveals that Burnett doesn’t take his job seriously and suggests that he has not seen enough excitement and thinks that the days of US military glory are long gone. In fact, he speaks this opinion very clearly when he says to the marine, “Everybody thinks they’re gonna get the chance to punch some nazi in the face at Normandy, and those days are long over. They’re long gone. I used to think I was going to get a chance to do that. Now I realize I get to eat Jello.” Burnett is so jaded with his experience in the navy that he submits his letter of resignation to Admiral

Reigart, saying “Sir, I signed up to be a fighter pilot, not a cop. Certainly not a cop on a beat no one cares about.” He wants to see real action; if he can’t be engaged in a real military conflict then he is not interested in continuing his career as an officer. He goes so far as to mock the US’ involvement in the Bosnia crisis, by saying “We’re not at war. We go out, we fly around and we come back. We’re not fighting, we’re watching. At least give me a fight I can understand. [This war] is like a joke.” He is upset because the US is involved in the Bosnian/Serbian conflict in a peacekeeping capacity and is not clearly fighting a defined enemy. Burnett is therefore prepared to abandon a promising career in the military rather than continue in what he sees as a stagnant career. He joined the navy in order to step into the “hero” role he expected from old war movies, and the reality of life in the modern American military has disappointed him. It is only when he is thrust into a real and dangerous war situation that he finds satisfaction as an American military hero.

After submitting his resignation to Admiral Reigart, Burnett is scheduled for a Christmas Day reconnaissance mission. It is to be his final mission before he retires from service. He and Stackhouse take off successfully and follow their prescribed flight plan, but find nothing out of the ordinary. Stackhouse comments that this is “yet another useful joyride at the expense of mere millions to the US taxpayers,” so Burnett suggests flying into the demilitarized zone to check out an unusual signature on his scanner. Although he is sceptical, Stackhouse agrees and they do a flyover and quickly discover something amiss—they locate a group of Serbian soldiers who are burying bodies in mass graves and photograph the site using new recording technology located at the bottom of their plane. Unfortunately they are spotted and shot down in enemy territory. Stackhouse is

injured so Burnett leaves him behind to take a radio to higher ground and try to contact Reigart back on the carrier. Within moments, Stackhouse is captured and executed by Serbian troupes. Burnett then falls into a fast-paced race through the Bosnian countryside to reach a rendezvous point.

It is through this dangerous ordeal that Burnett demonstrates several positive characteristics that serve to qualify him as an ideal soldier. He shows great intelligence, successfully gains vengeance for his partner's death and strives to protect the innocent. The first of these qualities is demonstrated on several occasions. When an entire Serbian army unit is tracking Burnett, he is able to escape by diving into a mass burial site. He hides in the mud and pulls a body over himself, thereby managing to camouflage himself and avoid detection. Later, he once again hides from his pursuers by switching uniforms with a Serbian soldier. At another point he props a glove over the ledge of a piece of machinery so that it appears that he is crouched behind it. When his enemy comes into the open to fire at him, he jumps up from his hiding place under a snow bank to take the Serbian by surprise. This creative, intelligent thinking differentiates him from the faceless Serbian soldiers and qualifies the American military as an institution that trains its men and women to negotiate even the most dangerous situations by themselves. Burnett acts completely independently; he is very different than the heroes in *We Were Soldiers* and *The Great Raid* who were dependent on each other to carry out military missions. Instead, Burnett symbolises an independent hero who is capable of carrying the weight of a situation on his shoulders alone. Together, these heroes represent the idealized soldier—one who works well as part of a team and can take orders, but who is also able to think rationally and independently when necessary.

Burnett is also shown to be a capable fighter. In fact, his skills on the battlefield allow him to seek revenge for his partner's execution. Stackhouse's executioner follows Burnett throughout the entire film and finally catches up to him at the top of a rocky outcrop where Burnett's plane had dropped the recording of the mass burial site. The two men engage in hand-to-hand combat. While Burnett does not begin shooting until he is shot at, he is a sharp shooter and delivers three shots to the antagonist's chest before punching him and delivering the final blow. He is thereby shown to be violent only if provoked.

A third characteristic that Burnett demonstrates is his desire to protect the innocent. After encountering a truckload of civilians, he meets a group of villagers who are the survivors of the Serbians' earlier massacre. When the Serbians follow him into the village he tries to tell the villagers to hide. They ignore him and are shot by the Serbians. Later, Burnett takes a young surviving villager under his wing and intends to have him rescued at the rendezvous point. His actions speak to his caring nature; he later tells the same young villager to stay away from him, because it will "be safer." Not only does Burnett protect the innocent, but "the innocent" are shown to embrace his help. When he first encounters the civilians, he stops their red pickup truck on a country road. The driver, who is dressed like Elvis and, who is listening to American rock and roll, recognizes Burnett and agrees to give him a ride into the closest town. One of the passengers shows great enthusiasm for the USA. He recognizes Burnett's nine millimetre and his first words are, "You American? Nine millimetre?" He is not disturbed by America's connection to firearms; he is holding a semi automatic weapon and is already familiar with violence. When Burnett asks for water, the passenger, who is wearing an

Ice-T t-shirt and who professes an appreciation for American rap music and hip-hop, offers him a Coca-cola. The American presence is therefore justified and embraced by the people who it is affecting—America is positioned as a respected and even emulated nation in the eyes of foreign citizens.

Of course, the historical relationship between the US and the region is much more complicated. Four years after contributing to NATO's 'Operation Deliberate Force' intervention in the Bosnian War in 1995, the United States became involved in the Kosovo conflict. In 1998, when the burgeoning conflict between Kosovo's Serbian and Albanian populations began to be reported heavily in the US, NATO, and consequently the United States, seemed eager to intervene. In early 1999 the conflict seemed to culminate with the Racak incident between the Kosovo Liberation Army (led by Albanians) and Serbian security forces. This event led to official NATO intervention, as the organization issued a statement suggesting that both sides should cease-fire or Yugoslavia would be bombed. NATO then composed the Rambouillet Accord, which includes a set of non-negotiable principles that the Serbian delegation refused to sign due to the access rights proposed for the NATO peacekeeping force, which it described as "occupation." On March 24, shortly after the Rambouillet Accord failure, the NATO bombing began. The campaign lasted until June 11 and resulted in between 1,200 and 5,700 civilian deaths.

Tellingly, NATO did not have the backing of the UN to use force in Yugoslavia, but justified its intervention by comparing Kosovo to the Holocaust. In fact, it was the US government in particular who created that comparison, with President Clinton comparing the government of Serbia to the Nazis (Johnstone, 15). Some critics argue that the US

saw Kosovo as an opportunity to demonstrate their military force. Essayist Diana Johnstone, who has written extensively on the topic of the Kosovo war, suggests that in the wake of the Cold War, the US needed a new enemy to fight. She writes, "The notion that the end of the Cold War had saved the world from the danger of war, that democracy was victorious, and that only a little more effort was needed to rid the world of 'evil' distorted the ability to understand what was really happening in Yugoslavia and what was really at stake" (13). She goes on to describe the US and NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as a turning point in the expansion of US military hegemony and claims:

For the first time, NATO abandoned its defensive posture and attacked a country that posed no threat to its member states, outside the NATO treaty area, and without seeking UN Security Council authorization. International law was circumvented in the name of an alleged higher moral imperative. A precedent was set. When the United States subsequently arrogated the right to bomb and invade Afghanistan on moral grounds, its NATO allies could only meekly offer to tag along. In a world with no more legal barriers to might proclaiming itself right, there was nothing to stop a U.S. president from using military force to crush every conceivable adversary. (Johnstone, 2)

According to Johnstone, the US/NATO intervention in the Kosovo conflict set a precedent for US military action against other non-compliant nations. The risks of failing to comply with US-imposed sanctions have been clearly highlighted in the night fireworks over Baghdad in 1991, Belgrade in 1999 and most recently, over Baghdad in 2003 (265).

There is no indication that US involvement in the region had ever been anything but benevolent in *Behind Enemy Lines*. Despite the fact that the film focuses on the Bosnian War rather than the Kosovo War, the renegotiation of US responsibility and intervention is clear. The film attempts to position the USA as a completely altruistic force without questionable motives. This is achieved mostly through Burnett's

characterization, but is also a result of the portrayal of senior military personnel. In *Behind Enemy Lines* the American decision makers are just as valiant as the soldiers and are willing to fight for their men. One man serves as Burnett's superior officer: Admiral Reigart. Reigart is tough but is shown to be a caring and fatherly type. He pushes Burnett to do better, refuses to accept his resignation on the spot, calls him by his first name over a radio transmission and refers to him on several occasions as "my boy." He appears to be personally invested in each individual soldier under his command. This is further demonstrated when Reigart learns that Burnett's plane has crashed in dangerous territory; he immediately tries to set up a rendezvous. However, Admiral Piquet, a French NATO official, cancels his order. Piquet is concerned that flying into the demilitarized zone will affect the peace process, since NATO is days away from withdrawing its forces. He scoffs at Reigart's suggestion that NATO send a team to pick up Bennett, saying, "Americans! All you care about is your own damn pilots! What happens when the fighting starts again? Will American recommit its forces to stop a major war? No. You don't have any control over that little detail do you? You might [save] your man today but you [risk] the lives of thousands tomorrow." For Reigart the issue is much simpler, as he says to Piquet, "All I know is that the American people want their pilot back." Reigart is willing to defy NATO orders for the sake of a single pilot's life, yet this is not shown as a negative. Instead his decision leads to the recovery of a disc that contains proof that Serbian troops had been committing war atrocities. In this one exchange NATO is shown to be incapable of competently judging whether the US should engage in a wartime activity—NATO's suggestion not to interfere would have resulted in Burnett's death and a lack of justice for the executed civilians. Reigart is therefore shown to be a better judge

of appropriate wartime action than the NATO advisor and as a result, the US is shown to be the most trusted and truthful warrior on terrorism.

The timing of Piquet's challenge for the US to "commit its forces" certainly seems to be appropriate in consideration of America's invasion of Iraq post 11 September, which occurred despite United Nations suggestions to approach the conflict in a different manner. Scenarios like those presented in *Behind Enemy Lines* certainly serve to support US military action and encourage the public to trust military decisions even if they are dissuaded by other sources. The potentially hazardous consequences of such decisions are not addressed in *Behind Enemy Lines*. Although Burnett's suggestion to fly into the demilitarized zone leads to his partner's death, and although he later leads Serbian militants into a village where they kill numerous civilians, he is never faulted for his actions. Rather, he is celebrated as a hero by the military and by the press. The side effects of his dangerous behaviour are renegotiated into positive action; for instance the trip into the demilitarized zone leads to the destruction of a renegade Serbian military unit who were responsible for the execution of innocent women and children. It seems that one single free-thinking American trained in military tactics is all it takes to uncover and take down a barbarous military unit, and the side effect of war (in this case the death of Stackhouse and other innocent civilians) simply dissolve into the background. "The chance to punch some nazi in the face" apparently remains a realistic military experience for American soldiers. The enemy may have changed, but according to the hero's trajectory in *Behind Enemy Lines*, the opportunity to play the hero in a clear-cut battle is still a very real possibility.

In fact, even the “clear-cut” battle is defined in this film. In a conversation early in the film, Burnett and a marine discuss the military’s peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia. While Burnett wants to take immediate action, the marine has a more diplomatic viewpoint, saying, “You don’t get to pick your fight. It comes to you.” In this one sentence the US military is set up as a defender of worlds—a nation that doesn’t start battles on its own behalf but who steps in to solve other nations’ problems. The US is not a perpetrator of war; it is established as a defender of innocents.

In all three of the films analyzed above, the portrayal of American military forces as just and valiant is achieved in part through the binary positioning of the Other. The heroes’ goodness is created in direct relation to the otherness of the nation or military force against which the American forces are fighting. The portrayal of Otherness does much to support the binaries set up by Bush in his September 20, 2001 speech, where he referred to American citizens as “decent, loving and giving people” and described the terrorists as “murderers...whose directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans” (Address to a Joint Session of Congress 2001, 3). The films thereby serve to continue the political demonology of other foreign powers that has been described by Michael Rogin and was previously discussed in chapter one. By reducing entire nations into caricatures of demonized Others, the films discussed in this chapter help to position America as a saviour of worlds. How is this Otherness achieved?

Unlike the brutality used to describe the Japanese forces in *The Great Raid*, the Other in *We Were Soldiers* is presented in a much softer light. Nonetheless, the North Vietnamese Army is still presented as vastly different from their American counterparts. While the first forty minutes of the film chronicle the lives of Hal Moore and his men as

they prepare to depart for Vietnam, the only introduction to the North Vietnamese Army that the viewer receives before the actual battle is at the very beginning of the film. Once again, a narrator describes America's history in Vietnam, and describes an event in June 1954, when "a French mobile group went hunting in the same central highlands of Vietnam where we would go eleven years later." This same French Army is seen marching through a dry forest, and a trumpet sounds. The French captain mutters "Fucking heat, fucking grass, fucking country," and is promptly shot in the head by an unseen sniper. The North Vietnamese Army quickly surrounds them and shoots most of the French men, then rounds up the survivors. The captain of the Vietnamese Army is filmed from a low angle and picks up a French bugle that has been dropped by one of the French soldiers. Another soldier asks, "Do we take prisoners?" and the captain answers, "No, kill all they send and they will stop coming." The North Vietnamese are shown to be a force that needed to be stopped and American involvement in Vietnam is partly justified by the fact that the French Army is presented as useless. In fact, in an early scene two American generals discuss American participation in Vietnam, saying "We wouldn't be there if they hadn't already beaten the French Army." The American military is therefore positioned as a reluctant participant in a war that could not be remedied by any other world power. In this instance, Otherness is not uniquely used to define a foreign Other whose values and behaviour are contrasted to those of the American people, but is rather used to demonstrate the American military's superiority over another military force and as justification for USA's intervention in Vietnam. This is particularly interesting when considering the Bush administration's antagonism towards European and United Nations hesitancy to invade Iraq in 2003.

Although the film's introduction to the North Vietnamese does show the army using violence, the film strives to present these soldiers as men rather than monstrous Others. The narrative includes a North Vietnamese soldier who is shown carrying a photograph of his wife and infant. The reference to his family helps to humanize him. Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Huu An of the North Vietnamese Army is also presented in a generally positive light. Although he is not introduced until 46 minutes into the film and although he is featured almost entirely underground in the cave-like system his army has set up, he is shown as a caring and strategic leader. After the first day of fighting he gathers his soldiers around him. The lighting is dark and the soldiers are cramped in the low-ceilinged space, but Huu An and his men are not shown to be animals. Instead, he congratulates them on their efforts, saying, "We fought well today...for the courage of those who have died and those who are about to die I am grateful." Later, after most of his men have been killed and the Americans have left the battlefield, Huu An emerges from his underground tunnel and comes across a small American flag that had been tucked into a tree trunk by Moore. He picks it up, surveys the battlefield and says, "Such a tragedy. They will think this was their victory. So this will become an American war. And the end will be the same, except for the numbers who will die before we get there." He then places the flag back in the tree and walks away. At this moment Huu An is shown to respect the Americans despite the mutual massacre that has occurred. As a result, his character is humanized, but only through his respect for the US army's war tactics. By having the enemy show admiration for the American military, the film justifies future military action like the invasion of Iraq after 11 September. The Other here is therefore contained by its similarities to the American people and not by its

differences. In this way the blame and anxiety surrounding the Vietnam conflict is taken away from the American government.

A third Other is presented in *Behind Enemy Lines*. This Other is the Serbian soldier and there is no blurring of Otherness here. Because the Scott O'Grady incident is still fresh in the minds of many Americans, and because the Serbian insurgents have already been presented in a particular way by the mass media during the Serbia/Croatia conflict, the narratives does not miss a chance to showcase this Other's brutality. The Serbian base is full of grey concrete windowless corridors that are shot from a low angle and are dimly lit. In the woods surrounding the base there is no sunlight, and this lack of bright light continues throughout the film. The environment is barren and filthy, and thereby portrays an ominous sentiment that reflects the characters that call it home. In many ways, in fact, this setting evokes the description used by Bush to define Al Qaeda operatives, as animals "burrowing deeper into caves" in a televised speech that was given on October 7, 2001. In both cases, the Other is viewed as subhuman, dirty and uncivilized.

The Serbian insurgents are first introduced after the plane lands in a field. Burnett leaves his pilot behind to get to higher land and radio for help, when the Serbian insurgents approach, shoot recklessly into the air, stand on Stackhouse's injured leg, laugh at the fact that he is scared, and then shoot him point-blank in the back of the head after asking him to stand. In this one short scene the Serbians are shown to be unnecessarily cruel, but the film goes a step further by also showing them to be barbaric towards their fellow countrymen. In flashback, the film reveals that the Serbians had previously loaded women and children from a nearby village into buses, taken them into

a field, and executed them. This willingness to murder innocent civilians emphasizes a definite cruelty that cannot be questioned.

The insurgents' Otherness is further supported in their costuming. Some wear facemasks and camouflage suits while the lead insurgent wears an Adidas-style tracksuit. This tracksuit style of dress was popular in North America in the 1970's and reveals that, while this man may have been attempting to emulate American style, he is several decades too late. This results in his portrayal as a disjointed and disconcerting figure, since his subsequent brutality stands in sharp contrast to the hegemonic American values; he may physically resemble an American but he is an animal and must be stopped. In fact, at one point one of the insurgents accidentally stands on the pin of a mine and asks the leader in the tracksuit to help him. Rather than show compassion or brotherhood he simply scoffs and walks away. This lack of caring dehumanizes the Other and portrays the insurgents as monstrous. Once again, there is no historical positioning of the conflict itself so this 'other's' actions are shown as random and sadistic. In simple terms: they must be stopped and American military intervention is the solution.

The Other in each of these films serves different purposes but regardless of how these characters are framed, the result is to sway viewer support toward the American protagonists' actions. These Others do not need to be Arab in order to be connected to the events of 11 September. Their nationalities and religions are not as important as the fact that they are *not American* and they are threats to the world at large. As such, these Others serve as surrogate Arabs in a post 11 September world; they are descendents of the Arab Other described by Jack Shaheen: brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerns, especially

Christians and Jews” (Shaheen 2001, 2). Any conflicts that they may create or be embroiled in are remedied by the presence of American military forces. This ability to fix all ills positions the USA as a necessary and successful problem-solver on the world stage and it may be argued that this perspective encourages public support of further US military interventions around the globe. In fact, Bush’s government has used a similar strategy to sway public opinion towards supporting military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. In his September 14 speech he says,

Our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life. Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory....History has called our nation into action. History has placed a great challenge before us: Will America—with our unique position and power—blink in the face of terror, or will we lead to a freer, more civilized world? There's only one answer: This great country will lead the world to safety, security, peace and freedom. (State of the Union Address, 8)

According to Bush, and according to the qualities demonstrated by the protagonists and antagonists in the films described above, the USA is responsible for overseeing the entire world’s “freedom”. This is accomplished by denying the historical complexities that lead to conflict and by manipulating military narratives so that they portray a faultless and perfect America.

I do not argue that the heroes in *The Great Raid*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Behind Enemy Lines* are personally soldiers for the government of a post 11 September America but that their actions and narratives encourage public support of military action against Afghanistan and Iraq in the weeks and years following 11 September 2001 by virtue of pure simplicity. The three films cover important turning points in American military

history, including a successful raid, a battle that was won through brotherhood, and an escape that succeeded through its protagonist's sheer individuality and determination. Each war film hero shows individuality but is ultimately very similar to his counterparts: he is a hero who is guaranteed adventure, camaraderie and the chance to defend a country that is in the complete right.

The soldiers of each of the three films are either lining up for a piece of this American dream or are willing to die to protect others' rights to this same dream. None are wanting for money, and many (especially in *We Were Soldiers*) have a healthy family unit. Almost exclusively, these military heroes demonstrate valour and are celebrated for serving their country. The films serve to re-remember American military history to show one that honours and remembers veterans. These war heroes are all valiant and humanistic; there is no unethical behaviour in the military; in fact, it is portrayed as a stalwart unit. The only dramas are a result of a foreign intruder. No characters stop to evaluate the actual state of the American dream, yet they are prepared to defend it without question. By revisiting past battles and portraying the actions of American soldiers (and in turn the decision makers behind the scenes) in a positive light, these films deny public discourse on the wisdom of current war efforts.

Several of the films discussed in this chapter as well as in chapter six were under production or planned before the events of 11 September 2001. As mentioned earlier, *Behind Enemy Lines* was originally intended for release in 2001 and *We Were Soldiers* was in pre-production at the time of the attacks. These films were not developed as a result of the November 11 meeting between Jack Valenti, Karl Rove and the heads of the major Hollywood studios; nonetheless, they are part of the cultural legacy of that event,

and the one that spawned it. Their eventual releases, their shaping through government assistance, and the overtly patriotic messages they contain have nurtured the escalation of American militarism in coordination with the Bush administration speeches, and the Bush speeches have in turn echoed the heroic notions put forth in these films and their predecessors. The symbiotic relationship between these two systems has been intentionally developed; the ideological expressions of the films themselves are a side effect of a long-standing link. As independent products, these films are popular entertainment. As components of a larger system, however, they support a particular governmental angle by replicating a false history and thereby denying the multitude of voices that should create the fabric of that history. One universal truth is presented in place of multiple voices.

In the case of the war films under consideration here, this results in a viewing public that epitomizes the American military hero and accepts these films' manufactured history without question. The heroes and their journeys are arguably meant to promote a sense of pride in American military history and the films certainly achieve this. By framing historical military events in a particular way and by providing nostalgic heroes to lead the viewer through the narrative (especially in Moore of *We Were Soldiers*), the films simulate an American military history that is carefully sculpted, and locate this history within a perfect past. The end result is the creation of war films that replace lived reality: in these narratives the American war hero trusts his superiors, is always fair, and is eternally in the right. His battles are just, and his actions are true. Mucci, Burnett and Moore are each citizens in this constructed reality. The details of the historical consequences and contributing factors surrounding the events of the Vietnam war, the

Scott O'Grady incident and the raid on Cabanatuan are thereby replaced with the singular narratives of Moore, Burnett and Mucci. As mentioned previously in this chapter, this careful renegotiation has been achieved before. Douglas Kellner (1995) speaks to the importance of film in nurturing a "military mindset" during the Reagan and Bush Senior administrations (Kellner 1995, 75). In discussing the aggressive military policies of the Reagan era, Kellner suggests that Hollywood film helped to mobilize public support for military intervention in the third world. He also suggests that a similar mobilization occurred when George Bush prepared America to engage in the Gulf war of the early nineties. He writes:

In a mass-mediated image culture, it is representations that help constitute an individual's view of the world, sense of personal identity and gender, playing out of style and lifestyle, and socio-political thought and action. Ideology is thus as much a process of representation, figure, image and rhetoric as it is of discourse and ideas. Moreover, it is through the establishment of a set of representations that a hegemonic political ideology is established, such as the New Right conservatism. Representations thus transcode political discourses and in turn mobilize sentiment, affection, perception, and assent toward specific positions, such as the need for male warriors to protect and redeem society. (60)

While Kellner discusses ideology in relation to films like *Iron Eagle*, *Rambo II* and *Top Gun*, it is clear that these strategies are not limited to Reagan and Bush Senior. *We Were Soldiers*, *The Great Raid*, and *Behind Enemy Lines* are equally saturated in a clear right wing agenda. These films perpetuate a conservative ideology dictated by the George W. Bush administration; just as Reagan and George W. Bush share a language in their speeches, they share a method of distributing that message as a means to fuel their unique wars: the method of film. At the same time, these public figures use language that refers back to the war and action films that are part of the nation's cultural history—Bush references the legend of the American cowboy in many of his speeches (by suggesting

that the enemies are wanted “dead or alive”) and visually referred to the iconography of *Top Gun* when he announced the end of major conflict in Iraq by landing on a US Navy air craft carrier dressed in a pilot flight suit. Reagan had appropriated the film hero in one of his speeches, when, in response to the 1985 Lebanon hostage crisis, he announced “I Saw Rambo last night. Now I know what to do the next time this happens” (Rogin, 7). The public speakers of myth draw from popular films’ portrayal of the American film hero, and the films in turn support the portrayals presented by these speakers. This referential relationship works to strengthen the singular narrative of the American war hero, and to nurse a patriotic fervor that denies historical complexity and works to renegotiate cultural memory of the actual events.

Chapter Five: Justified Revenge—The Renegade Warrior

While the heroes in the mainstream Hollywood war films discussed in chapter four fit within a particular construct of the American hero post 11 September, they are not ideal in their ideological behaviour. These soldier heroes act as part of an organized and approved military unit. As a result, there is no opportunity for heroes like Mucci, Moore and Burnett to act independently to satisfy their own agendas; instead they trust their superiors (in this case, the government and military protocol) to make the major decisions that drive them to take action against foreign threats. While their behaviour promotes a sense of pride in the American military and admiration for the honest, good-hearted men that appear to populate these military units, these military heroes do not provide the audience with any cathartic violence. That is not to say, however, that American mainstream films post 11 September are lacking in narratives that provide the opportunity for heroes (and therefore viewers) to embrace retaliatory violence. Films like *Collateral Damage* (Dir. Andrew Davis, 2002), *Man on Fire* (Dir. Tony Scott, 2004), and *The Punisher* (Dir. Jonathan Hensleigh, 2004) deliver heroes who react to definitive acts of terrorism against the United States with unbridled anger and vengeance. These heroes are not sheltered by governments who must make diplomacy-based decisions—they take acts of terror personally. These renegade heroes, in combination with the war heroes discussed in chapter four, jointly create the perfect conservative hero: one who can act as part of a government-sanctioned retaliation against terror, but who is also justified for taking vengeance into his own hands. Gordy Brewer of *Collateral Damage*, Frank Castle of *The Punisher* and Creasy of *Man on Fire* are each ordinary men wronged by an external enemy. Each hero takes it upon himself to exact vengeance upon a clearly

defined and demonized enemy, and in doing so demonstrates a skill for violence in the name of justice. These heroes share similar characteristics; each has previously served his country as a firefighter, policeman or soldier, and his ability to exact violence upon the enemy is intrinsically tied to his American-ness. As an American he is both able and entitled to destroy his enemy through force and without consequence; he is positioned as righteous. Several film critics criticized this troubling characteristic upon these films' release. Robert W. Butler of the *Kansas City Star* suggests that *Collateral Damage* justifies its hero's revenge by "painting an absurdly simplistic picture" of international terrorism," (Butler) while Walter Chaw of Film Freak Central writes that *Man on Fire* film "boils down to a white ultra-conservative Christian's medieval wet dream of world order and fiery justice" (Chaw).

Although their conflicts take place on different continents and in different environments, the protagonists in *Collateral Damage*, *Man on Fire* and *The Punisher* are reflections of the post 11 American spirit as defined by the current US government. I will perform an ideological analysis of each film in order to qualify the individual heroes' actions and environments as they relate to this projected spirit. I will also refer, when applicable, to past film heroes that were birthed from other conservative American political landscapes.

I will begin with an analysis of *Collateral Damage*, since it is the only of the three films under consideration here to have completed production at the time of the attacks in New York. The film was originally planned for an October 2001 release but producers chose to delay the release until February 2002 because they were aware that its terrorism subject matter was too similar to the events of 11 September. In his article "Representing

atrocities: From the Holocaust to September 11,” David Sterritt describes the circumstances surrounding the release of the film, and goes so far as to suggest that part of the reason *Collateral Damage* was held back until February 2002 from a planned October 2001 release date was not because of its plotline, which has a firefighter seek revenge on a Columbian drug lord who has killed his family, but because it was “too tame.” In fact, he reports that the film’s Manhattan premiere emphatically pushed the 11 September connection, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, who plays the film’s protagonist, sharing the red carpet with representatives for the Twin Towers Fund (Sterritt 2004, 66). Sterritt identifies an immediate post 11 September Hollywood appetite for films featuring a vigilante protagonist seeking revenge against a terrorist enterprise. The plot may not have been generated with the events of 11 September in mind, but the film seeks to rationalize violent behaviour against a foreign Other nonetheless.

The narrative of *Collateral Damage* focuses on Gordy Brewer, an American firefighter whose wife and young son are killed when a Columbian guerrilla leader bombs the Columbian consulate in Los Angeles. Although a Columbian government official and a CIA agent were the targets of the bombing, it is evident in the film that Brewer and his family are the true victims. Played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, Brewer is established as a traditional American hero in the film’s opening shots; the narrative opens as Brewer, dressed in his yellow fireman’s suit, is directing a unit of firefighters to evacuate a burning building. When a co-worker informs him that there are people left at the end of the hall, he speaks his first words: an enthusiastic “Come on guys—let’s do it!” He then makes a superhuman leap over an area of the hallway floor that has collapsed, finds a woman in the wreckage and gives her his mask as he leads her to

safety. This comic book-like behaviour serves a dual role: to infantilize the American public as requiring a saviour against external threats, and to position Brewer as an indestructible hero. In this first three minutes Brewer is also clearly positioned as a selfless individual since he is willing to risk his life as a firefighter and is not willing to stop until he has rescued all possible victims of a fire. As a firefighter he is linked to an American institution that is representative of heroism and is thereby portrayed as trustworthy and good.

The film further establishes Brewer as an iconic hero through the depiction of his home life. He is married to a blond nurse with delicate features and they have a son named Matty who is also fair-skinned and fair-haired. During an early scene, Brewer's wife Anne awakens in a brightly lit bedroom filled with photographs of their happy family. Their home is modern, clean and full of warm colours; this is clearly a happy home. The morning that Anne awakens she finds her husband and son giggling as they build an airplane out of a lego-like building kit. Brewer wears an LA firefighter shirt, further defining him as firefighter. There is no conflict in this home and no indication of financial struggle—life here appears indicative of a nuclear family. When this perfect American lifestyle is shattered by the deaths of his wife and son, Brewer is given legitimate cause to erupt in violence against the terrorists behind the bomb strike—after all, his wife and son were completely innocent. The film goes so far as to have Brewer witness the deaths of his family. He waves to them from across the street and senses something out of place just before the building explodes. In the aftermath of the explosion the film reveals the lego-like airplane next to the body of Brewer's son. This

event is therefore undeniably personal to Brewer, despite later claims by a terrorist sympathizer that the civilian deaths were accidental “collateral damage.”¹⁰

The film positions the attack as a personal because Brewer, and the viewer by extension, is familiar with the victims the incident is personal and even more vicious. The Columbian terrorist’s action is therefore separated from its intrinsic political motivation and the incident becomes an attack on American civilians and even the American lifestyle—all the more reason for Brewer, as an icon of American male heroism, to step in and deal with the intruders. Within the logic of the film, Brewer is granted the right to retaliate with equal violence; his nationality grants him the privilege of performing violence without being questioned.

Brewer seeks personal vengeance only after his government fails to provide him with justice. Immediately after the deaths of his family members Brewer asks the FBI what they will do to retaliate against the attack, and they respond that they plan to avoid any further conflict because of the fragile relationship between the USA and Columbia. The Secretary of State tells Brewer, “We must fight the temptation to make hasty policy decisions we may come to regret.” Brewer erupts after listening to a terrorist sympathizer responds to the bombing by referring to the deaths as collateral damage and is quickly contained. The lead FBI officer tells him that he “can’t take the law into [his] own hands.” Brewer then plays into the scenario that is repeated in hundreds of vigilante and cop movies, and immediately begins to prepare to do just that, saying, “If I don’t do it, it

¹⁰ It should be noted that this term became popularized during the first Gulf War and refers to “the unintentional damage or incidental damage affective facilities, equipment or personnel, occurring as a result of military actions directed against targeted enemy forces or facilities.” (USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide, 14). The term was widely used by US military spokespeople to defer attention away from civilian deaths caused by US military forces. Ironically, the film appropriates the term so that it refers to the accidental death of Americans at the hands of a terrorist. The film goes to great lengths to show the human suffering that results from these deaths, therefore positioning America as the victim once more and further denying the legacy of US violence that is traditionally associated with this term.

seems no one else will.” By presenting the American government as unwilling to engage in military action against an enemy, the film positions Brewer as legitimate in his desire to exact revenge his own way. Here, the government’s desire to maintain peace essentially prevents justice. Peace will not be possible for Brewer, however, until the terrorist who killed his family is dead. This is one ordinary citizen who seeks conflict abroad and who would welcome a violent resolution.

Of course, Brewer is hardly shown to be an “ordinary” citizen as evidenced by his actions while in Columbia. When he first arrives he attempts to travel by bus to the area where the terrorist group holds camp. Along the way the bus is stopped at a roadblock and the bus travelers are attacked by guerillas. Before fleeing into the woods Brewer assists two women and carries a child away from danger. Later, when being chased by guerillas he leaps from a waterfall to escape. On his way to discover the guerilla camp he comes across a cocaine production plant that is organized by the terrorists and infiltrates the plant by pretending to be a mechanic. Next he uses stray mechanical parts to create a makeshift trigger mechanism that successfully blows up the plant. He then makes a second bomb and nearly blows up the person he believes to be the head terrorist, who is also known as The Wolf. During a climactic battle scene back in the USA at the end of film, Brewer determines that the true terrorist is not The Wolf but in fact The Wolf’s wife Selana whom Brewer had befriended in Columbia (her characterization as Other will be discussed later in this chapter). While being led by the two terrorists down a corridor within an FBI building, Brewer accomplishes what no FBI or CIA officer had managed to do: defeat them both. He first breaks a gas main to cause a major explosion, then

throws Selena against a fuse panel to electrocute her and finally throws a fire axe at The Wolf, hitting him squarely in the chest.

While Brewer's skill with a fire axe can be attributed to his experience as a firefighter, Brewer's overall tactical and strategic skills are remarkable. He is never questioned for his ability and shows tremendous prowess at killing men with bare hands. It is therefore unsurprising that Brewer's illegal and renegade actions against a foreign terrorist unit are rewarded with adulation rather than legal action. In fact, upon killing The Wolf and Selena, Brewer receives the Medal of Freedom, which is described in the film as "the highest decoration a civilian can receive." His actions are hence legitimized; without his interception and willingness to take matters into his own hands the government would have not been able to destroy the terrorist cell.

Brewer is not the only American character motivated by "justice," but he is the only one whose actions are legitimized. His character's juxtaposition against a CIA operative named Brandt is important in this respect. From his first appearance after the bombing that kills Brewer's wife and son, Brandt is shown to be villainous. He is identified as one of the bombing's intended targets; he had been organizing a secret plan to attack the guerillas' camp and this was discovered by the terrorists. Brandt makes a plea to simply attack the camp, saying, "You cannot negotiate with terrorists! These guerillas don't want peace. All they want is to sell cocaine." Later, he refers to the guerillas as "animals." Eventually Brandt follows Brewer to Columbia and leads an attack force of CIA operatives into the camp where Brewer is being held. The operatives gun down innocent women and children; Brandt claims the CIA is there to rescue Brewer but his true motivation is to further his personal career. He is willing to use violence

without consideration of the consequences, telling Brewer that the civilian deaths are part of the price to pay and that he “fight[s] terrorists with terror.” Brandt is vilified because he targets all Columbian guerrillas rather than a particular individual. It seems that American violence on another nation is only legitimized if it is in reaction to a direct personal injustice. Not surprisingly, while Brewer’s actions do lead to civilian casualties, he is not directly responsible for them; they are caught in crossfire from their own countrymen. In this way Brewer’s reactionary action is endorsed; he knows who is responsible for his family’s death so he can avoid killing innocent civilians. Brewer has a specific purpose: to rid the world of a known terrorist. This personal vendetta has a striking similarity to the US government’s reaction to the attacks in New York. Just as Bush quickly announced his intention to hunt down Osama Bin Laden and later Saddam Hussein as a means to obliterate worldwide terror, Brewer targets The Wolf as the source of his tragedy. Just like the Bush administration Brewer does not analyze the impetus behind the attack or the political and economic conflict that led a terrorist unit to take action against the United States. The complexities of the situation are ignored to allow Brewer to seek vengeance upon a single man, without concern about how his actions will affect the civilians of Columbia. His outlook is nearly identical to the Bush administration’s decision to send troops into Afghanistan and later Iraq; under the cloak of vengeance against a defined enemy he can exact violence against all who cross his path, including civilians.

Brewer’s violent actions against Columbian characters are justified through the visual and ideological representation of the entire nation as Others. Most of the Columbian civilians wear dirty disheveled clothes and appear overheated and tired. They

are also shown to be violent and corrupt; the first civilian action that Brewer witnesses in Columbia occurs when his bus is stopped at an anti-guerilla roadblock and he is chased through the jungle on foot. The anti-guerrillas are trying to locate terrorists but carry machine guns and shoot at fellow civilians, thereby equating themselves with the terrorists. Several of the anti-guerillas are secretly working for CIA agent Brandt, so their loyalties are evidently fluid. The gun-carrying citizens are not the only ones who are painted in a negative light. As Brewer makes his way into a town near the guerilla camp he passes through a town that is holding a carnival. The streets are chaotic and lined with dirty coloured tents and cheap carts—this is certainly no Disneyland. At one point, a man walks through a crowd on stilts wearing a red papier maché devil head with horns and pointy teeth, and this image is accompanied by the sounds of screaming children coming from one of the festival rides. In this one scene the Colombian culture is reduced to caricature and is aligned with the anti-Christian devil. A scene that could have been portrayed as a joyful celebration is reworked so that it seems that even the ordinary village people are somehow corrupt. Later, as Brewer navigates through the crowd, two men on dirt bikes speed through the crowd and narrowly avoid hitting a woman and her young son. Moments after this, Brewer encounters the national police who try to restrain him for traveling through the country on a forged passport, and a gunfight erupts in the street between the police and several of The Wolf's men who are also in town to capture Brewer. The police and the terrorists alike readily shoot into the crowd. There is very little distinction between ordinary villagers and the corrupt lawmen and guerrillas; overall the Colombian people are shown to be without compassion and are essentially dehumanized into gun-crazy, chaotic animal mass.

Two non-Columbian characters further vilify the Columbian people. Before Brewer travels to Columbia he receives advice on how to travel inconspicuously from a friend who had spent two years with the American military in Columbia. He is very disparaging about the country, saying, "You can't even land in Columbia without a passport and it's a sure bet that you were on the restricted list five minutes after that bomb [that killed Brewer's wife and son] went off...let's say you did manage to get into the country without being kidnapped or killed. You'd never make it into the guerilla zone without a pass and they are sure as hell not going to give you one. It would take them about two seconds to realize you're not [who you say you are on your passport], then they'd pull your eyelids back up over your skull, shove your head up your ass and bowl you over a cliff." It is clear that this man, who has had experience in the country, does not think highly of the Columbian people.

A second character echoes this man's description a few moments later. Brewer encounters a Canadian man named Sean Armstrong when he is briefly thrown in jail. Armstrong, who has been arrested for public lewdness, is not above passing judgment on his host country, saying, "half the country wants to kidnap you, the other half wants to kill you." As a Canadian, Armstrong is shown to be inept and vile, and goes so far as to describe the Canadian role in world politics. He says, "The good thing about being Canadian is no one gives a shit about us. The desperados kill the guerillas, the guerillas kill the military, the peasants are caught in the middle and killed by everybody but we Canadians, flies on the wall." This comment is interesting given the American-Canadian relationship in the years after 11 September and Bush's less than complimentary view of his neighbours to the north. This view was demonstrated during Bush's September 20,

2001 speech when he thanked France, Germany, South Korea, Egypt, Australia, Africa and Latin America for their aid after 11 September, but never mentioned Canada, who had committed a multitude of resources towards aid. Bush also failed to acknowledge Canadian victims of the attacks, but focused instead on the “dozens of Pakistanis, more than 130 Israelis, more than 250 citizens of India, men and women from El Salvador, Iran, Mexico and Japan, and hundreds of British citizens” (JSC, September 20 2001) who died on 11 September. He then went on to identify Britain as America’s “truest friend”, a statement that caused a ruckus at the time. This hesitancy to identify Canada as kin and ally may be tied to Canada’s close association with the UN and to its long history as peacekeeper rather than warrior. Canada is not known for aggressive policy; compared to the US notion of might makes right, Canada does not make the grade.

This is certainly reflected in Armstrong’s character. Armstrong describes his country’s role as that of bystander, and an insect-like bystander at that. Brewer’s desire for action exists in sharp contrast to Armstrong’s slovenly characterization. He is shown to be a mostly useless individual and simply watches the terror in Columbia without interfering. Had *Collateral Damage* been written in the wake of 11 September the Armstrong character might be interpreted as an intentional jab at Canada’s hesitation to send troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. However even without this historical placement, the film’s portrayal of a Canadian speaks volumes about how the US perceives itself and its neighbour and the countries’ individual approaches to world politics. Punitive action is clearly preferred. Yet despite Armstrong’s negative qualities, he is nonetheless presented as an ally to Brewer since he is a follower and does not try to change Brewer’s mind

about his actions. He may be distasteful but he nonetheless serves to further the presentation of the Columbian people as Others.

Despite the clear dehumanization of the general Columbian public, the Otherness is most evident in the characterization of the film's two primary antagonists: a terrorist named Claudio (who is also known as The Wolf) and his wife Selena. They are politically motivated Columbian terrorists, although their country of origin is not as important as their clearly defined hatred of America and their vicious, sociopathic behaviour. This is achieved through The Wolf's environment and actions. His camp is located in the middle of the wild Columbian jungle and comprises makeshift tents, tire piles, old run down dirty buildings and dark hallways. This environment is sharply contrasted to the bright colourful rooms that made up the Brewer's home and likens The Wolf and his guerillas to animals. In fact, even his name suggests his animal nature. The Wolf's Otherness is further defined by his actions. From his first appearance The Wolf's actions reveal both his violence and his lack of humanity. On the morning of the bombing The Wolf dresses as a cop to plant the bomb outside the Columbian Consulate. Brewer sees him and tells The Wolf that he will be parking his car in front of the building for a moment as he needs to pick up his son, and The Wolf simply smiles at Brewer. During this short exchange The Wolf is alerted to the fact that Brewer's son is in the line of fire and yet does nothing to prevent the bomb from exploding. He also shows no remorse when the boy is killed, suggesting that he is not concerned with the deaths of children. By comparison, when Brewer is later given the opportunity to kill The Wolf with a bomb he hesitates when he sees The Wolf's wife and child approaching the bombsite. At that moment he remembers the faces of his own wife and child and differentiates himself

from The Wolf by choosing to save their lives rather than achieve his vendetta. The Wolf makes no such distinction; he is willing to be vicious. This cruelty comes through even more during an interaction with one of his men. When a guerilla soldier makes a bad decision, The Wolf demands that he be tied to a chair, his mouth forced open with a clamp, and then personally feeds him a venomous snake. He also openly criticizes America, saying "Americans hide behind family values, false ideals. They have forgotten the reality of war. Not like us." The Wolf does not respect the family unit—he is even willing to put his own adopted son in danger in order to pursue his cause. His Otherness is even further defined during a scene in which he taunts a captured Brewer. When Brewer calls him a coward, The Wolf challenges him, saying, "It seems we're both willing to kill for a cause, so what's the difference between you and I?" Brewer's response, "I'm just gonna kill YOU." The difference between these men is clear: The Wolf is painted as a drug dealing, American-hating terrorist who tortures his own countrymen and is willing to kill women and children, while Brewer is a family-loving, hard-working American hero who wants to rid the world of a single violent man.

The second major antagonist character established as an Other is Selena, The Wolf's wife. When Brewer first meets her she is shown to be a caring adoptive mother to a young boy named Mauro, and she strikes up a friendship with the hero. After The Wolf's henchmen attack Brewer she comes to his rescue and nurses him back to health. She tells him a story about her history with The Wolf and gains his trust, telling him that she does not want to be a part of the violence any longer. It is not until he escapes to America with Selena and her son that he realizes that she is the mastermind behind the entire initiative. Once he has escorted her into FBI headquarters, she plants a bomb that

she had hidden in her son's plastic dinosaur and then excuses herself to go to the washroom. She tries to take her son with her but he doesn't want to go with her so she leaves him behind, then begins to kill operatives as she makes her way out of the building. Seconds later, the dinosaur explodes. Selena's character is of particular interest because she is initially established as sympathetic. She is likeable, friendly and motherly, and yet this is a façade—her true nature is violent and calculating. Furthermore, her role as mother is shown to be a front, since she chooses to abandon Mauro in the FBI building rather than take him with her before the bomb explodes. Her own child is simply another pawn in her violent game. It seems that as a terrorist, her responsibility to her child is weak; she is more animal than human woman. Further, Selena's behaviour is vastly different to that exhibited by Anne Brewer who was shown to be extremely loving towards her son. As a woman who is not comfortable within the contained family unit, Selena is vilified and is presented as a threat to international security (this fantasy that normal life includes women in the home is further exemplified by Brewer's home life since his wife is only killed because she leaves the home to work. If she were a stay-at-home mom, she would never have been in harm's way). The fact that Selena initially appears trustworthy makes her even more threatening; it seems that every foreign civilian is a potential terrorist. This attitude is striking in its similarity to the US military's representations of the Afghan and Iraqi populations as no effort was made to differentiate between soldiers and citizens. After all, according to George Bush, terrorists from more than 60 countries "are recruited from their own nations and neighbourhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan where they are trained in tactics of terror [and] are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and

destruction” (National Day of Prayer Speech 2001, 2). This film certainly supports this idea.

Although *Collateral Damage* is not a war film, it has the effect of justifying or encouraging military action and due to its plot and perspective, it has a particular relevance in the aftermath of September 11. After all, Brewer is positioned as a civilian saviour fueled by conservative morals, who has been abandoned by a liberal government that would rather “wait and see” than to act against the enemy. By taking action, he demonstrates that force and knee-jerk vengeance provide fruitful results. In this way, Brewer is strikingly similar to the heroes of many early eighties action and vengeance films. For instance, the wave of Chuck Norris feature films in the eighties, including *An Eye for an Eye* (Dir. Steve Carver, 1981) and *Code of Silence* (Dir. Andrew Davis, 1985), feature Norris playing disgruntled police officers who must refuse to adhere to liberal laws in order to take down drug rings. *Invasion USA* (Dir. Joseph Zito, 1985) is another film that features Norris as a former CIA agent who must take matters into his own hands in order to return order to his society. In each of these films, the hero hails from a conservative background, has at one time served his country as a keeper of the peace (whether that was as a military man, police officer or other position of authority), and is dismayed at the state of his community’s liberal organization. He is a man who must rebel against the current government in order to do what is best, since it is clear that his government has lost control because it has become too liberal. These films helped to mobilize support for a more aggressive political outlook. Kellner and Ryan argue:

The revival of the hero in Hollywood films of this period, after such heroes had been put into question in the liberal climate of the late sixties and the seventies, plays an important part in cultural mobilization. The strong male hero allowed an affirmative vision to be deployed by conservatives of the sort that liberals at this

time were incapable of generating...these cultural representations respond to needs by guiding people toward certain social policy choices. More often than not those policy choices are conservative...the heroes of the late seventies and the eighties aided the triumph of conservative individualist models of social action during this time. The new hero is usually an individualist who combines three essential components of the contemporary conservative agenda; he is a warrior, an entrepreneur, and a patriarch. (Ryan and Kellner 1998, 219)

While the hero described above was arguably a reactionary product of the Reagan era and the resulting resurgence of conservative fervor, the description could easily be applied to characters like Gordon Brewer, whose emergence parallels the rise of Bush Junior and the nation's resulting conservative turn. *Collateral Damage's* overarching moral message seems to indicate that violent revenge is a legitimate response to a terrorist attack against American civilians, even if the decision to retaliate is made by a small group of individuals who know what is really best for the country. This echoes American military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and is useful as a means of understanding American attitudes towards so-called "terrorist" nations even before the attacks—while the nation's ferocity may have increased in the wake of the attacks in New York, its conservative ideological outlook on its role in world politics was already readily established, as propagated by the mainstream media and entertainment industries.

A second film that warrants consideration in the investigation of the post 11 September American male hero is the 2004 film *Man on Fire* (Dir. Tony Scott). This film was produced after the events in New York City so its narrative is arguably more connected to the national consciousness after that date. There are several elements, however, that distance this film from a direct connection to 11 September: the film is set in Mexico, there are very few American characters, global terrorism is not directly addressed, and the main American heroic protagonist is presented as a flawed, even

disturbed, individual. Nonetheless, an analysis of this hero and his journey reveals a strong connection to the militant mindset of post 11 September American society. Just as the US government stoked the fires of revenge, the hero of *Man on Fire* is quick to violence. Vengeance, it seems, is entrenched in the American way.

The hero of *Man on Fire* is Creasy, a former American soldier who has traveled to Mexico City to visit an old military friend named Rayburn. Rayburn encourages him to seek work as a children's bodyguard and reveals that in Mexico City, most wealthy families hire bodyguards to protect their children from kidnapping attempts. Apparently, kidnapping is a common threat and children go missing on a daily basis. A wealthy Mexican man named Samuel, who is married to an American woman named Lisa, hires Creasy to protect their daughter, named Pita. Creasy agrees and strikes up a relationship with the young girl. When she is kidnapped and apparently killed, Creasy erupts and stops at nothing in his quest to unveil a kidnapping conspiracy. Along the way, he does not hesitate to exact violent revenge upon every individual who he believes is a participant in the kidnapping.

Unlike Brewer, Creasy is introduced as a broken soul—this is no perfect American. The first shot shows Creasy traveling by 1980s taxi through the busy, colourful but dirty streets of Mexico City. He is disheveled: his face is covered in stubble, he wears rose-coloured glasses, and he drinks from a flask. Later, he admits to Samuel that he is an alcoholic, and it is clear that he also struggles with depression. This is emphasized during a scene in his bedroom, when he loads his nine-millimetre gun, aims at his own head and pulls the trigger. He had been prepared to kill himself, but the bullet jams. Despite his failure at suicide, his self-hatred is clear; he is hardly a proud American.

In fact, his internal conflict is rooted in his 16 years experience in the American military. During his job interview with Samuel, Creasy reveals that he worked as part of an anti-terrorism unit, and later he asks Rayburn if he thinks “we’ll ever be forgiven?” This concern with his past behaviour in the military can be read in relation to Vietnam policies and the plight of soldiers upon their return to the US; he is ashamed of his compliance with past government initiatives and can barely live with himself, as he has become a vicious thug. For Creasy, his affinity for violence is linked to guilt and self-doubt. His suicide attempt suggests that Creasy seeks escape. This is further demonstrated during a later scene when he releases a caged bird from his bedroom—he is dissatisfied with life and feels little connection to the world around him. Like the bird, he wishes to escape.

It is not until Creasy meets Pita that he begins to find joy in life. Played by Dakota Fanning, Pita is a blond, constantly smiling 10-year old. She too is an outsider—the film does not reveal any friends—and takes to Creasy immediately. Soon, he is accompanying her to school and appointments, and she is not fazed by his gruff personality. She actively engages him. In Pita, Creasy find a family and a reason to continue living. In fact, he quickly becomes a type of surrogate father, as Pita’s own father seems to be away often, and Creasy comes to know Pita’s mother, who acknowledges her own isolation in Mexico. Creasy’s relationship to Pita is cemented when he attends one of her swim meets. When he arrives, he tells the headmistress that Pita’s parents are away; her response is, “Today, you are her father.” That evening, Pita gives Creasy a gift—a pendant of St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes. He accepts the gifts and retreats to his room, where he chooses to read the bible rather than to indulge in a drink. As a surrogate daughter, Pita connects Creasy to life and gives him reason to carve out a future. When

she is kidnapped, he is personally affected by the loss of this girl—the kidnappers have attacked his territory.

It is Creasy's connection to an *American* child that catalyzes his desire for vengeance. He is able to react so aggressively because Pita and her mother Lisa are American. As such, they are immediately positioned as visible victims of the Mexican kidnapping ring. Pita, Lisa, Creasy and Rayburn are the only Americans in the film and their American-ness is constantly highlighted: Rayburn wants Creasy to remain in Mexico because he says, "there's no one to talk to around here," despite being surrounded by Mexicans. For her part, Lisa points out Creasy's American identity immediately—the first thing she says to him is, "You're American." Pita also emphasizes that she and Creasy are both American when she asks him what state he is from. She wants to find out more about his American identity. As Americans, Creasy, Pita and Lisa are connected, and are all out of place in Mexico. This is often demonstrated through framing and mise-en-scène. These three characters are repeatedly placed in the corner of the frame, as if they are outsiders who do not belong in their surroundings. Lisa and Pita's Mexican home is equally telling of their situation: the home is grand but impersonal. The ceilings are tall, the rooms are dark, and the décor is opulent but cold. The home lacks any warmth. In fact, only Pita's bedroom, with its warm colours, seems to offer any sense of comfort. Lisa and Pita are therefore positioned as out of place and unhappy in their non-American environment. Like Creasy, they are isolated, and like Creasy, their American-ness defines them very differently than their Mexican counterparts.

In addition to linking him more closely to Pita and her mother, Creasy's American-ness provides him with the necessary skills to seek vengeance against those responsible for Pita's disappearance. Creasy's 16 years of anti-terrorism experience in the American grants him the skills that lead to his emergence as saviour and hero. He depends on his torture training to uncover the conspiracy behind Pita's kidnapping. Without his skill for destruction, he would not be able to save Pita. So although the film recognizes that past American military action resulted in trauma for soldiers and "unforgivable" actions against Others, it nonetheless works to sanction this type of action since it equips Americans to effect positive change. The film smoothes over past wrongs by suggesting that these wrongs eventually lead to good results.

A similar process took place in several films released during the Reagan administration, when mainstream Hollywood film finally began to feature narratives about the Vietnam War, for the first time since *The Green Berets* (Dir. Ray Kellogg and John Wayne, 1968). In the 1980's the Department of Defense welcomed scripts from filmmakers who were willing to accommodate its perspective on the Vietnam War and depict US involvement in a war that would once again bolster public support in the military. *Rambo: First Blood* (Dir. Ted Kotcheff, 1982) and *Missing in Action* (Dir. Joseph Zito, 1984) are good examples of films that were created in close conjunction with the Pentagon and essentially reconstruct the Vietnam experience as one that is either beneficial to the American public or one whose negative effects can be blamed entirely on a few corrupt decision-makers—the violence here is individualized rather than put in social context. In *Rambo: First Blood*, Sylvester Stallone stars as a Vietnam veteran who must rely on the skills he acquired at war to defeat a sadistic Sheriff. Without these skills

he would be a helpless victim, and his town would also suffer. *Missing in Action* tells the story of a former Vietnam prisoner of war who is called back to the country ten years later to try and locate other POWs and uncovers a government cover-up. Michael Klein suggests that these films “reduce the complexities of the Vietnam era to the morality of soldiering. This is an effort to reconcile the ambiguities and silence the contradictions of a period that was a watershed in American politics – a period of opposition to the war and to the worldview that sustained it [...] the war is mystified as a tragic mistake or an existentialist adventure through which the White American hero discovers or realizes his identity” (Klein, 23). Klein argues that the effect on the American memory is actualized because of the medium itself. He notes:

After a war or significant social crisis [...] and especially during a period of conservatism following an era of radical social or cultural action, the history of the recent past is often reinterpreted. Radical or oppositional moments in the history of a nation are effectively exercised from the cultural memory. A process of organized forgetting takes peoples’ complex past away, substituting comfortable myths that reinforce rather than challenge the status quo. (19)

Certainly, the events of 11 September qualify as a “social crisis”, and the release of multiple revenge and war narratives in the years following the fall of the towers support Klein’s claim that dominant political attitudes are reflected in the cultural products produced in such an event’s wake. Yet with no Vietnam War to retell, this new group of post 11 September vengeance films work to justify future American military action by featuring protagonists who rely on military training to succeed in their new, dangerous world, and who must rebel against an ineffectual liberal government to do so. While *Man on Fire* does not feature a protagonist living through a recognizable past war, the film nonetheless shares some of the qualities of *Missing in Action* and *Rambo*. Like these films’ heroes, Creasy feels abandoned by a country and government he fought to protect.

Like these heroes, Creasy is isolated from his community, and like these heroes, he ultimately proves his worth by relying on skills that he acquired during his participation in conflicts that his nation tried to deny. He acknowledges regret for his role in “anti-terrorist” events. While it is not clear where Creasy served his 16 years of military experience, it is not a stretch to assume that he may have participated in the original Iraq War. Regardless of where he performed the atrocious acts for which he later repents, it’s clear that he did so while employed by the US government. Yet he does not assign blame for the events on anyone but himself—in fact, he is prepared to kill himself to receive absolution. That is not to say that his violent actions are not shocking. In many ways, Creasy is a monster. For instance, he tortures a man by taping this man’s fingers to a steering wheel then cutting them off one by one until he receives the information he desires. Later, he stuffs an explosive device up a man’s posterior and blows him up without remorse once he successfully receives information. His merciless nature is vicious, and yet it is justified. After all, a young American girl’s life is at stake.

Creasy’s violent actions pale in comparison to those committed by many of the Mexican characters in the film, as these Others are presented as the true monsters. While Creasy only turns to violence when Pita is kidnapped, the Mexican Others view violence as everyday business. These men are not concerned with the violence they commit. When Creasy tortures one of the Others, the tortured man repeatedly insists that the kidnapping was not personal and that he is a professional. Later, once Creasy discovers that Fuentes, the head of the police’s anti-kidnapping division, is involved, he tortures him as well. Fuentes, like Jorge, insists, “I’m really sorry for the girl, it was just business. I’m a professional.” It appears that the entire Mexican police system is corrupt, and that

Mexican people are able to approach kidnapping and the deaths of children as a business. Even Pita's father Samuel has used a child to make a profit. As Creasy discovers, Samuel had hired men to kidnap Pita so that he could steal part of the ransom money and escape from debt. Although Samuel is connected to the American family through his marriage to Lisa, he is an intruder who does not share typical American family values. After all, he is willing to jeopardize his own daughter's safety in order to find financial security. Once again, a Mexican character treats a child like a business. Samuel is punished for his actions; upon hearing of his betrayal, Lisa essentially tells him to kill himself, and Creasy provides him with the means to commit suicide by giving him the same gun and bullet that had jammed when Creasy had attempted to kill himself. The gun does not jam for Samuel. The fact that Samuel, as Pita's biological Mexican father, is revealed to be weak and corruptible reveals the narrative's prejudice toward Mexicans and its favoritism of the American male. Despite Creasy's violent past, he seems more suited to defend Lisa and Pita against their assailants. He is less monstrous than the Others he attack, even when demonstrating this superiority through acts of violence.

Jorge, Fuentes and Samuel are dehumanized, along with many of the other Mexican characters in the film. As a people, the Mexicans are shown to be corrupt and unclean; the streets of Mexico City are filled with older model cars, the men are covered with tattoos, the women flaunt their bodies, and the people congregate in dark, dirty clubs and apartments. The Mexican people are also shown to have little empathy or compassion. In fact, they attack each other—the film opens with jump cuts of children being abducted. The cuts are quick and disjointed and interspersed with freeze frames of children being taken off the street as the captions announce, “there is one kidnapping

every 60 minutes in Latin America. 70% of the victims do not survive.” This introduction immediately establishes Latin America, and particularly Mexico City, as a threatening and treacherous place where citizens target their neighbours for profit. This is no America, and it makes sense that Creasy would seek refuge in a place like this as he struggles with his own violent history. Yet despite sharing this environment, it is clear that Creasy is very different from the Others who inhabit it. Men like Jorge and Fuentes have been saturated by the place and embrace violence with pleasure—they do not value human life. In contrast, although Creasy’s methods are vicious, he is presented as more human than his enemies. After all, he has a conscience and is haunted by his violent past. He has recognized that his actions were wrong and is willing to kill himself rather than to continue to relive his memories. It is only when provoked that he engages in violence once more.

Creasy’s violence is tied to his love of Pita, as evidenced by the juxtaposition between scenes of his attacks on the kidnappers with scenes of Creasy and Pita in happier times. He is not a man who pursues violence for violence sake, but rather for love. Upon hearing that Pita is presumed dead, he tells Lisa, “I’m going to kill them. Anyone that was involved, anyone who profited from it, anyone who opens their eyes at me.” Lisa responds, “You kill them all.” Her words further legitimize Creasy’s actions—he has an American mother’s blessing. Creasy is thereby positioned as a justified vigilante since his actions are motivated by emotion rather than profit. His positioning as one of the only Americans in a narrative full of disdainful Mexican characters serves to justify his actions.

While Creasy is undoubtedly a conflicted and flawed individual, he remains an American hero because of his willingness to seek revenge against a clear-cut enemy, and for his aptitude for appropriate violence (a result of his experience in the American military). His familiarity with torture saves an innocent girl's life, and as Rayburn explains, "he deliver[s] more justice in a weekend than ten years of [Mexico's] courts and tribunals." He is the true bringer of justice. This solitary American is able to bring down a corrupt police unit and a kidnapping ring. With his interference and agency an entire city is saved. He does what the people wouldn't do for themselves. In this way, Creasy's actions are similar to the Bush administration's argument for the invasion of Iraq. Just as the USA was positioning itself as the harbinger of democracy and peace, Creasy is positioned as a cleanser of corruption. While his questionable and violent methods certainly draw attention, and even disgust, the result of his actions (the salvation of kidnapped children and the culling of an inadequate father from an otherwise ideal American family) serve to justify the means.

While both Creasy and Brewer's reaction against the Others who attack their respective families is undoubtedly vicious, their retaliatory actions pale in comparison to a third film hero: Frank Castle of the 2004 film *The Punisher*. Castle is more than a wronged father—he becomes a vigilante hero who exacts revenge for himself, and for other wronged citizens, after his entire extended family is gunned down in a mob-style hit. The fact that Castle emerges from the role of angry victim to become a literal punisher of "evil" is especially relevant in post 11 September America, as the USA embarks on a worldwide quest to rid the world of evil. For this reason Frank Castle, and the world in which he exists, is worthy of analysis in this chapter.

The Punisher is based on a comic book series of the same name, which also features a hero named Frank Castle (originally an ex-marine and veteran of the Vietnam War). This comic book hero originally appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #129 in February 1974. An ongoing series was created in 1987, and several series have continued Frank Castle's story. *The Punisher* comic books have always dealt with the subject matter of justified revenge; therefore, it cannot be argued that the revenge narrative was created as a result of the events of 11 September. Second, *The Punisher* was released during a peak in production of films based on comic books: *Spiderman* (Dir. Sam Raimi) was released in 2002 to a very favourable box office, *Spiderman 2* (Dir. Sam Raimi) followed in 2004, *Hulk* (Dir. Ang Lee) was released in 2003, and *The Fantastic Four* (Dir. Tim Story, 2005) and *Superman Returns* (Dir. Bryan Singer, 2006) were in production in 2004. The popularity of this genre would certainly have contributed to this film being produced. However, despite these factors, the fact that this film was produced (rather than another less vengeance-themed comic book film, for example) speaks to the post 11 September political climate and underlines the mainstream Hollywood film industry's support of films featuring a revenge-based narrative. *The Punisher* is the only comic book film to have been released since 11 September that does not feature a hero with superhuman abilities. Frank Castle's character transformation does not depend on his journey to adapt to newfound powers or to overcome a hesitancy to embrace his heroic responsibilities. Rather, *The Punisher* focuses on Castle's reaction to the brutal deaths of his entire family and ultimately, on the equally brutal vengeance he exacts on his enemies. His newfound skills are in no way superhuman, gallant, or graceful; rather, they are instinctive and vicious. The fact that Castle is the lone non-super superhero in a series

of films based on comic books speaks volumes to the importance of his vengeance narrative.

As the film opens, Castle is about to retire from a successful career as an undercover police officer in the counter-terrorism unit. He has just completed one last job, where he broke up a weapons smuggling ring. During the bust, one of the criminals was accidentally shot. Unbeknownst to Castle, the criminal was son of Howard Saint, one of the city's leading criminal masterminds. Saint's wife is so distraught over the loss of her son that she asks her husband to avenge him. Saint arranges for a massacre; when Castle's entire extended family (including his wife and child, parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews) gathers for a family reunion, they are shot to death in front of him. He is also shot and left for dead, but survives and swears that he will avenge his family's deaths. The rest of the film follows Castle as he violently destroys Saint's family and life, and then moves on to avenge other injustices.

Castle's aggressive response to his family's death is wholly justified through the portrayal of his personal life: Castle is a good, family-oriented man who has served his country with honour. The other men in his unit revere him—one describes him as “the finest soldier, the finest undercover cop, the finest man I've ever known,” and many of his peers congratulate him for his dedication and skill as a policeman. It is also revealed that before joining the police force, he completed two military tours of duty, and that he performed 12 special operations with the Counter Terrorism Unit. Further, it is suggested that he has sacrificed some of his own personal privileges in order to serve his country: during a conversation with his wife Maria, Castle reveals that he has missed spending time with her and his young son, saying, “There were times, Maria, I gotta tell you, I lost

so much time with both of you (his wife Maria and his son Will) and I'm really sorry." His wife responds, "Hey, I married you. I knew what I was doing and I'd do it again. You and I, we're not lucky, we are blessed." As the wife of a man dedicated to defending his country against criminals, she is nothing but supportive. Maria recognizes that his duty lies with his country, and never questions his patriotism. The narrative celebrates his identity as a soldier. Fighting for the USA has served him well. He has been rewarded with a strong and moral family unit and has also been financially rewarded (his home suggests an upper middle class economic background). Castle's family life is further revelatory in regards to his heroic construction. His relationship to his wife is free from conflict. This is evidenced by Castle and Maria's actions, wardrobe, and environments: many of the scenes between them take place in a house by the beach, and the setting is bright and airy. Castle and his wife wear green, blue, and white flowing clothing, suggesting a relaxed and compassionate sensibility. They are traditionally romantic with each other, gazing lovingly into one another's eyes and demonstrating a gentle affection. They appear supportive of one another and seem to genuinely love each other selflessly.

Castle seems to share an equally comfortable relationship with his extended family. During the family reunion, his family laughs effortlessly, children dance with their elders while others frolic on the beach, and the entire family shares food and stories. The reunion takes place outside at Castle's parents' house in Puerto Rico, and the physical environment reveals a loving and relaxed attitude. The family enjoys food on a patio that is adorned with cream linen curtains, and the white wooden house, natural foliage (wild grass and flowers grow around the house) and airy environment contribute to a sense of calm. Castle's family all wear loose, flowing, light-coloured clothing and

some have bare feet. Their clothing and behaviour (laughing and dancing) reveal a relaxed and organic nature. This family seems to take pleasure from simply spending time together. As a member of this family, Castle is portrayed as a kind and family-focused individual. At this point in the film, Castle is presented as the ideal post-11 September citizen—family-focused, willing to sacrifice his own privileges to serve his country, and supportive of his government and its military actions. This portrayal of an idyllic personal life serves to rationalize his evolution into a vicious punishing force when his family unit is destroyed. He has reason to seek justice because his perfect American life has been attacked in a very brutal way, and everything he has ever loved or cared for has been taken away. The vicious deaths of Castle's family leave no room for confusion. It is clear that they are the innocent victims of a villain, and that their deaths deserve retaliatory measures against an enemy.

The Punisher does not hesitate to portray this enemy in a villainous light: Howard Saint and his family are shown to be sadistic, amoral, and corrupt. This is achieved through the Saint family's physical appearance, environment, and actions. While Castle's family dress in light, flowing clothes, Saint's family prefers to wear dark, expensive-looking clothing. Saint wears black exclusively. In fact, he even wears a black shirt and pants while golfing. His sons and henchmen also wear dark clothes, while his wife wears dark reds and blacks. Their clothes are also very rigid and include stiff collars, tailored suits, and flashy shoes, revealing a preoccupation with material possessions and outward appearance, and a lack of individualization. The Saints' physical environment supports this preoccupation with appearance rather than substance. They live in a large stone mansion that is adorned with thick marble columns, dark rooms, dark heavy furniture,

and sculptures. The driveway is lined with heavy flowerpots that contain well-tended flowers—a contrast to the wild grass and natural plants that surround the Castle's Puerto Rican vacation home. There is nothing organic or natural about Saint's household. It appears to be based on outward appearance but lacks depth and love.

While physical appearance and environment reveal much about the Saint family's shallow approach to life, it is their actions that unveil their most critical flaw: selfish, amoral, uncompassionate malevolence. This family does not hesitate to cause others to suffer—when faced with conflict they do not come together, but choose to look out for their own desires instead. This is evidenced by Olivia Saint's reaction to her own son's death. Although he was killed because he was hoping to profit from weapons smuggling, she refuses to admit his complicity. Instead, she lashes out against Frank Castle, who she knows had been involved in the events that led to her son's death. While Castle orders his henchmen to kill Castle, Liv requests that they kill Castle's entire family. Although she is a wife and mother herself, Liv desires absolute vengeance and does not hesitate to order the deaths of close to 30 men, women, and children. She is therefore framed as a bad mother. Saint is presented as an equally bad father. When he suspects that his wife is having an affair with his best friend Quentin, he kills Quentin by repeatedly stabbing him in the torso, and then kills his wife by throwing her off a bridge onto a railroad track. Although both Liv and Quentin try to explain that they are innocent, Saint does not trust them and kills them before he can learn the truth. Saint reacts aggressively and kills without pausing to reflect. It is his own mistrust and the lack of family strength that leads to the demise of his family by his own hand. Because his family does not understand selfless love or compassion, it self-destructs.

Although Saint is financially successful, he (and his family) is morally bankrupt. As such, he is comparable to the villainous “enemy” described by Bush Jr. in many of his broadcast speeches. During a speech on January 29, 2002 speech, for example, Bush suggested that these terrorists were truly monstrous, saying, “We have seen the depth of our enemies' hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life [...] This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens -- leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children” (State of the Union Address, January 29 2002). By describing individuals in this way, Bush weakens their humanity and represents these men as soulless monsters who will only grow stronger if the USA does not confront their villainy. Saint and his family share this lack of humanity. They have committed atrocities without consequence for years, and it is not until Castle scurries around the law and challenges them that their brutal reign ends. Like the “enemies” Bush describes, the Saint family cannot simply be penalized—it must be destroyed entirely.

Of course, this destruction comes at a price. In order to defeat his enemies, Castle must embrace their methods and become a vicious and merciless thug. Yet while Castle's methods are equally gruesome, and while he is also willing to kill those who have killed his loved ones, he is nonetheless positioned as righteous. Unlike Saint, Castle plans his attacks based on intelligence, and embraces violence as a means to stop those who would do violence against others. This is evidenced when Castle prevents a domestic assault incident in his new apartment building. He shares a floor with three other tenants (Joan, Bumpo, and Dave), whom he ignores in favour of a bottle of Wild Turkey. However, when one of Joan's old boyfriends tries to break down her door in the middle of the night,

he steps in to prevent her from being hurt. Despite being fueled by a desire for justice, he is also human and compassionate. Castle is similar to an undercover soldier; his methods may be controversial, but he ultimately prevents the destruction of innocent lives.

Castle's actions are further sanctioned through his connections to the American criminal system. As a result of his time as a police officer, Castle knows right from wrong, and his actions are motivated by a desire to do what is right. Although he is partially responsible for the death of Saint's son during the weapons smuggling bust, the son is equally to blame, and his death occurs within the boundaries of the law (the son is shot because he was involved in a criminal enterprise, and because he fails to drop his weapon). When Castle learns that Saint's son has been killed, he responds, "People weren't supposed to die." He acknowledges the son's death, and even laments it, but recognizes it as a consequence of fighting crime.

Castle's experience as a crime fighter also contributes to his transformation into a vigilante. He expects justice for the wronged, and when five months pass and no one has been arrested for the deaths of his family members, he decides to take justice into his own hands, telling his former policemen friends that he is not prepared to sit and wait for the system to work. He wants to see justice done and is clear in his intentions. Before he engages in his final attack on Saint, he writes a letter, which reads:

I leave this as a declaration of intent, so no one will be confused. Number one: Sic vis pacem para bellum. The boot camp sergeant made us repeat it like a prayer – if you want peace, prepare for war. Number two: Frank Castle is dead. He died with his family. Number Three: In certain extreme situations the law is inadequate. In order to shame its inadequacy it is necessary to act outside the law, to pursue natural justice. This is not vengeance. Revenge is not a valid motive, it's an emotional response. No, not vengeance. Punishment.

As the film ends, Castle reiterates his vendetta, saying, “Those who do evil to others, rapists, sadists, psychos, killers, will come to know me well. Frank Castle is dead. Call me...the Punisher.” According to Castle, it is legitimate for an individual to act as judge and jury when legal avenues do not provide a satisfactory resolution to a problem. He does not hesitate to use violence to dole out punishment on his own terms and is not afraid to target “evil” individuals. Further, he is willing to isolate himself from society (he chooses a solitary lifestyle rather than seek out friendship or love with the other tenants in his apartment building) in order to do what he believes is right. In this way, Castle becomes a renegade distributor of American justice, and those who have harmed “innocent” Americans are fair game.

Castle’s eagerness to destroy a clear-cut enemy is not surprising, considering the timing of the film’s release. When the film came to theatres three years after the events of 11 September, the desire for “justice” against a foreign Other was still being pushed by the Bush administration. Three days after the attack on New York, Bush made a clear statement regarding the United States’ intended response against the terrorist threat, positioning America as a global saviour equipped to destroy evil (President’s Address to the Nation, September 14, 2001). A few months later, Bush reiterated the United States’ right to obliterate the “evil doers”, this time by suggesting that a failure to retaliate would result in more bloodshed. He stated, “We’ll be deliberate [in our actions against the enemy], yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer” (State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002). Six months later, he added, “War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. The nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. The conflict was

begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing" (Address to the Nation, June 6, 2002).

Through these speeches, Bush legitimates violent action against the enemy, by suggesting that if the United States does not act, then more innocent people will suffer, and nothing will be done to bring justice to those responsible for 11 September. The similarities between this situation and the narrative of *The Punisher* are striking. Like Castle, the US is given permission to end the violence by using more violence, and like Castle, this is justified on the basis that the retaliation is deserved.

Such an argument is easier to make when the hero and antagonists are well defined (as evidenced in the descriptions of Castle and Saint, and their respective families in the paragraphs above). However, it is interesting to note that Castle is not rewarded for his troubles. By most accounts, Castle's vendetta is successful. He defeats his enemy and receives justice for his family. Yet unlike Brewer of *Collateral Damage* (who also acts alone and is left to raise The Wolf's son) and Creasy of *Man on Fire* (who is able to finally escape from his violent past through death), Castle does not emerge from his travails with a surrogate family or a release from life. In fact, he rejects Joan's advances and shies away from spending time with the other tenants in his building. There is no reward for Castle. By embracing his dark side, he becomes a shadow—a hero for humanity, but expelled to its outskirts for his troubles (however, it seems that within the logic of the film, vengeance is its own cathartic reward). The reason for Castle's isolation is unclear. Perhaps it is because he has killed fellow Americans rather than foreign Others, or perhaps it is because he has acted independently of the law within his own country (Brewer disobeyed the law in Columbia, while Creasy disobeyed the law in Mexico).

Regardless, it is clear that while he suffers for his actions, he is also revered. Without his actions, innocent lives would not have been avenged, and a sadistic family would have continued to corrupt lives.

While each of the primary hero characters discussed in this chapter approaches conflict in a different manner, they are nonetheless very similar. Each man is connected in some way to American law enforcement or a military institution, and shares a penchant for violence once provoked. Furthermore, each man demonstrates willingness, and in some cases enthusiasm, to embrace violence after being personally attacked. For these heroes, there is only one normal reaction to a display of aggression: returned violence. Their subsequent actions adhere to the doctrine presented by Bush in October 2002, when he addressed the American nation and spoke these famous words, "Either you're with us, or you're with the enemy" (Domke 2004, 30). As suggested by political analyst David Domke in his book, *God Willing? Political Fundamentalism in the White House, the "War on Terror" and the Echoing Press*:

This declaration by the President [was] an archetypal example of an either/or construction of reality. Such binary constructions are simultaneously grounded in a fundamentalist worldview while being well-suited for a US political culture dominated by mass media [...]. The President's binary communications [were so] important [because] they presented a limited, rigid view of the world and forced decisions between two options that, in actuality, were not the only possible outcomes [...]. [After September 11] the Bush administration offered a conception of political reality that parsed people, institutions, behaviour, and ideologies into opposing "camps" [...] this rhetorical move, when carefully constructed, can railroad an audience's thinking into an "all or nothing", us versus them mentality. When forced into only two choices, the easiest path is to choose either this or that rather than to push for the exploration of potentially other, more complex solutions. (31)

While Domke addresses the implications of the Bush administration's religious fundamentalist perspective here, he could just as easily be describing the heroes' choices

in the films under consideration in this chapter. The heroes here also see the world in black and white. For them, it is not worth the effort to investigate cause or to explore solutions that might prevent further bloodshed or hatred in the future. Creasy, Brewer and Castle have no desire to solve problems. They do not pause to grieve or to reflect as they have a limited consideration for the wider stage on which their experiences take place. Instead, they embrace the rage that accompanies their personal tragedies and never release their grip on this rage. In doing so, they embrace their American-ness as defined by Bush in his binary declaration: these heroes are clearly “with” their country. They are angry, vengeful, and willing to show it.

In some ways, these heroes are even more “American” than their military counterparts discussed in chapter four, since they are not bound to behave according to the rules of sanctioned warfare. These are renegade agents free to excise their own demons while committing what they view as “justified” revenge. In this way they match Bush Jr.’s description of the true American hero, which was first introduced in his September 14, 2001 speech (“Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.”), and which he reinforced during his February 26, 2003 speech, (“Across the world, we are hunting down the killers one by one. We are winning. And we’re showing them the definition of American justice.”), and most recently, during his speech to the nation on the fifth anniversary of 11 September, when he exclaimed, “On 9/11, our nation saw the face of evil. Yet on that awful day, we also witnessed something distinctly American: ordinary citizens rising to the occasion, and responding with extraordinary acts of courage” (President’s Address to the Nation,

September 11, 2006). The heroes analyzed in this chapter seem to have taken this description to heart; their actions reflect an eagerness to rise to the occasion, and to exact revenge by any means necessary in the name of American justice. In many ways, these heroes are reflective of the frontier hero described by Jenni Calder:

If the western hero had not acted independently of the law, he would scarcely have emerged and lasted as he has done. In frontier conditions, vigilante action, action to protect the community without the authority of the law, was an accepted necessity [...] He is primitive, in the most impressive sense, for he is expressing forces elemental in human nature, instincts of survival, and aggressive protection of one's own. [This] hero is very much a man who does not wait. (Calder 1977: 87-97)

Certainly, this description is true of the heroes of *Collateral Damage*, *Man on Fire* and *The Punisher*. These men take the law into their own hands: Brewer takes it upon himself to single-handedly destroy an entire terrorist cell, Creasy does not hesitate to torture his enemy's family members as a means to gaining information, and Castle does not hesitate to kill his enemy's own child in order to satisfy his desire for justice. Furthermore, their questionable methods are not questioned. Rather, the end results of their efforts are celebrated: they are heroes by virtue of the fact that they destroyed a violent source. These heroes' relation to the frontier hero will be further discussed in the conclusion.

None of these renegade vigilante heroes investigate the cause of the original violent act, and are therefore strikingly similar to the 80's and 90's cop heroes analyzed by Neal King in his book *Heroes in Hard Times: Cop Action Movies in the U.S.* King argues that while the action film cop heroes in the 80's and 90's inevitably remedied the surface violence, their resistance was purely aesthetic—there was no true desire to elicit change, only to return to their community to its original state. Through violence, they complete an aesthetic cleansing. Brewer, Creasy and Castle are similarly inclined to their

counterparts in heroes like John McClane and Martin Riggs, and yet they differ in one major way: they are personally victimized and they carry the past with them. These new heroes have each been directly affected by the terrorist actions of an outside force—it is their own loved ones rather than random American citizens who have been targeted and in most cases killed by a foreign and hateful force, and this affront is never forgotten. The final victorious exchanges between these heroes and the villains are tainted by the heroes' knowledge that life will never return to normal. Brewer will go on to raise the son of the woman who coordinated his family's death in place of his own child, Creasy chooses death over a life where he is reminded of past sins, and Castle will go on to exact revenge over and over against the world that allowed his family to die. These heroes do not simply become reanimated and return to normal life. This refusal does not mean that these same heroes are critical of the world in which they live. Brewer is happy to walk away from the reporters who provide him with the opportunity to comment on his experience and to perhaps shed light on his government's responsibility for the terrorist attacks, Creasy chooses to end his own life rather than to combat further injustices or criticize the military that left him so damaged and Castle promises to only target the obvious and abhorrent US citizens rather than to investigate the system that allows these types of individuals to flourish. These men are happy to react to an immediate threat but have no desire to effect change on a greater scale. They choose to ignore the corruption that exists within their own American society.

This outlook is arguably a side effect of the Bush speeches and the American political environment in post 11 September America. The events of that day have been used as a backdrop by the Bush government on which to situate a carefully sculpted

portrayal of American responsibility. By employing the vague descriptor of “terrorist” to a faceless, unknown group, and by attributing increasingly violent and barbaric qualities to that same group, the Bush administration has constructed a world stage on which America can only be viewed as a necessary warrior. This process can be described using Michael Rogin’s “political demonization.” Rogin explains that the political demonologist “splits the world in two, attributing a magical, pervasive power to a conspiratorial center of evil” (xiii). He argues that by repetitively accusing another nation or group of terrorism, the accuser can then justify his own terrorist behaviour. The methods used by the renegade heroes could certainly be viewed as terrorist-like: violent, reactionary and targeted, their actions would be viewed as abhorrent in any other circumstance.

These heroes have no reason to find fault in their own society or to attempt to solve the social ills that may have led to the original conflict (government corruption, poverty and opulence, and mob violence come to mind here), because the narratives in which they exist avoid these same issues. These heroes’ conflicts are resolved at face value, and thereby the ideological struggles are concluded through a repetitive, mirroring fallacy that is void of present-day complexity.

In conclusion, it is evident that the three heroes discussed in this chapter share certain qualities that position them as warriors for present-day American society. These men are defenders of the American way of life as defined by an administration that denies self-reflection and progressive change and relies on an outdated, unrealistic perception of what this way of life means. The renegade heroes under consideration respond to a singular moment in time and solve the immediate, visible problems that result from this moment, while ignoring the ever expanding ripples that result from their

own actions. Finally, and most importantly, Brewer, Creasy and Castle do not hesitate to use violence to achieve their means. Although they view their enemies as animalistic, they are willing to use similar brutal tactics to exact vengeance yet are still viewed as heroic within the larger narrative. These are men of action, not of reflection, and in this way they mirror the Bush administration in their instinctive and barbaric reaction to violent incidents. Tellingly, however, while these heroes may achieve victory over their enemies, their behaviour reveals an inherently aggressive, vicious undertone to American society. That this viciousness is celebrated as a desirable and “uniquely American” trait and even renegotiated as “courageous” is reflective of a darkness bubbling beneath the surface of American masculine identity.

Conclusion: You're Either With Us or Against Us

In the six years since the terrorist attacks on New York City, a particular image of the American male hero has been sculpted by the Bush administration, and this same image has been echoed by the popular mainstream media—in particular within the heroic protagonists and narrative trajectories in recent war and renegade hero feature films. Despite their individual circumstances, these film heroes share certain common traits, including strong ties to their American identity and an affinity for violence if provoked. In order to better understand this type of hero and his role in post 11 September America, this thesis has included an ideological analysis of the actions, environments, and personalities of heroes within the war film and the renegade action film. These heroes were selected because they each exist within narratives that are reliant on violence as a cathartic pathway. Regardless of whether these heroes are soldiers or ordinary citizens, these are American men who are swift to exact violence on others in order to reclaim their “natural” way of American life. Their actions against their respective Others are arguably indicative of a post 11 September America that has been regularly rallied by its own federal administration to take violent action against various Others, including the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq. These heroic representations support a government agenda to ally patriotism with military dominance and further confuse justice with vengeance.

The US military is presented in a complimentary way through the characters in the three war films. These men are valiant, brave and represent the military tradition in a positive light. Since 11 September, a great number of war films have been released by American studios, including *The Great Raid*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Behind Enemy*

Lines, as well as *Annapolis* (Dir. Justin Lin, 2006), *Flyboys* (Dir. Tony Bill, 2006), *Behind Enemy Lines II: Axis of Evil* (Dir. James Dodson, 2006), *A.W.O.L.* (Dir. Jack Swanstrom, 2006), and many more. The popularity of this genre in a post 11 September reveals an American appetite for narratives that show US soldiers vanquishing a recognized Other. These men are unblemished heroes: brave, kind, and fair—they have the noblest intentions and are defending their country against clearly demonized Others. Further, these men are citizens of an idealized American past. They live in a nation that is strikingly similar to the America created by Frank Capra in his *Why We Fight* series, “a country where the people regarded the government as decent and honest, where right would triumph over force, where the average American’s faith and wisdom would overcome adversity, and where capitalism delivers the American dream to all people” (Giglio 2000, 12). This renegotiation of American history in such widely distributed cultural products perpetuates a myth of social perspective where a particular class, religion and political outlook is the norm. The idealized lifestyle and community enjoyed by the men in these films act as a containment method, which serves to blind both them and the audience to the larger political realities that exist outside of this perspective. Frederic Jameson speaks to this method of strategic containment in *The Political Unconscious*, when describing Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*. Jameson suggests that Conrad’s Jim exists in relation to a particular landscape (both geographically in terms of the sea and ideologically in terms of the morals and expectations put forth by his community and father) (Jameson 1981, 211). His narrative trajectory is directly related to these components and as a result he acts within the restrictions associated with them. The heroes’ actions in the three renegade action films that have been analyzed in this thesis

are similarly restricted due to their geographic and moral environments. Whether it is Mucci and his men living in an isolated camp far from “real” America and unified by a shared religious experience, Burnett living in complete social isolation on an aircraft carrier, or Moore and his family living on an army base that offers a secluded lifestyle with other army families, these men are denied access to larger political realities. They are offered one moral position: to fight for the good of a country that is presented as altruistic and united, and this functions as ideological containment, thereby denying multiple perspectives and outlooks on the historical complexities that truly exist

The strategic containment within these films may expand beyond the geographical and moral environments—it may also cross over into genre. Says Jameson, “It must be clear to anyone who has experimented with various approaches to a given text that the mind is not content until it puts some order in these findings and invents a hierarchical relationship among its various interpretations” (31). If “order” can be interpreted as a way to organize and understand a text, then it is reasonable to suggest that a form of order could be genre, since genre presents itself in a particular form and structure. It could therefore be argued that the war or renegade film genres, with their particular qualities and style, could also be seen to serve as strategies of confinement since they offer reassuring resolutions to ideological conflict through narrative coherence that is familiar to the audience. These texts repress history by confining meaning within the limits of a particular aesthetic system or narrative. The audience is comforted by the familiar closure offered through the generic qualities and is not exposed to the larger crises that exist beyond the confines of the narrative. By situating the war narrative within a familiar context where resolution is expected and conflict is predetermined (to an extent), further

criticism and reflection is denied and the audience becomes limited by the same system that created the cultural product.

When this consumable product is a war film, the viewer can become a receptacle of a singular interpretation of history and need not apply his or her own personal knowledge to further interpret this same history. The result is a dangerous one: war films have the capacity to replace “true” history and present a singular, controlled version of American military behaviour that denies the complicated and often brutal reality of war. Such cultural products can therefore encourage public support of American participation in current wars by promoting a sense of pride in a particular image of the American military tradition. Certainly, it seems that with the onset of films like *The Great Raid* and *We Were Soldiers*, Hollywood has once again moved towards a mobilization of public opinion during a time of crisis. Douglas Kellner has identified a similar thrust by Hollywood during the Reagan and Bush Jr. administrations, noting:

In a mass-mediated image culture, it is representation that helps constitute an individual's view of the world, sense of personal identity and gender, playing out of style and lifestyle, and socio-political action (...) Representations thus transcode political discourse and in turn mobilize sentiment, affection, perception, and assent toward specific positions, such as the need for male warriors to protect and redeem society. (Kellner 2005, 60)

This same strategy has been employed in the wake of 11 September, so that American war history is presented in a particular way. The public is discouraged from questioning the validity of current USA war efforts and is simultaneously presented with an idealistic version of military service.

The renegade heroes that have been analyzed in this thesis play a similar role in swaying public opinion in post 11 September America. They may not be part of a

military narrative, but they are clearly linked to another American tradition that has become popularized since 2001: vengeance. Each of these heroes begin their character trajectories as part of a family unit, and are spurred to violent measures when their families are personally attacked by an enemy. These men react immediately and return the attack ten-fold, never pausing to consider alternate solutions to their conflicts. In their eyes, this retaliatory violence is justified, especially since their idealized American families are shown to be innocent. In contrast, the lives and families of their enemies are shown to be morally bankrupt; the renegade heroes are therefore presented as righteous in their violent retaliation. These heroes are ideal stand-ins for the current Bush administration—they barrel full speed towards a bloody resolution without considering that their own actions only increase the victim count and escalate tension. In doing so, these heroes reflect the patriotic citizen described in Bush's many post 11 September speeches—that of the willing soldier. Just as Bush encouraged violent action against Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden and in doing so justified the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the heroes in the revenge action films do not hesitate to destroy their enemies (and anyone who gets in their way) in order to solve their problems. This enthusiasm for violence reveals a nation's inability to face the complexities of the catalyzing situations; more importantly, these characters' affinity for destruction unveils the USA's cathartic pleasure in vicious retaliation rather than the love for democracy and justice that it purports to pursue.

Like the nations they represent, these heroes' violent behaviour is justified through careful binary construction. They are "righteous" because their enemies are so clearly evil. These enemies are un-American, vicious, willing to put their own families in

danger and out for personal gain. Given the option between supporting the clean-cut hero and the horrifying Other, the viewer has a clear choice—support the hero. Because there are only two extreme options to choose from, the viewer is not encouraged to consider an alternate solution to the conflict. This binary construction is also popular in politics, as evidenced by the Bush speeches. The irony of Bush's use of the "good American" versus "evil Other" binary is that his administration's political fundamentalism is extremely similar to the terrorists' outlook. David Domke identifies a danger in the political use of such binary constructions, suggesting that "both see the world through a binary lens of good versus evil, in which complex understandings of the 'enemy' are rejected as inconceivable...both also assert that they offer universal norms of human relationships and behaviour that are divinely decreed for all peoples. In each case, others are perceived to have perverted, or chosen against, these mores, and both worldviews demand unflinching support and exact a sizable cost from those who dissent" (Domke 2004, 179). Domke addresses an important lack in this fundamentalist perspective that has been embraced by the Bush administration and parroted in the war and revenge action films discussed in this thesis: self-reflection. The modern patriotic hero is so enthusiastic to protect his American way of life that he never pauses to consider whether this way of life is truly worth defending. This hero's America is the same America that Bush has defined in many of his post 11 September speeches, and most recently during his address to the nation on September 11, 2006 when he said, "We will lead the 21st century into a shining age of human liberty" (President's Address to the Nation, September 11 2006). Here, just as in the films, the USA is positioned as a near-perfect nation that can lead other countries towards a better tomorrow, and the flaws and injustices that plague American

society are completely overlooked. The only inkling of self-criticism takes place in *We Were Soldiers*, when Colonel Moore's wife briefly acknowledges racism within her small community. However, since the film takes place during the Vietnam War, it avoids placing this racism within modern day America. The heroes in these films exist in an America that is beyond reproach and is therefore deserving of an aggressive defense.

It is also an America with a longstanding history of cultural and physical expansion, and in many ways the six films seem to possess qualities of another genre: the Western. The war and revenge action heroes that emerge in these films spring in some ways from the western hero. Moore, Castle and the others owe much to the masculine definition of heroism sculpted by John Wayne and others in the American film western. That is not to say that the heroes in these films do not adhere primarily to the action and war genre but that they are also part of an evolution of western masculinity that is shifting back towards the aggressive after a reprieve towards a softer, more feminized approach following the progressive gains of the 1950s (Biskind, 283).

These films and their heroes are also characteristic of the western, especially in regards to their treatment of space. The films play out their conflicts in very particular locations that allow for the heroes to navigate between a savage landscape and the demands of civilization. For instance, *Man on Fire's* Creasy views Mexico City as a lawless wilderness and rides through town killing outlaws in order to protect the "civilization" represented by the American family he has sworn to protect. In contrast, the heroes in *We Were Soldiers* must attempt to dominate a literal wilderness and evade attack from the Viet Cong "savages" that already possess the land in order to protect the survival and interests of the American nation/town, while Frank Castle of *The Punisher*

roams the amoral wasteland of corporate and familial corruption and seeks to purge this new breed of savages from the rest of “civilized” America. In fact, the heroes in the six films under consideration in this thesis all struggle against a “savage” Other, and all seek to establish a principled environment in the place of chaos and violence. In his essay “Fade-Out in the West”, Chuck Berg suggests that the heroes in these westerns “struggle to carve empires from the Western wilderness through epic battles with nature, greedy villains, and hostile “Indians” [...] and these “Indians” primarily served the genre’s narrative needs by dramatically embodying an obstacle to be overcome—through annihilation, subjugation or “civilization”—by whites presumably blessed by the divine aura inherent in the nation-building rationale of Manifest Destiny” (Berg, 214). With the Wild West already conquered, it seems as though the American heroes in films like *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Man on Fire* have moved on to new landscapes and “Indians” to civilize. The films may not look and feel like traditional westerns, but the heroes’ journey through the wilderness is echoed nonetheless in the wilds of Mexico City in *Man on Fire*, or in the Bosnian wilderness of *Behind Enemy Lines*. The heroes’ ultimate domination over these environments does not result in the taming of the land or the people, but does work to position the American hero as civilized, especially as compared to the savages he encounters. The new frontier is no longer limited to the American west—it has become a psychological frontier that has expanded across the world and has become endless. As argued by Jean-Michel Valantin in his discussion of national security, cinema and American strategic identity, “the Frontier legend is the memory’s digest of the conquest of the west, of the building of the Nation and the repeated and legitimate use of armed force against any entity threatening the community and its rules. The use of force in the

world is thus not only legitimate but necessary, and knows no internal bounds” (Valantin, 2). This new hero’s quest is not limited to the protection of his own land from known enemies but has been expanded to pre-emptive violence against anyone deemed a threat to the world at large, which has become the new American frontier.

In addition to their treatment of space, the six films under analysis in this thesis possess a second quality that links them to the western genre: the behaviour of the heroes. The renegade behaviour of the heroes in *Man on Fire*, *Collateral Damage* and *The Punisher*, for instance, is particularly similar to the cowboy hero, especially in relation to their use of “justified” violence and their isolationist attitudes. These heroes are self-disciplined and independent yet explode with violence and protect communities when threats emerge on their frontiers. They also ultimately choose to remain outside of the communities that they are trying to save: Creasy dies instead of staying on with Pita as a potential father, Castle chooses not to become a part of the family of outcasts at his apartment building, and Brewer rejects posterity in order to retreat with his new son. On the other hand, the heroes of the war films under consideration also possess qualities of the western hero, if only for their use of violence against a ‘savage’ other. Richard Slotkin argues that the American frontier myth is intrinsically tied to violence, and that “the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it has been the means to our achievement of national identity” (Slotkin 1993, 10). He suggests that, while the original function of this myth was to justify the growth of the American colonies, it has since been reinterpreted in order to explain and justify America’s presence as a powerful nation. Slotkin argues “violence is central to both the historical development of the Frontier and its mythic

representation” and reminds us that “the Anglo-American colonies grew by displacing Amerindian societies and enslaving Africans to advance the fortunes of white colonists. As a result, the “savage war” became a characteristic episode of each phase of westward expansion [and] the Myth of the Frontier relates the achievement of “progress to a particular form or scenario of violent action” (11). This “savage war” has never ceased to be fought, even long after the West has been claimed by civilization. As argued above, the psychological frontier has expanded across the globe, and the heroes in the war films continue to fight the “savage war.” Moore and his men must overcome the aggressive Viet Cong, who have already shown their villainy by butchering the French army at the beginning of the film, Burnett must defeat Serbian forces who have demonstrated their savage nature by massacring children and families and dumped their bodies in a mass grave, and Mucci and his soldiers must eliminate the Japanese, who have been shown to be merciless against their foes. Each American warrior must regress to a primitive state in order to achieve victory over his enemy (in each film a hero defeats his foremost enemy through hand-to-hand combat, therefore proving himself as the most worthy warrior), something that Slotkin refers to as “regeneration through violence” (12). Only by participating in conflict and by engaging in violent acts can these American heroes protect their communities and demonstrate their superiority.

Beyond the behaviour of the heroes, many of the films under consideration here also include re-imagined western iconography. Beyond the obvious fact that all the heroes resort to the use of guns in order to solve their problems, both *We Were Soldiers* and *Behind Enemy Lines* connect the military with cowboy iconography. *We Were Soldiers* does so by visually connecting military action to the cowboy myth that was

discussed in chapter three. In an early scene Moore gathers his men inside an airplane hangar and walks briskly towards them as he announces, "Welcome to the new cavalry, gentlemen. We will ride into battle and this will be our horse. You don't have to catch it, and you don't have to feed it." He turns to the open hangar doors and a brand new Huey helicopter descends from the sky to land. Large, metal and loud, this machine is obviously a powerful beast. According to Moore, this is no ordinary horse because these are no ordinary soldiers. Rather than adopt the mythos of the solitary combatant that is described by Jenni Calder, this film turns to the cowboy myth to convey a sense of power and utility. The horse here does not symbolize independence or free reign; rather it is a tool that represents a military advantage.

A similar approach is taken by the marines in *Behind Enemy Lines*. After learning that Burnett has been shot down but is still alive in enemy territory, a marine tells Reigart, "You say the word and we'll saddle up. All we need is a ride." Both films emphasize the triumph of technology over nature and position the USA as John Wayne-style cowboy figures that are fearless to settle the next frontier. Having used up the Wild West, it seems that foreign nations are the next best thing.

These films are war and action films, and yet they are also westerns. In many ways they rely on the basic mythic structure put forth in the western film and reinforce the ideological function of this myth; one that positions the American hero as representative of order and strength while simultaneously justifying this hero's reliance on violence as necessity. When considered in relation to a post 11 September landscape where the Bush administration positions America as a type of justified cowboy who must

“lead the world to safety, security, peace and freedom,” it appears that the frontier myth continues in full force.

When I originally chose this thesis topic, there were very few cultural products that dealt directly with the events of 11 September. In the last few years, however, this has changed. Several American films have been released over the last two years that openly address terrorism, and in some cases, September 11 itself. Their treatment of this event, as well as the heroes that react to this event, would be useful for future study and is briefly discussed below. One of these films is 2005’s *Jarhead* (Dir. Sam Mendes), which tells the story of a platoon of marines who are sent to the Gulf War in 1990. The film focuses on new recruit Anthony Swofford, a marine whose father and uncle had served in Vietnam. He joins the marines when he is 20 years old to follow in his father’s footsteps but soon admits in voiceover to the audience that he was too young to make such a decision and that it may have been a mistake. When he is sent to Iraq, his platoon spends nearly a year doing nothing but practicing sniping tactics and entertaining themselves playing football, suggesting that the troops are not really in danger, which is certainly contrary to the current war in Iraq. The film provides a running tally of the number of days the US is in Iraq as well as the rising number of troops. It also acknowledges some of the reasons that Saddam Hussein poses such a threat—one soldier declares, “You know how they got the weapons? We gave them to them.” This film does not focus on the glory of American warfare. In fact, the military’s faults are emphasized: Swofford’s platoon is fired upon by other Americans, his gas mask does not function properly, a soldier is killed in training camp, and the platoon witnesses the aftermath of the bombing of a caravan of civilians. *Jarhead* identifies that the Gulf War did not unfold as expected

and that life in the military is not the same as it is advertised to be. In doing so, the film encourages thought about the myth of war and what it means to be a hero and a soldier, within clear limits.

Another film goes a step further towards encouraging thought: it blurs the line between hero and terrorist. The film *V for Vendetta* (Dir. James McTeigue, 2006) was released in April of 2006. Based on an Alan Moore comic, the story follows a British vigilante called V, who resides in a strictly government-regulated and monitored London, England. Tired with the government's control of human rights, V sets in motion a grand scheme to blow up the parliament buildings and engage London's citizens to reclaim their individual rights. In essence, the film is about overthrowing the government. While the original graphic novel was set in the era of Margaret Thatcher, the film is set in the future and makes direct reference to "America's War". It suggests that the war in Iraq led to the third world war and a gradual loss of human rights in the first world. V is essentially a terrorist—he is not averse to killing in order to achieve his goals, nor does he hesitate to use violence. He is a suicide bomber, and yet he is also an advocate for personal rights and freedom of expression. This new terrorist is well rounded; he is fleshed out and not a caricature. Even his goals are well defined and are based in his country's own history. It is only because of his government's actions and foreign policy that he is driven to take action.

While these films have obvious connections to the events of 11 September, it was not until 2006 that mainstream films began to tackle the events directly. Oliver Stone took on the events of 11 September directly in *World Trade Center* (2006), a film about two Port Authority police officers that become trapped under the rubble of the World

Trade Centre, while Paul Greengrass explored the plight of the passengers aboard the ill-fated United 93 flight in his film *United 93* (2006). Although this second film was made with contributions from the passengers' families, reaction to this film was mixed. The trailer was banned from several theatres after theatre owners claimed it was too disturbing for viewers. A review by Dennis Lim in *The Village Voice* suggests that some Americans reacted to the film as though it was another form of terrorism. He identifies the narrative of *United 93* as a sculptable myth that was seized by the Bush administration. He suggests that,

The temptation to fix on a definitive narrative of *Flight 93* is obvious. The most dramatic 9-11 subplot to have wholly escaped the reach of news cameras, this unseen event exerted an immediate stranglehold on the national imagination. As was quickly apparent, not least to the president's speechwriters, Flight 93 was an eminently marketable legend. The initial myth, which persisted until investigators discounted it nearly two years later, held that the passengers had improvised a kamikaze response to their hijackers' suicide mission; the "citizen soldiers," as Tom Ridge eulogized them, crashed the plane in a bid to defend the Capitol or the White House." (Lim, April 18 2006)

The film, however, recognizes that the passengers charged the cockpit in a desperate attempt to survive, rather than as a patriotic gesture. This is a different kind of 11 September hero—one that is not as easily manipulated to represent American patriotism.

But does the release of these films signals a shift in the narrative of 11 September? Slavoj Žižek suggests that films like *United 93* and *World Trade Centre* are not much different than the action films that take more liberties in their portrayal of American heroism. He writes that these films are equally "restrained from taking a political stance and depicting the wider context of the events. Neither the passengers on United 93 nor the policemen in WTC grasp the full picture. All of a sudden they find themselves in a terrifying situation and have to make the best out of it" (Žižek 2006). Žižek identifies a

lack of political and historical context in these films and others that began to surface in 2006. He is concerned that these films remain reactionary, since the characters do not have an understanding of why they have been attacked or what has caused the conflict. Instead they react to the destruction in the same way they might react in the aftermath of a natural disaster—the political is lost and these films fail to acknowledge the events of 11 September as anything more than an isolated moment in time.

Since Zizek made these comments, several new films have been released that do deal more closely with the political implications of the event, by focusing on the ways that the US government has reacted post 11 September. *Rendition* (Dir. Gavin Hood, 2007) tells the story of an American immigrant from Egypt who is kidnapped by the American government and taken back to Egypt to be questioned by the CIA. Its narrative is critical in some ways of the tactics employed by the USA, but once again the film is mostly reactionary. The narrative focuses on events that occur after 11 September but doesn't shed light on the US political history that led to the event itself. *Lions for Lambs* (Dir. Robert Redford, 2007) focuses on the current conflict in the Middle East from the perspective of several characters, including two young soldiers who joined the army to serve their country and now face imminent death on an Afghan hilltop, a liberal American professor who tries to encourage students to become more aware of their country's involvement in world affairs, and a Republican Senator willing to risk soldiers' lives in order to benefit politically. The film invites the public to engage in politics and to question their government, which is a promising step. However, like its predecessors the film fails to explore the historical lead-up to the event. It appears that as time passes, film narratives are more likely to explore alternative narratives surrounding the aftermath of

11 September 2001, but there remains hesitancy to explore the political implications of the attack itself. Further investigation would be useful to better understand the evolution of the American male hero in this context.

While my thesis has not focused on films that directly address the events of 11 September, its analysis of war and revenge action films has nonetheless revealed a vibrant militarism and an affinity for vengeance. As prefaced by the design of the war and renegade heroes throughout American film history, and actualized once more in the films analyzed in my thesis, mainstream film heroes can serve as stand-ins for the nation's conservative viewpoints towards war and military action. The knee-jerk reactions of the renegade heroes work to legitimize violent retribution against an intrusive Other, and dissuade the viewer from considering alternate resolutions to similar problems. Further, the war heroes' whitewashed interaction with past US military events have the effect of rewriting history in the memories of the viewer, and in doing so position the USA as a valiant saviour of other nations. The masculine hero, whether he is a soldier or a renegade, is intrinsically linked to national prestige, patriotism and power. This position recalls Giroux's description of the function of cultural products during times of accelerated patriotism and political infliction: it seems the six films each contribute to an ongoing "militarization of visual culture," where anxiety and terror of the Other is situated in direct opposition to salvation through violence.

Just as the Bush speeches set rigid norms and behavioural codes establishing America as a faultless force, many of the films released soon after feed this same perception. Whether the films reflect Bush's rhetoric or Bush's rhetoric reflects a legacy of film narratives that position the American as justified hero warrior, the effect is the

same. Both systems echo an ideological fantasy of a faultless, fabled American history, life and patriotism. According to these films, the clear choice in post 11 September lies in supporting the USA as hero, since the alternative would be to support a subhuman enemy. In an America that encourages citizens to choose the "us" in an "us versus them" equation, it certainly helps to have Hollywood on your side.

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Appendix A:

September 20, 2001 Address to a Joint Session of Congress

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore, members of Congress, and fellow Americans, in the normal course of events, presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the union. Tonight, no such report is needed; it has already been delivered by the American people.

We have seen it in the courage of passengers who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground. Passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer. And would you please help me welcome his wife Lisa Beamer here tonight?

(APPLAUSE) We have seen the state of our union in the endurance of rescuers working past exhaustion.

We've seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers in English, Hebrew and Arabic.

We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own.

My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of union, and it is strong.

(APPLAUSE)

Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.

(APPLAUSE)

I thank the Congress for its leadership at such an important time.

All of America was touched on the evening of the tragedy to see Republicans and Democrats joined together on the steps of this Capitol singing "God Bless America."

And you did more than sing. You acted, by delivering \$40 billion to rebuild our communities and meet the needs of our military. Speaker Hastert, Minority Leader Gephardt, Majority Leader Daschle and Senator Lott, I thank you for your friendship, for your leadership and for your service to our country.

(APPLAUSE)

And on behalf of the American people, I thank the world for its outpouring of support.

America will never forget the sounds of our national anthem playing at Buckingham Palace, on the streets of Paris and at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate.

We will not forget South Korean children gathering to pray outside our embassy in Seoul, or the prayers of sympathy offered at a mosque in Cairo.

We will not forget moments of silence and days of mourning in Australia and Africa and Latin America.

Nor will we forget the citizens of 80 other nations who died with our own. Dozens of Pakistanis, more than 130 Israelis, more than 250 citizens of India, men and women from El Salvador, Iran, Mexico and Japan, and hundreds of British citizens.

America has no truer friend than Great Britain. (APPLAUSE) Once again, we are joined together in a great cause.

I'm so honored the British prime minister has crossed an ocean to show his unity with America.

Thank you for coming, friend.

(APPLAUSE)

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war, but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning.

Americans have known surprise attacks, but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day, and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.

Americans have many questions tonight. Americans are asking, "Who attacked our country?"

The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda. They are some of the murderers indicted for bombing American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya and responsible for bombing the USS Cole.

Al Qaeda is to terror what the Mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money, its goal is remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.

The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics; a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam.

The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children. This group and its leader, a person named Osama bin Laden, are linked to many other organizations in different countries, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries.

They are recruited from their own nations and neighborhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan where they are trained in the tactics of terror. They are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction. The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan we see al Qaeda's vision for the world. Afghanistan's people have been brutalized, many are starving and many have fled.

Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough. The United States respects the people of Afghanistan -- after all, we are currently its largest source of humanitarian aid -- but we condemn the Taliban regime.

(APPLAUSE)

It is not only repressing its own people, it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists.

By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder. And tonight the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban:

-- Deliver to United States authorities all of the leaders of Al Qaeda who hide in your land.

-- Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens you have unjustly imprisoned.

-- Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country.

-- Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. And hand over every terrorist and every person and their support structure to appropriate authorities.

-- Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.

These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion.

(APPLAUSE)

The Taliban must act and act immediately.

They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate. I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah.

(APPLAUSE)

The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself.

The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them.

(APPLAUSE)

Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there.

It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

(APPLAUSE)

Americans are asking "Why do they hate us?"

They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa.

These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us because we stand in their way.

We're not deceived by their pretenses to piety.

We have seen their kind before. They're the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way to where it ends in history's

unmarked grave of discarded lies. Americans are asking, "How will we fight and win this war?"

We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network.

Now, this war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat.

Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes visible on TV and covert operations secret even in success.

We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place until there is no refuge or no rest.

And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.

From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. Our nation has been put on notice, we're not immune from attack. We will take defensive measures against terrorism to protect Americans. Today, dozens of federal departments and agencies, as well as state and local governments, have responsibilities affecting homeland security.

These efforts must be coordinated at the highest level. So tonight, I announce the creation of a Cabinet-level position reporting directly to me, the Office of Homeland Security. And tonight, I also announce a distinguished American to lead this effort, to strengthen American security: a military veteran, an effective governor, a true patriot, a trusted friend, Pennsylvania's Tom Ridge.

He will lead, oversee and coordinate a comprehensive national strategy to safeguard our country against terrorism and respond to any attacks that may come. These measures are essential. The only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it and destroy it where it grows.

Many will be involved in this effort, from FBI agents, to intelligence operatives, to the reservists we have called to active duty. All deserve our thanks, and all have our prayers. And tonight a few miles from the damaged Pentagon, I have a message for our military: Be ready. I have called the armed forces to alert, and there is a reason.

The hour is coming when America will act, and you will make us proud.

This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.

We ask every nation to join us.

We will ask and we will need the help of police forces, intelligence service and banking systems around the world. The United States is grateful that many nations and many international organizations have already responded with sympathy and with support -- nations from Latin America to Asia to Africa to Europe to the Islamic world.

Perhaps the NATO charter reflects best the attitude of the world: An attack on one is an attack on all. The civilized world is rallying to America's side.

They understand that if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next. Terror unanswered can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments.

And you know what? We're not going to allow it.

(APPLAUSE)

Americans are asking, "What is expected of us?"

I ask you to live your lives and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.

I ask you to uphold the values of America and remember why so many have come here.

We're in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith.

I ask you to continue to support the victims of this tragedy with your contributions. Those who want to give can go to a central source of information, Libertyunites.org, to find the names of groups providing direct help in New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia. The thousands of FBI agents who are now at work in this investigation may need your cooperation, and I ask you to give it. I ask for your patience with the delays and inconveniences that may accompany tighter security and for your patience in what will be a long struggle.

I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy. Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity; they did not touch its source.

America is successful because of the hard work and creativity and enterprise of our people. These were the true strengths of our economy before September 11, and they are our strengths today.

And finally, please continue praying for the victims of terror and their families, for those in uniform and for our great country. Prayer has comforted us in sorrow and will help strengthen us for the journey ahead. Tonight I thank my fellow Americans for what you have already done and for what you will do.

And ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, I thank you, their representatives, for what you have already done and for what we will do together.

Tonight we face new and sudden national challenges. We will come together to improve air safety, to dramatically expand the number of air marshals on domestic flights and take new measures to prevent hijacking.

We will come together to promote stability and keep our airlines flying with direct assistance during this emergency.

(APPLAUSE)

We will come together to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home.

We will come together to strengthen our intelligence capabilities to know the plans of terrorists before they act and to find them before they strike.

(APPLAUSE)

We will come together to take active steps that strengthen America's economy and put our people back to work.

Tonight, we welcome two leaders who embody the extraordinary spirit of all New Yorkers, Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

As a symbol of America's resolve, my administration will work with Congress and these two leaders to show the world that we will rebuild New York City.

After all that has just passed, all the lives taken and all the possibilities and hopes that died with them, it is natural to wonder if America's future is one of fear.

Some speak of an age of terror. I know there are struggles ahead and dangers to face. But this country will define our times, not be defined by them.

As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror. This will be an age of liberty here and across the world.

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment.

Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us.

Our nation, this generation, will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter and we will not fail.

(APPLAUSE)

It is my hope that in the months and years ahead life will return almost to normal. We'll go back to our lives and routines and that is good.

Even grief recedes with time and grace.

But our resolve must not pass. Each of us will remember what happened that day and to whom it happened. We will remember the moment the news came, where we were and what we were doing.

Some will remember an image of a fire or story or rescue. Some will carry memories of a face and a voice gone forever.

And I will carry this. It is the police shield of a man named George Howard who died at the World Trade Center trying to save others.

It was given to me by his mom, Arlene, as a proud memorial to her son. It is my reminder of lives that ended and a task that does not end.

I will not forget the wound to our country and those who inflicted it. I will not yield, I will not rest, I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people. The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. (APPLAUSE)

Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice, assured of the rightness of our cause and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom and may he watch over the United States of America. Thank you.

Appendix B:

January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address

Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, Vice President Cheney, members of Congress, distinguished guests, fellow citizens: As we gather tonight, our nation is at war, our economy is in recession, and the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers. Yet the state of our Union has never been stronger. (Applause.)

We last met in an hour of shock and suffering. In four short months, our nation has comforted the victims, begun to rebuild New York and the Pentagon, rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression. (Applause.)

The American flag flies again over our embassy in Kabul. Terrorists who once occupied Afghanistan now occupy cells at Guantanamo Bay. (Applause.) And terrorist leaders who urged followers to sacrifice their lives are running for their own. (Applause.)

America and Afghanistan are now allies against terror. We'll be partners in rebuilding that country. And this evening we welcome the distinguished interim leader of a liberated Afghanistan: Chairman Hamid Karzai. (Applause.)

The last time we met in this chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government. And we welcome the new Minister of Women's Affairs, Doctor Sima Samar. (Applause.)

Our progress is a tribute to the spirit of the Afghan people, to the resolve of our coalition, and to the might of the United States military. (Applause.) When I called our troops into action, I did so with complete confidence in their courage and skill. And tonight, thanks to them, we are winning the war on terror. (Applause.) The man and women of our Armed Forces have delivered a message now clear to every enemy of the United States: Even 7,000 miles away, across oceans and continents, on mountaintops and in caves -- you will not escape the justice of this nation. (Applause.)

For many Americans, these four months have brought sorrow, and pain that will never completely go away. Every day a retired firefighter returns to Ground Zero, to feel closer to his two sons who died there. At a memorial in New York, a little boy left his football with a note for his lost father: Dear Daddy, please take this to heaven. I don't want to play football until I can play with you again some day.

Last month, at the grave of her husband, Michael, a CIA officer and Marine who died in Mazur-e-Sharif, Shannon Spann said these words of farewell: "Semper Fi, my love." Shannon is with us tonight. (Applause.)

Shannon, I assure you and all who have lost a loved one that our cause is just, and our country will never forget the debt we owe Michael and all who gave their lives for freedom.

Our cause is just, and it continues. Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies' hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of the destruction they design. We have found diagrams of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities, and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world.

What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. Most of the 19 men who hijacked planes on September the 11th were trained in Afghanistan's camps, and so were tens of thousands of others. Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.

Thanks to the work of our law enforcement officials and coalition partners, hundreds of terrorists have been arrested. Yet, tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large. These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are. (Applause.) So long as training camps operate, so long as nations harbor terrorists, freedom is at risk. And America and our allies must not, and will not, allow it. (Applause.)

Our nation will continue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world. (Applause.)

Our military has put the terror training camps of Afghanistan out of business, yet camps still exist in at least a dozen countries. A terrorist underworld -- including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed -- operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities.

While the most visible military action is in Afghanistan, America is acting elsewhere. We now have troops in the Philippines, helping to train that country's armed forces to go after terrorist cells that have executed an American, and still hold hostages. Our soldiers, working with the Bosnian government, seized terrorists who were plotting to bomb our embassy. Our Navy is patrolling the coast of Africa to block the shipment of weapons and the establishment of terrorist camps in Somalia.

My hope is that all nations will heed our call, and eliminate the terrorist parasites who threaten their countries and our own. Many nations are acting forcefully. Pakistan is

now cracking down on terror, and I admire the strong leadership of President Musharraf. (Applause.)

But some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will. (Applause.)

Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.

Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom.

Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens -- leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections -- then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.

We will work closely with our coalition to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction. We will develop and deploy effective missile defenses to protect America and our allies from sudden attack. (Applause.) And all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security.

We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons. (Applause.)

Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch -- yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch.

We can't stop short. If we stop now -- leaving terror camps intact and terror states unchecked -- our sense of security would be false and temporary. History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight. (Applause.)

Our first priority must always be the security of our nation, and that will be reflected in the budget I send to Congress. My budget supports three great goals for America: We will win this war; we'll protect our homeland; and we will revive our economy.

September the 11th brought out the best in America, and the best in this Congress. And I join the American people in applauding your unity and resolve. (Applause.) Now Americans deserve to have this same spirit directed toward addressing problems here at home. I'm a proud member of my party -- yet as we act to win the war, protect our people, and create jobs in America, we must act, first and foremost, not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans. (Applause.)

It costs a lot to fight this war. We have spent more than a billion dollars a month -- over \$30 million a day -- and we must be prepared for future operations. Afghanistan proved that expensive precision weapons defeat the enemy and spare innocent lives, and we need more of them. We need to replace aging aircraft and make our military more agile, to put our troops anywhere in the world quickly and safely. Our men and women in uniform deserve the best weapons, the best equipment, the best training -- and they also deserve another pay raise. (Applause.)

My budget includes the largest increase in defense spending in two decades -- because while the price of freedom and security is high, it is never too high. Whatever it costs to defend our country, we will pay. (Applause.)

The next priority of my budget is to do everything possible to protect our citizens and strengthen our nation against the ongoing threat of another attack. Time and distance from the events of September the 11th will not make us safer unless we act on its lessons.

America is no longer protected by vast oceans. We are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad, and increased vigilance at home.

My budget nearly doubles funding for a sustained strategy of homeland security, focused on four key areas: bioterrorism, emergency response, airport and border security, and improved intelligence. We will develop vaccines to fight anthrax and other deadly diseases. We'll increase funding to help states and communities train and equip our heroic police and firefighters. (Applause.) We will improve intelligence collection and sharing, expand patrols at our borders, strengthen the security of air travel, and use technology to track the arrivals and departures of visitors to the United States. (Applause.)

Homeland security will make America not only stronger, but, in many ways, better. Knowledge gained from bioterrorism research will improve public health. Stronger police and fire departments will mean safer neighborhoods. Stricter border enforcement will help combat illegal drugs. (Applause.) And as government works to better secure our homeland, America will continue to depend on the eyes and ears of alert citizens.

A few days before Christmas, an airline flight attendant spotted a passenger lighting a match. The crew and passengers quickly subdued the man, who had been trained by al

Qaeda and was armed with explosives. The people on that plane were alert and, as a result, likely saved nearly 200 lives. And tonight we welcome and thank flight attendants Hermis Moutardier and Christina Jones. (Applause.)

Once we have funded our national security and our homeland security, the final great priority of my budget is economic security for the American people. (Applause.) To achieve these great national objectives -- to win the war, protect the homeland, and revitalize our economy -- our budget will run a deficit that will be small and short-term, so long as Congress restrains spending and acts in a fiscally responsible manner. (Applause.) We have clear priorities and we must act at home with the same purpose and resolve we have shown overseas: We'll prevail in the war, and we will defeat this recession. (Applause.)

Americans who have lost their jobs need our help and I support extending unemployment benefits and direct assistance for health care coverage. (Applause.) Yet, American workers want more than unemployment checks -- they want a steady paycheck. (Applause.) When America works, America prospers, so my economic security plan can be summed up in one word: jobs. (Applause.)

Good jobs begin with good schools, and here we've made a fine start. (Applause.) Republicans and Democrats worked together to achieve historic education reform so that no child is left behind. I was proud to work with members of both parties: Chairman John Boehner and Congressman George Miller. (Applause.) Senator Judd Gregg. (Applause.) And I was so proud of our work, I even had nice things to say about my friend, Ted Kennedy. (Laughter and applause.) I know the folks at the Crawford coffee shop couldn't believe I'd say such a thing -- (laughter) -- but our work on this bill shows what is possible if we set aside posturing and focus on results. (Applause.)

There is more to do. We need to prepare our children to read and succeed in school with improved Head Start and early childhood development programs. (Applause.) We must upgrade our teacher colleges and teacher training and launch a major recruiting drive with a great goal for America: a quality teacher in every classroom. (Applause.)

Good jobs also depend on reliable and affordable energy. This Congress must act to encourage conservation, promote technology, build infrastructure, and it must act to increase energy production at home so America is less dependent on foreign oil. (Applause.)

Good jobs depend on expanded trade. Selling into new markets creates new jobs, so I ask Congress to finally approve trade promotion authority. (Applause.) On these two key issues, trade and energy, the House of Representatives has acted to create jobs, and I urge the Senate to pass this legislation. (Applause.)

Good jobs depend on sound tax policy. (Applause.) Last year, some in this hall thought my tax relief plan was too small; some thought it was too big. (Applause.) But when the checks arrived in the mail, most Americans thought tax relief was just about right.

(Applause.) Congress listened to the people and responded by reducing tax rates, doubling the child credit, and ending the death tax. For the sake of long-term growth and to help Americans plan for the future, let's make these tax cuts permanent. (Applause.)

The way out of this recession, the way to create jobs, is to grow the economy by encouraging investment in factories and equipment, and by speeding up tax relief so people have more money to spend. For the sake of American workers, let's pass a stimulus package. (Applause.)

Good jobs must be the aim of welfare reform. As we reauthorize these important reforms, we must always remember the goal is to reduce dependency on government and offer every American the dignity of a job. (Applause.)

Americans know economic security can vanish in an instant without health security. I ask Congress to join me this year to enact a patients' bill of rights -- (applause) -- to give uninsured workers credits to help buy health coverage -- (applause) -- to approve an historic increase in the spending for veterans' health -- (applause) -- and to give seniors a sound and modern Medicare system that includes coverage for prescription drugs. (Applause.)

A good job should lead to security in retirement. I ask Congress to enact new safeguards for 401K and pension plans. (Applause.) Employees who have worked hard and saved all their lives should not have to risk losing everything if their company fails. (Applause.) Through stricter accounting standards and tougher disclosure requirements, corporate America must be made more accountable to employees and shareholders and held to the highest standards of conduct. (Applause.)

Retirement security also depends upon keeping the commitments of Social Security, and we will. We must make Social Security financially stable and allow personal retirement accounts for younger workers who choose them. (Applause.)

Members, you and I will work together in the months ahead on other issues: productive farm policy -- (applause) -- a cleaner environment -- (applause) -- broader home ownership, especially among minorities -- (applause) -- and ways to encourage the good work of charities and faith-based groups. (Applause.) I ask you to join me on these important domestic issues in the same spirit of cooperation we've applied to our war against terrorism. (Applause.)

During these last few months, I've been humbled and privileged to see the true character of this country in a time of testing. Our enemies believed America was weak and materialistic, that we would splinter in fear and selfishness. They were as wrong as they are evil. (Applause.)

The American people have responded magnificently, with courage and compassion, strength and resolve. As I have met the heroes, hugged the families, and looked into the tired faces of rescuers, I have stood in awe of the American people.

And I hope you will join me -- I hope you will join me in expressing thanks to one American for the strength and calm and comfort she brings to our nation in crisis, our First Lady, Laura Bush. (Applause.)

None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September the 11th. Yet after America was attacked, it was as if our entire country looked into a mirror and saw our better selves. We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history. We began to think less of the goods we can accumulate, and more about the good we can do.

For too long our culture has said, "If it feels good, do it." Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: "Let's roll." (Applause.) In the sacrifice of soldiers, the fierce brotherhood of firefighters, and the bravery and generosity of ordinary citizens, we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We've been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass. (Applause.)

My call tonight is for every American to commit at least two years -- 4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime -- to the service of your neighbors and your nation. (Applause.) Many are already serving, and I thank you. If you aren't sure how to help, I've got a good place to start. To sustain and extend the best that has emerged in America, I invite you to join the new USA Freedom Corps. The Freedom Corps will focus on three areas of need: responding in case of crisis at home; rebuilding our communities; and extending American compassion throughout the world.

One purpose of the USA Freedom Corps will be homeland security. America needs retired doctors and nurses who can be mobilized in major emergencies; volunteers to help police and fire departments; transportation and utility workers well-trained in spotting danger.

Our country also needs citizens working to rebuild our communities. We need mentors to love children, especially children whose parents are in prison. And we need more talented teachers in troubled schools. USA Freedom Corps will expand and improve the good efforts of AmeriCorps and Senior Corps to recruit more than 200,000 new volunteers.

And America needs citizens to extend the compassion of our country to every part of the world. So we will renew the promise of the Peace Corps, double its volunteers over the next five years -- (applause) -- and ask it to join a new effort to encourage development and education and opportunity in the Islamic world. (Applause.)

This time of adversity offers a unique moment of opportunity -- a moment we must seize to change our culture. Through the gathering momentum of millions of acts of service and decency and kindness, I know we can overcome evil with greater good. (Applause.) And we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace.

All fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated, and live free from poverty and violence. No people on Earth yearn to be oppressed, or aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police.

If anyone doubts this, let them look to Afghanistan, where the Islamic "street" greeted the fall of tyranny with song and celebration. Let the skeptics look to Islam's own rich history, with its centuries of learning, and tolerance and progress. America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere. (Applause.)

No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance. (Applause.)

America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.

In this moment of opportunity, a common danger is erasing old rivalries. America is working with Russia and China and India, in ways we have never before, to achieve peace and prosperity. In every region, free markets and free trade and free societies are proving their power to lift lives. Together with friends and allies from Europe to Asia, and Africa to Latin America, we will demonstrate that the forces of terror cannot stop the momentum of freedom. (Applause.)

The last time I spoke here, I expressed the hope that life would return to normal. In some ways, it has. In others, it never will. Those of us who have lived through these challenging times have been changed by them. We've come to know truths that we will never question: evil is real, and it must be opposed. (Applause.) Beyond all differences of race or creed, we are one country, mourning together and facing danger together. Deep in the American character, there is honor, and it is stronger than cynicism. And many have discovered again that even in tragedy -- especially in tragedy -- God is near. (Applause.)

In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we've been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential.

Our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life. (Applause.)

Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory.

Thank you all. May God bless.

Appendix C:

September 14, 2001 National Day of Prayer Speech

We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow. We come before God to pray for the missing and the dead, and for those who love them.

On Tuesday, our country was attacked with deliberate and massive cruelty. We have seen the images of fire and ashes, and bent steel.

Now come the names, the list of casualties we are only beginning to read. They are the names of men and women who began their day at a desk or in an airport, busy with life. They are the names of people who faced death, and in their last moments called home to say, be brave, and I love you.

They are the names of passengers who defied their murderers, and prevented the murder of others on the ground. They are the names of men and women who wore the uniform of the United States, and died at their posts.

They are the names of rescuers, the ones whom death found running up the stairs and into the fires to help others. We will read all these names. We will linger over them, and learn their stories, and many Americans will weep.

To the children and parents and spouses and families and friends of the lost, we offer the deepest sympathy of the nation. And I assure you, you are not alone.

Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.

War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing.

Our purpose as a nation is firm. Yet our wounds as a people are recent and unhealed, and lead us to pray. In many of our prayers this week, there is a searching, and an honesty. At St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on Tuesday, a woman said, "I prayed to God to give us a sign that He is still here." Others have prayed for the same, searching hospital to hospital, carrying pictures of those still missing.

God's signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy that his purposes are not always our own. Yet the prayers of private suffering, whether in our homes or in this great cathedral, are known and heard, and understood.

There are prayers that help us last through the day, or endure the night. There are prayers of friends and strangers, that give us strength for the journey. And there are prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own.

This world He created is of moral design. Grief and tragedy and hatred are only for a time. Goodness, remembrance, and love have no end. And the Lord of life holds all who die, and all who mourn.

It is said that adversity introduces us to ourselves. This is true of a nation as well. In this trial, we have been reminded, and the world has seen, that our fellow Americans are generous and kind, resourceful and brave. We see our national character in rescuers working past exhaustion; in long lines of blood donors; in thousands of citizens who have asked to work and serve in any way possible.

And we have seen our national character in eloquent acts of sacrifice. Inside the World Trade Center, one man who could have saved himself stayed until the end at the side of his quadriplegic friend. A beloved priest died giving the last rites to a firefighter. Two office workers, finding a disabled stranger, carried her down sixty-eight floors to safety. A group of men drove through the night from Dallas to Washington to bring skin grafts for burn victims.

In these acts, and in many others, Americans showed a deep commitment to one another, and an abiding love for our country. Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of national unity. This is a unity of every faith, and every background.

It has joined together political parties in both houses of Congress. It is evident in services of prayer and candlelight vigils, and American flags, which are displayed in pride, and wave in defiance.

Our unity is a kinship of grief, and a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies. And this unity against terror is now extending across the world.

America is a nation full of good fortune, with so much to be grateful for. But we are not spared from suffering. In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time.

On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask almighty God to watch over our nation, and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. We pray that He will comfort and console those who now walk in sorrow. We thank Him for each life we now must mourn, and the promise of a life to come.

As we have been assured, neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, can separate us from God's love. May He bless the souls of the departed. May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country. God bless America.

