Homecoming's, Killer Ants, and War Games: A Roundtable on Teaching with Popular Films

Richard Hume Werking, Matt Loayza, Molly M. Wood, Justin Hart

Visions of Post-World War II America: Considering *Pride of the Marines*

Richard Hume Werking

I was introduced to the practice of having students use popular films as primary sources at the University of Wisconsin in the 1970s, as a teaching assistant for Professor Paul Glad's course on U.S. History since 1917. At a time when physical proximity to tangible materials was much more necessary than it is today, we had some remarkable resources to work with readily at hand. Sometime during the 1960s the Wisconsin Historical Society had acquired the United Artists collection, which contained all films released by Warner Brothers, RKO, and Monogram studios from 1930 to 1950.[1] Glad had designed his course to exploit this treasure trove by showing full-length feature films during special evening sessions, films such as *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Dawn Patrol* (1938), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), and *Pride of the Marines* (1945). Right away I was especially interested in *Pride* as a substantive pedagogical tool, and that interest deepened over the years. At the Naval Academy I deployed it chiefly in my sophomore research seminar on the early Cold War.[2]

In November 1942, on Veterans Day, *The New York Times* published a story about one man's heroism during a battle on Guadalcanal three months earlier, when badly wounded Private Albert A. Schmid manned a machine gun and killed some two hundred Japanese soldiers while helping the Marines repulse an enemy attack.[3] Roger Butterfield followed up with a March 1943 *Life* magazine story about Schmid and his struggle with blindness and subsequently turned the article into a book published the next year: *Al Schmid: Marine*.[4] Hollywood picked up the story from there. *Pride* was produced during 1944–45 and released as the war was ending.

I avoid telling my students much about this film before showing them portions of it. I do reveal that it was released in August 1945; that it is based on the real-life story of Al Schmid, a steelworker from Philadelphia who joined the Marines soon after Pearl Harbor and was blinded in combat on Guadalcanal, where his heroism earned him the Navy Cross; and that it stars one of the most widely acclaimed actors of the mid-twentieth century—John Garfield. It is a two-hour film, so I usually show them just a sample of perhaps 25–30 minutes. I urge students to consider this film as another kind of primary document and to ask themselves as they watch it, "What's the message here? What are the key scenes, the most important lines? What evidence am I seeing or hearing to suggest this film was made when it was?" And I strongly suggest that they take notes.

Opening. The first voice we hear, for more than a minute, belongs to John Garfield as Al Schmid, while the camera pans the city from above before focusing on the places Al mentions:

> *This is Philadelphia, 1941. Everybody's got a hometown; this one's mine. My name is Schmid, Al Schmid, maybe you've heard of me, maybe not. Anyhow, one way or another, what I've got to tell you starts here, in Philly.*
>
> *I grew up here, used to go to places like Independence Hall (that's where the Liberty Bell is and where the Declaration of Independence was signed). . . . And this is where Betsy Ross lived; you've heard about her I guess. . . .*
>
> *None of these things meant a whole lot to me then; when you grow up with something, you kind of take it for granted. And the reason you're seeing these places now is just because this is where my story begins.*
>
> *But it could have begun anywhere. It could have begun in your hometown, maybe. And what happened to me might have happened to you.*

With this introduction Garfield establishes Schmid's credentials as a typical American, a regular guy. And the remaining two hours provide an allegory, in which Schmid is Everyman and the journey he takes is the journey his country takes, from fierce self-reliance, self-centeredness, and ignorance of matters international and societal to a greater awareness of the larger environment.[5]

News of Pearl Harbor. Al and his sweetheart Ruth (played by Eleanor Parker) are having Sunday dinner with friends on December 7, when a preliminary announcement comes over the radio that Pearl Harbor is being attacked. Neither couple knows where it is, though their host is sure of its location:

Host

Oh, it's down the Jersey coast near Atlantic City someplace.

Ruth

It can't be, the Japs are bombing it.

Al dismisses the announcement as "just one of those 'men from Mars' programs."[6]

When the announcer comes back on the air to confirm

the news and announce that the United States is effectively at war with Japan, the hosts' 13-year-old daughter asks, "Are you going to be a soldier, Al?" He replies, "Nah, I'm going to Canada and shoot bears."

Blindness. But Al joins the Marines instead, is blinded on Guadalcanal, and begins a months-long hospital stay. Some of the most affecting scenes in the film take place in the San Diego Naval Hospital. When Al's bandages are removed from his eyes, he can't accept the fact that he has been blinded. When handed a braille card, he reacts angrily. "This is for blind people . . . I don't want any of this stuff, I want to stand on my *own*."

Hopes and Fears. One of the longest and richest scenes occurs in the hospital's recreation room during a bull session, as Al and seven or eight other wounded Marines share their hopes and fears about the postwar world facing them.

Bill

Twice in his life my old man got his name in the papers; the first time in 1917, he was the first to enlist in Milwaukee; and the second time in 1930, he was the first vet to sell unemployed apples. . . .

Lee Diamond *(Al's buddy and machine-gun loader on Guadalcanal; played by Dane Clark)*

C'mon, climb out of your foxholes. You think nobody's learned anything since 1930? You think everyone's had their eyes shut and their brains in cold storage?". . . .

Bill

I'm scared. I wasn't half as scared on the Canal. If a man came along, anybody, and told me I'd have a decent job for the rest of my life, I'd get down on my knees and wash his feet.

Veteran #2

Well, I'm not scared.

Veteran #3

You talk like a guy with dough in the bank. You ask me what I want out of life? I'm not an ambitious guy, thirty bucks a week, enough to take my girl out on a Saturday night, a ball game on Sunday. That's about all I ask. Or is that too much?

Veteran #2

You're a cinch. Things are different now, the whole country has its eyes open; it won't be like 1930 again.

Veteran #3

That's pretty music, but I don't understand the words.

Veteran #2

What about the GI Bill of Rights? I'm going to college on that. They guarantee your old job back, Bill. . . .

Bill

Do they?. . . . My old boss wrote me, "I'm in a new business and your old job just ain't"; there's nothing in the GI Bill of Rights to cover that. You can't get your job back if it doesn't exist.

Veteran #2

Yeah, that's got to be considered.

Bill

Considered?. . . . How about them considering this silver plate in my head? How long did we get to consider when they said 'Hit the beach' at Guadalcanal; they said 'Go' and we went? That's OK; well, I want some considering now. I've got a wife and I want to support her. The doc says I can never do heavy work again, ever. Well, I want to work. . . . How do I know anybody will ever want me?

Veteran #4

Yeah, when I get back to El Centro I'll probably find some Mexican's got my job.

The camera shifts to one of their fellow Marines in B Company, a wheelchair-bound Mexican who has been listening to the conversation off to the side and now wheels away.

Lee

You dumb coot! He's got more foxhole time than you've got in the Marine Corps. . . .

Veteran #3

So maybe we'll even have prosperity for two years after the war while we catch up on things. . . . But what happens after two years? . . . .

Al *(smiling)*

A bonus march.

Lee

No sir. You guys think that because you did the front-line fighting you can take a free ride on the country for the rest of your lives? No sir. . . . I fought for me, for the right to live in the USA. And when I get back to civilian life if I don't like the way things are going, okay, it's my country, I'll stand on my own two legs and I'll holler. If there's enough of us hollering, we'll go places, check?. . . .

Veteran #2

I'm going to be a lawyer. Who says in ten years I won't be a congressman? I'm

going into politics with both feet. And if I have anything to say about it my kid isn't going to land on any beachhead, and if any old windbag tries to sell me on the idea of shipping oil to Japan, or doing business with any new Hitler, he'd better start ducking.

Bill

OK, Junior, I'll check that… I'll put a little handwriting on the wall for you… and whoever's running the country better read it, too: no apples, no bonus marches. Now paste that in your hat, Congressman.

Lee

("America the Beautiful" playing in the background)
One happy afternoon when God was feeling good, he sat down and thought of a rich, beautiful country, and he named it the USA. . . . Don't tell me we can't make it work in peace like we do in war. Don't tell me we can't pull together. Don't you see it,

Al

I don't see none of those things. *(He stumbles away.)*

On the train. After a few months of convalescence, Al and Lee are sent east by train to their hometowns shortly before Christmas, where each is to receive the Navy Cross for valor, Al in Philadelphia and Lee in Brooklyn. A contemporary movie reviewer described Al in this scene as being engulfed by "pride, bitterness, fury, self-pity, despair."[7]

Lee

Al, look; in a war somebody gets it, and you're it. Don't you think I'd crawl on my hands and knees to a doctor if he could take an eye out of my head and put it in yours? But he can't. . . . Believe me, you ain't been a sucker. There ain't a guy who's been killed or disabled in this war who's been a sucker. . . . Everybody's got problems. . . .

Al

What problems have *you* got? You're in one piece, ain't you?. . . . When you go for a job there ain't nobody gonna say "We 've got no use for ex-heroes like *you*."

Lee

That's what *you* think. . . . There's guys that won't hire me because my name is Diamond, instead of Jones. Because I celebrate Passover instead of Easter. . . . You and me, we need the same kind of a world, we need a country where nobody gets booted around for *any* reason.

Final Scene. Al and Ruth are leaving the Philadelphia Navy Yard after the Navy Cross ceremony. They get into a cab, and the cabbie asks, "Where to, folks?" With a smile on his face and his arm around Ruth, Al provides the last word: "Home." The music swells, an amalgamation of the "Marines' Hymn" and "America the Beautiful," as the camera fades from the happy couple and focuses on Independence Hall. As the music's last note sounds, "THE END" is superimposed over the Marine Corps' official insignia—the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor.

HUAC and the "Hollywood Ten"

Pride is an intelligent film, and it enjoyed an overwhelmingly positive reception. The Marine Corps arranged banquets in twenty-eight American cities, where it was shown to Guadalcanal veterans and local officials. The State Department used short-wave radio to broadcast the story to foreign countries, touting it as "an example of the American way of life."[8] The movie reviewer for *The New York Times* provided an especially glowing review, which began:

> The vital and delicate subject of the rehabilitation of wounded men—a subject which has broad implications to civilians as well as service men today—is treated with uncommon compassion, understanding and dignity, as well as with absorbing human interest. . . . Albert Maltz took the journalistic accounts of Schmid's experience and translated them into a solid, credible drama, composed of taut situation and dialogue. . . . His ear for the current idiom . . . is eminently indicated in some of the best talk we've heard on the screen. And Delmer Daves directed the document— for a document it actually is—with brilliant pictorial realism and emotional sympathy.[9]

Even Henry Luce's *Time* magazine took only a passing shot at the film for serving as "a rostrum for liberal polemics," while strongly praising its "compelling doggedness and honesty." The review went on to call *Pride* "exciting— because the screen is so unaccustomed to plain talk— to see and hear the angry discussion of postwar prospects." And *Collier's Year Book* likewise noted that "the real theme of the picture was the adjustment to a postwar world by returning war veterans," and the reviewer praised it for having "performed a public service in making civilians understand the problem."[10]

But not everyone was a fan. In 1947, after the Republican sweep of the congressional elections in 1946, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) launched an investigation of the movie industry. Eventually it cited ten writers, producers and directors—the Hollywood Ten— for contempt for refusing to cooperate with the committee and answer questions about their membership in the Communist Party. According to Ian Hamilton, HUAC focused on three movies in particular: *Pride of the Marines*, *Wilson* (1944), and one of the most popular films of 1946 (it won seven Oscars, including Best Picture), *The Best Years of Our Lives*.[11] Apparently, a majority of the committee deemed all three of these works overly critical of American economic or political life, and unlike the *Time* reviewer they were in no mood to give *Pride* a pass as "a rostrum for liberal polemics."

Consequently, an additional advantage in using this film as a teaching tool is the opportunity it offers to segue into an investigation of HUAC and the Hollywood Ten episode as a precursor to the antics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, which began three years later. Since *Pride* is such an obviously patriotic work, students are surprised when they learn that its screenwriter, Albert Maltz, was one of the ten men who were hauled before Congress, accused of anti-American and pro-communist sympathies, and as a result served time in prison and were blacklisted in Hollywood

for more than a decade. (The one Oscar nomination that the film received was for Maltz's screenplay.)[12]

But perhaps the movie *was* a subversive film at the time, as it sought to draw attention to America's recent economic and foreign policy history. In the process, it seemed to be advocating the sort of interventionist state that for decades would be a defining characteristic of post-World War II American liberalism. It is not Robert Taft's small-town or rural America that is portrayed here on the home front, but instead an urban, industrial world.[13]

In 1945 *Pride of the Marines* connected its audiences with three sets of issues that are again very much with us seventy years later: returning veterans, particularly the disabled, and society's response to them; our nation's role in the world; and the nature of America's political economy. There seems to be relatively little dissent these days about the need to provide care for veterans, especially wounded vets, at least among attentive segments of the public. Not so for the other two issues involving the role of the national government at home and abroad.

Notes:
1. For an introduction to this collection, see http://wcftr.commarts.wisc.edu/about/history.
2. Ronald Briley has also advocated teaching with "Hollywood films that have tried to address the fears and aspirations of the American citizenry, while also attempting to turn a profit." See Briley, "Reel History and the Cold War," *OAH Magazine of History* (Winter 1994): 19.
3. *New York Times*, November 11, 1942, 16.
4. Roger Butterfield, "Al Schmid: Hero," *Life* (March 22, 1943), 35–44; and *Al Schmid: Marine* (New York, 1944). See also "Dear Ruth," *Time*, February 1, 1943, at http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,790773,00.html.
5. David Gerber develops this point in "In Search of Al Schmid: War Hero, Blinded Veteran, Everyman," *Journal of American Studies* 29 (1995): 1–32.
6. A reference to Orson Welles's production of the CBS radio drama "War of the Worlds," the Mercury Theater's Halloween episode in 1938. See the lengthy article on the production at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_War_of_the_Worlds_(radio_drama).
7. "The New Cinema," *Time,* September 3, 1945, at http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,855271-100.html.
8. "Offer of Proof Through Jerry Wald, Motion Picture Producer," n.d., Albert Maltz Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society. Gerber does not cite the Maltz papers, or other Hollywood Ten collections, at the Wisconsin Historical Society, but he does cite a Maltz collection at Boston University's archives (24).
9. Bosley Crowther, "The Screen," *New York Times*, August 25, 1945, 7.
10. "The New Cinema," *Time*, September 3, 1945; *1946: Collier's Year Book Covering Events of the Year 1945* (New York, 1946), 355.
11. Ian Hamilton, *Writers in Hollywood, 1915-1951 (*New York, 1990), 283–99.
12. Gerber erroneously awards the Oscar to Maltz for *Pride*, 21. Five years later, Maltz's screenplay for the highly acclaimed *Broken Arrow* (1950) was also nominated for an Oscar. But because Maltz was blacklisted by then, his friend Michael Blankfort fronted for him. Blankfort was publicly recognized as the author for forty years. "Mending Broken Arrow," *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1991, http://articles.latimes.com/1991-06-29/entertainment/ca-1195_1_broken-arrow.
13. For a succinct characterization of Taft's America, see Eric Goldman, *The Crucial Decade and After* (New York, 1960), 54. Teachers might wish to have their students learn more about Al Schmid's postwar life. Gerber's account of Al's "resistance to rehabilitation" and his difficult relations with other wounded

veterans, including foxhole mate Lee Diamond, stands in marked contrast to the film's portrayal. Gerber, "In Search of Al Schmid," 13 and esp. 30–32.

The Early Cold War on Film

Matt Loayza

Using historical films as primary source materials in the teaching of U.S. foreign relations is an effective way of engaging students and prompting them to think critically about what they watch as well as what they read. Anyone interested in thought-provoking films that can pique student interest in the early Cold War (1945–1962) and help them grasp the issues and public fears related to this era might consider the 1954 science fiction film *Them!* and the 1962 political thriller *The Manchurian Candidate*.

By the time my students begin to study the Cold War, they have already worked with a variety of primary source materials, such as newspaper articles, advertisements, official government correspondence, and personal letters. When introducing students to using films as historical texts, it is helpful to begin by reminding students to analyze the film clip rather than simply watch it. I explain that historians don't look to Hollywood films for accurate historical accounts, but rather for clues and insights about the assumptions, concerns, hopes, and fears expressed in a particular time period. I encourage them to consider the message that the screenwriter and/or director wants to present and the assumptions built into the narrative (i.e., how the story is told).

Them! and *The Manchurian Candidate* both reflect popular fears that emerged during the early Cold War, and both films can help students better grasp the extent to which the Soviet threat came to permeate American society. Prior to using these films, I found that students, even those who possessed an exceptionally keen grasp of the competing economic systems, ideals, and interests of the two superpowers, and had read the likes of George Kennan and Paul Nitze tended to dismiss the Soviets as the next in a long line of historical "bad guys." What was missing, I concluded, was adequate attention to how Cold War narratives reached the public and how the public consumed these messages.

The first film I use in class is the 1954 science fiction/horror classic *Them!*[1] Before screening it, I give students an introductory lecture on the Cold War and have them read contemporary perspectives on U.S.-Soviet Relations (usually George Kennan's 1946 "Long Telegram" and Ambassador Nikolai Novikov's 1946 telegram to Moscow).[2] I also assign *Life* magazine's June 1948 article "The Reds Have a Standard Plan for Taking Over A New Country."[3] When we discuss these readings in class, students usually begin by comparing the Kennan and Novikov articles. Later, when I ask them how the analysis of the Soviet threat presented in the June 1948 issue of *Life* measures up to Kennan's analysis, there is general agreement that *Life* conveyed a more exaggerated, dire sense of an immediate threat than did Kennan. The *Life* article helps students understand that Cold War precepts were not simply conveyed in trickle-

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down fashion from statesman to layman. It also provides a solid foundation for exploring how popular culture (in this case, Hollywood films) conveyed and/or reflected popular fears about the Cold War conflict.

In the backstory of *THEM!* it is revealed that the Trinity test has caused the ants of New Mexico to mutate into giant carnivorous insects. In order to meet the threat, FBI agent Bob Graham (played by James Arness) joins forces with an elderly scientist, Dr. Harold Medford (Edmund Gwenn), and his young daughter, Dr. Pat Medford (Joan Weldon).[4] Before showing the first clip from *THEM!*, I explain that upon discovering the murderous ants, the elder Dr. Medford is sent to Washington DC to brief top policymakers on the nature of this new and frightening threat.

I ask students to take notes on Dr. Medford's presentation, which succinctly describes the killer ants in just under two minutes (clearly not a history professor!). Of particular interest is his description of the ants as "savage," "ruthless," "chronic aggressors" who use "slave laborers" and show "instinct and talent for industry and social organization." *THEM!*'s fictional ants clearly possess the same characteristics that the *Life* magazine article attributed to Soviet communists.

After revealing the nature of the threat to humanity, the narrative establishes that collaboration between the state and the scientific community will be necessary to defeat the ant hordes. This is made explicit in a clip in which Bob Graham leads a mission to destroy an ant nest. After dispatching the insects with machine guns and poison gas, the soldiers look to the elderly Dr. Medford to confirm the success of their mission. Although Medford did not participate directly in the nest attack, their deference to his judgment indicates that he is the expert and architect of the plan.

Although *THEM!* presents the central conflict in stark and uncompromising terms, it offers more ambiguous depictions of gender roles. The only major female character, Pat Medford, certainly fulfills the role of a "damsel in distress," but the plot does include scenes that portray her as an assertive, progressive woman confident in her abilities and her potential to contribute. This is evident in the scene that follows the nest attack. As the men relax on the edge of the battlefield and celebrate their success, Dr. Pat Medford comes striding into the scene, disturbing the all-male space. Although she has to this point shown that her fashion preferences lean toward the traditional (think skirts, hats, and purses), she now appears in attire more suitable for hunting giant insects than for a trip to the local ice cream parlor. Her appearance clearly causes consternation among the men, leading Bob to declare that the site is "no place for you or any other woman." Pat convincingly responds that her scientific knowledge makes her presence not simply beneficial, but indeed essential to the success of the mission. Having lost the debate, Bob nevertheless looks to the elder Medford for paternal approval before stalking away in grudging acceptance. The film's ambivalence toward active female participation in the Cold War reflects a society that placed a heightened emphasis on domesticity even as growing numbers of women were entering the workforce.[5] As a document from the mid-1950s, *THEM!* can help students better understand how films can both reflect and perpetrate popular fears related to the Cold War and the dawn of the Nuclear Age.

For those who would prefer to engage students with metaphors more subtle than vicious mutant bugs, I suggest 1962's *The Manchurian Candidate*. This film works on several different levels and can be taught in a number of ways. For example, historians can use the film in general education survey courses as part of a broader discussion of the Red Scare and the early Cold War.

The Manchurian Candidate begins with a depiction of the Korean War in 1952. A U.S. Army platoon is betrayed by its Korean guide, captured by enemy (presumably Soviet) troops, and spirited away to Manchuria by helicopter. There, under the direction of Dr. Yen Lo, the men are subjected to communist brainwashing that leads to the deaths of two of the squad members. The rest are given false memories so they cannot recall the experience. They are then taken back to the field. They return home believing (erroneously) that they survived battle thanks only to the brave deeds of Staff Sgt. Raymond Shaw, who receives a hero's welcome upon his return stateside. However, Shaw's Manchurian conditioning has turned him into a "sleeper agent" who, when awakened by the display of the queen of diamonds playing card, turns into a robot-like assassin.[6] By incorporating the Korean War and the Red Scare into the narrative, the plot effectively depicts the fears common to the early Cold War: that average Americans were becoming increasingly vulnerable to hidden forces that sought to manipulate individuals by advancing hidden agendas.[7]

About half an hour into the film, the plot takes an interesting and entertaining turn in back-to-back scenes that feature Raymond Shaw's Russian and Chinese handlers. The clever communists circulate the ruse that Shaw has been injured in a car accident and taken to a hospital. The hospital is actually a safe house where the communists plan to observe Shaw and determine the success of his brainwashing. Prior to starting the clip, I ask students to compare and contrast the portrayal of the Soviet agent Zilkov (Albert Paulsen) and the Chinese spy, Dr. Yen Lo (Khigh Dhiegh) so that they can discuss the two "bad guys" after the film.

The film clip quickly establishes that the two men are not equals. Although Zilkov is one of the most powerful Soviet agents on the East Coast, he defers to Yen Lo and repeatedly refers to him by his title, "Doctor." Yen Lo, on the other hand, appears to view his Soviet counterpart as more supplicant than colleague and addresses him as "my dear Zilkov." In addition to possessing a higher rank, Yen Lo also appears to take greater pleasure in his work; he approaches espionage and mind-control with far greater relish than Zilkov. When Zilkov elaborates upon the details of the hospital's cover story and operations, he boasts that it was one a very limited number of Soviet spy operations in the United States that "actually showed a profit at the end of the last fiscal year." Yen Lo responds with a mock warning to his comrade about the "highly infectious" nature of the "virus of capitalism," quipping that "soon you'll be lending money out at interest!" When Zilkov fails to show proper appreciation for the joke, Yen Lo advises his comrade to "try to cultivate a sense of humor" in order to "lighten the burdens of the day." He sets the example: after declaring that Shaw's conditioning has produced an efficient, "entirely police-proof" killer, Yen Lo adds that Shaw's "brain has not only been washed, as they say, it has been dry-cleaned." Students remark upon how Zilkov's joyless, nervous demeanor contrasts with Yen Lo's delight in causing mayhem.

In the next scene, Zilkov and Yen Lo argue about whether or not Shaw is ready to be turned over to his American operator. Zilkov appears to be highly agitated. He paces beside Shaw's bed, and a close-up highlights the beads of sweat that appear on his face as he begs Yen Lo to test Shaw's capabilities. Yen Lo, who is seated on the

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other side of Shaw's bed, is preoccupied with some origami (note the conflating of Japanese and Chinese culture) and appears to be mildly bored. Although neither man shows any reluctance to commit murder, Yen Lo takes a more casual attitude toward killing. Tiring of the discussion, he advises Zilkov to have Shaw kill one of his own people if he really wants to test the American before turning him over. Zilkov replies that the Russian operation is short-staffed as it is. In exasperation, he demands that Yen Lo suggest a suitable victim. Yen Lo laughs heartily and reminds his colleague to conduct himself "with humor, my dear Zilkov, always with a little humor!"

These scenes enable us to discuss how racial stereotypes influenced Hollywood's portrayal of the communist enemy. The two characters are polar opposites and provide opportunities to analyze how Hollywood perpetrated cultural and racial images such as those embodied in the late nineteenth-century stereotype of the "Yellow Peril." The plot distinguishes Yen Lo from both the Russians (he refers condescendingly to the Soviet Union as a "young country,") and the Americans (he boasts that Shaw, when his brainwashing is complete, has been purged of the "uniquely American qualities of guilt and fear"), making it clear that his cunning, sophisticated brand of evil stems more from his Asian origins than his communist ideology. As an updated version of the early twentieth-century literary villain Fu Manchu, Yen Lo can be discussed both in a Cold War context, with reference to Communist China's role in the Korean War, as well as a domestic context, in association with enduring negative stereotypes of Asians that predate the Cold War by decades.[8]

Subsequent questions as to why the characters are portrayed so differently provide an opportunity to introduce how the Chinese indoctrination of U.S. POWs in Korea, translated by contemporary observers as "brainwashing," prompted CIA Director Allen Dulles to issue reports warning of communist efforts to wage "brain warfare" and led academics to invent terms such as "menticide" to refer to methods devised by the Chinese communists to realize the "robotization of man."[9] The film effectively drew upon recent history, along with longstanding ethnic stereotypes, to construct a formidable and convincing villain in Yen Lo.[10] Viewed in this context, *The Manchurian Candidate* is a valuable supplementary source for explaining that the Cold War was not simply the preserve of statesmen and politicians, but rather had a significant impact on everyday life that found expression in multiple areas of American culture.

Popular films can enrich student understanding of a wide number of topics. Like other primary sources, they can provide compelling and challenging material for students to analyze and discuss. Used as texts, they can help students grasp the broader impact of historical events such as the Cold War on the popular imagination and can help them learn to critically assess contemporary films that claim to possess some explanatory power about various aspects of U.S. foreign policy.

Notes:
1. *Them!,* DVD, directed by Gordon Douglas (1954; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2002).
2. George Kennan's "Long Telegram" and Nikolai Novikov's "Telegram to the Soviet Leadership" are both available on many websites in edited and full versions. For example, see "Long Telegram" (Moscow to Washington) (February 22, 1946), at http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm; and "Telegram from Nikolai Novikov, Ambassador to the US, to the Soviet Leadership," September 27, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP SSSR, f. 06. op.8, 45, 759, published in Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn' #11, 1990, 148–154, translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg, at http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110808.pdf?v=c46f797bf3d939c2c328ac98eb778f09.
3. "The Reds Have a Standard Plan for Taking Over a Country,"

Life (June 7, 1948). See also Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930's–1950's," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (April, 1970): 1046–64.
4. *Them!*
5. See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York, 1988).
6. *The Manchurian Candidate,* DVD, directed by John Frankenheimer (1962; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 1998).
7. David Seed, *Brainwashing, The Fictions of Mind Control: A Study of Novels and Films Since World War II* (Kent, OH, 2004).
8. See chap. 6 of William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Hamden, CT, 1982).
9. Allen Dulles, remarks to the National Alumni Conference of the Graduate Council of Princeton University, Hot Springs, VA, April 10, 1953, available at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80R01731R001700030015-9.pdf. For a detailed analysis of how the early connotations of the term "brainwashing" were specifically tied to Communist China, see chap. 5 of Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (Oxford, UK, 1995), 89–107.
10. On the emergence of Fu Manchu as a significant character in American popular culture, see Wu, *The Yellow Peril,* especially chap. 6.

Teaching the Early 1980s Cold War with Popular Film

Molly M. Wood

An elevator door opens, far underground. Two men exit and punch a code into a digital pad, which slowly opens a thick steel door. The previous two-man shift leaves the control room, and the new team enters. Each man takes a separate chair in front of a bank of computer monitors. They chat amiably as they punch buttons and work through their protocol. Suddenly an alarm sounds, followed by an anonymous voice giving them a code, which they each copy down. The men know exactly what to do. They have practiced this exact scenario hundreds of times, so their movements are confident and business-like. They reach for identical red boxes, unlock them, and remove envelopes. The launch codes in them match. They then enter those codes into their computers. The computers respond: "Launch order confirmed." They realize that this is not a drill, and the younger officer says, quietly, "Holy shit."

The countdown begins. "T minus sixty," the disembodied voice says. The officer in charge says, "O.K. let's do it." They each insert a launch key into a separate lock and turn it to "set." At this point, we see the first slight hesitation from the senior officer. His junior prompts him: "Sir?" They both proceed with the manual enabling of missiles by flipping a series of switches. But while the younger officer, Phelps, continues flipping switches, the senior officer, Larsen, starts mumbling "This has got to be a mistake" and reaches for his phone. Meanwhile, the other officer has proceeded to enable all ten missiles. No one answers the phone. Larsen shouts at Phelps, "Get me wing command post." "That's not the correct procedure, Captain," Phelps replies. "Try SAC headquarters," Larsen responds, sounding increasingly desperate. "That's not the correct procedure," comes the response. "Screw the procedure," Larsen yells. "I want someone on the goddamn phone before I kill twenty million people!"

Finally, Phelps grabs his phone. Again, no one answers. "I got nothing here," he says. "They might've been knocked out already." "All right," Larson replies, "on my mark to launch." And the countdown resumes at T minus twelve. At T minus five, Larson removes his hand from the key that he must turn in order to launch the missiles. "Sir, we have a launch order," Phelps says. "Put your hand on the key, sir!" The countdown reaches zero. Larson stares at the key, murmuring unintelligibly. Meanwhile, Phelps has taken out his sidearm and is pointing it at Larson's head. "Sir, we

are at launch. Turn your key," Phelps commands. Larson continues to murmur, saying "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." And once again Phelps says, as he clicks the safety off his weapon, "Turn your key, sir." The scene ends abruptly.[1]

This fictional scenario occurs at the beginning of the 1983 film *War Games*. It was, of course, an elaborate drill, intended to push the men to the very brink and make sure they would follow through with their orders even if they *really believed* they would be launching the missiles. The clip effectively illustrates human resistance to killing twenty million people with the flip of a switch. The scene also provides the context for the overall premise of the film: the misguided belief that tasking a supercomputer, instead of a human being, with the "decision" to launch missiles would result in a "fool-proof" system. In *War Games*, a teenage computer hacker thinks he is playing a new computer strategy game called "Global Thermonuclear War," but instead he has initiated a *real* "war game" that will result in a nuclear first strike. The opening scene also serves as one way of introducing a discussion about Cold War fears and anxieties—in this case, the heightened fears of nuclear war with the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. While we in the classroom are accustomed to teaching about "what happened" during the Cold War from a variety of perspectives, it remains particularly challenging to help students understand, analyze and interpret the very real *emotions*, namely fear and anxiety, associated with the Cold War.

After they watch this film clip, the students are given additional context to help them understand the heightened level of fear and anxiety about possible nuclear war with the Soviet Union in President Ronald Reagan's first term. We discuss events from the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to Reagan's infamous March 1983 speech condemning the Soviet Union as an "evil empire"[2] and his announcement, two weeks later, of the Strategic Defense Initiative, a far-fetched proposal to build a defensive shield that would protect the United States from incoming Soviet missiles.

Two primary sources, the first volume of Reagan's published diary and his 1990 memoir, *An American Life,* have also proved very useful for supplementing discussions about these years, particularly 1983.[3] For example, in a diary entry from March 7, 1983, Reagan wrote about his preparation for the speech on the Strategic Defense Initiative: "I'm going to take our case to the people only this time we are declassifying some of our reports on the Soviets and can tell the people a few frightening facts."[4] I ask students why Reagan would be so intent on providing "frightening facts" to the American public and what impact those facts might have. Later in March, the president made further preparations for the speech and explained that he did "a lot of re-writing," much of which "was to change bureaucratic talk into people talk."[5] I want to know how the students interpret this statement. What do they believe Reagan meant by "people talk" versus "bureaucratic talk" and what might this reveal to us about Reagan's reputation as "the Great Communicator"?

Later that year Reagan also wrote, in his diary and memoirs, about the news that the Soviet Union had shot down a Korean passenger plane. Echoing the words from his speech in March, he declared that "if the Free World needed any more evidence in the summer of 1983 that it was facing an *evil empire* [my italics], we got it the night of August 31 when a Russian military plane cold-bloodedly shot down a Korean airliner, Flight 007, murdering 269 innocent passengers, including a U.S. congressman and sixty other Americans."[6] He also linked the incident directly to his SDI proposal:

> If, as some people had speculated, the Soviet pilots simply mistook the airliner for a military plane, what kind of imagination did it take to think of a Soviet military man with his finger close to a nuclear push button making an even more tragic mistake? If mistakes could be made by a fighter pilot, what about a similar miscalculation by the commander of a military launch crew? Yet, if somebody made that kind of mistake—or a madman got possession of a nuclear missile—we were defenseless against it. Once a nuclear missile was launched, no one could recall it, and until we got something like the Strategic Defense Initiative system in operation, the world was helpless against nuclear missiles.[7]

Reagan then drew further connections between the KAL incident and the film *The Day After*, which he had seen at a private screening. I show students the "attack segment" (approximately six minutes) from this made-for-television movie, which first aired publicly on November 20, 1983.[8] The clip begins with a control room sequence showing military personnel on the phone confirming a "massive attack against the U.S.," with "over three hundred missiles inbound." The next scene depicts Kansas City, Missouri. Air raid sirens blast as people run, panicked, through the streets to take shelter. A long-distance shot of Kansas City is followed by a blast of blinding light and the iconic mushroom cloud. Scenes of horror and mayhem flash by quickly for the next three minutes. Another mushroom cloud. People stampeding. Buildings being blown apart. Roaring fires. And snapshots of individuals and groups of people transformed in a split second into eerie images of skeletons and then nothing, to illustrate the instantaneous obliteration of all of those within a certain radius of each blast. The only sounds are of wind, explosions, roaring fire and screams. Even though the production values of the film are dated, students are usually fairly shocked by the graphic depiction of a nuclear holocaust. I explain to them that the film, and especially the sequence they viewed, relied partly on declassified government footage of early nuclear tests.

Reagan watched the film at Camp David on October 10, more than a month before its scheduled air date. In his memoir, he excerpted part of his diary entry from that same night. "It is powerfully done . . . It's very effective and left me greatly depressed. . . . My own reaction: we have to do all we can to have a deterrent and to see there is never a nuclear war."[9]

The KAL flight had drifted off course into Soviet airspace. But the Soviets had been tracking an American spy plane earlier, and while that plane had already returned to its base on one of the Aleutian Islands, there was some understandable confusion about which plane was now in Soviet airspace. After considerable hesitation, the Soviets finally gave the order to "destroy target."[10] American

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leaders, Reagan included, reacted with intense anger and had an initial urge to respond strongly, based on the spotty raw intelligence that was available in the immediate aftermath of the incident. However, clearer heads prevailed in the U.S. intelligence agencies, where it was decided that the incident was surely a terrible mistake. Later that same month, the CIA concluded in a report for the White House that the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was "pervasively bleak." David Hoffman, in his book *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and its Dangerous Legacy*, describes "a wave of fear about nuclear war" in the fall of 1983 that "gripped both the Soviet Union and the United States."[11]

As we discuss the ubiquitous nature of popular culture, students can begin to see the films of this era as rich primary source material for understanding the contemporary mood of the American public. Yet another example of such material is the 1984 cult favorite R*ed Dawn*, which graphically portrayed a sudden Soviet attack on the United States and the small band of high school students who wage a guerilla war against the invaders. By showing just the two-minute trailer for the movie, I can raise additional themes with students, including the meaning of an attack on the "American heartland," the appeal of grass-roots action, and guerilla warfare-style resistance to an overt attack; I can then contrast those themes with the theme of preventing an accidental war.

Popular culture in a variety of forms, especially film, has pervaded the lives of most Americans, making it an effective tool for gaining a greater understanding of the emotional content of the Cold War era. Understanding what fears and anxieties people felt and how those feelings were expressed in cultural forms is not only part of the historian's task, but also part of the work of classroom teaching.

I steal shamelessly from Teaching History with Film and Television—*the fantastic pamphlet that John O'Connor, the dean of teaching history through motion pictures, put together for the AHA almost thirty years ago. Even though this pamphlet is quite dense, I actually assign the first half of it to my students at the beginning of the course, because it gives them the tools they will need to approach every film we watch.*

Notes:
1. *War Games*, directed by John Badham (1983; MGM/UA Entertainment Co.).
2. Ronald Reagan, Address to the National Association of Evangelicals, 8 March 1983. Available at the Voices of Democracy, which is an NEH-sponsored project website. http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/.
3. An excellent secondary source for an overview of and context for the tense months of autumn 1983 is chap. 3, "War Scare," in David E. Hoffman's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and its Dangerous Legacy* (New York, 2009), 73–100.
4. Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries, Unabridged*, vol. 1, *January 1981–October 1985* (New York, 2009), 203.
5. Ibid., 209.
6. Ibid., 273; and Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York, 1990), 582.
7. Reagan, *An American Life*, 584.
8. *The Day After*, directed by Nicolas Meyer (1983; American Broadcasting Company). The attack segment and the entire movie are both available on YouTube.
9. Reagan, *An American Life*, 585.
10. Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, 73–8.
11. Ibid., 89.

Teaching with Popular Films

Justin Hart

I will be offering something of an unorthodox commentary here because I come at the issue of teaching with popular films from a perspective that is somewhat different from that of the other participants in the SHAFR roundtable. Several years ago I designed a course, which I have since taught frequently, entitled U.S. Foreign Relations through Film. I teach it in a three-hour format and typically show an hour or so of each film—mostly Hollywood features, but also some fairly high-profile documentaries. Readers should thus be aware that I speak as someone who has the luxury of being able to introduce long clips of historical films and to structure every single discussion in a given semester around the viewing and analysis of motion pictures.

I have taught U.S. Foreign Relations through Film in two different ways. Originally I presented a tour of twentieth-century U.S. foreign relations, starting with a unit on World War I, then moving to a unit on World War II, the Cold War, and Vietnam, before closing with a brief segment on post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy in which I introduced the debate over Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Over time, though, I had a harder and harder time getting students to connect with *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moreover, I wanted a new challenge. I was and continue to be struck by the sheer quantity of important and revealing films made about post-9/11 foreign policy in the last thirteen years, but picking just one of them to cover in the last day or two of class seemed thoroughly inadequate. I therefore redesigned the class in the fall of 2013 as a survey of post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy through film. On balance I am glad that I did. It has been an interesting experience, albeit one that has not been without its difficulties.

Although I used almost entirely different content for the two versions of the course, I tried to keep the methodology the same as much as possible. My approach encompasses the way that each of our contributors has addressed the theme of this roundtable—"teaching with popular films as primary sources"—but analyzing films as primary sources is only one of the techniques that I use. In teaching this course, I steal shamelessly from *Teaching History with Film and Television*—the fantastic pamphlet that John O'Connor, the dean of teaching history through motion pictures, put together for the AHA almost thirty years ago. Even though this pamphlet is quite dense, I actually assign the first half of it to my students at the beginning of the course, because it gives them the tools they will need to approach every film we watch. I highly recommend introducing some sort of methodological approach, whether O'Connor or something else, to turn the students into active rather than passive viewers and to give them a sense of what they should be looking for when they view the films.

O'Connor describes four different frameworks for teaching history through the analysis of what he refers to as "moving image documents," a classification that includes feature films, but also documentaries, television, and even fragmentary footage like the Zapruder footage of the Kennedy assassination. Those frameworks include analyzing moving image documents as (1) representations of history, (2) evidence of social and cultural history, (3) evidence of historical fact, and (4) evidence for the history of film and television. Of these, the first and second are the

ones we discuss most in my class, although we occasionally get into the issues of moving image documents as depictions of historical fact and as evidence for the history of film. (We do not cover television in my course.)

In discussing O'Connor, I begin by talking about what questions we might ask if we use these categories to analyze a motion picture document. I emphasize that the kind of questions asked determines whether the motion picture document is being treated as a primary source or a secondary source, since many films can function in either capacity depending on how they are analyzed. The first category (film as a representation of history) probably provides the best examples of the way films can function as either primary or secondary sources. This category is basically an exercise in explicating a film's interpretation of history and the historical events it depicts. For example, *Pride of the Marines*, which was made during World War II, is an interpretation of the soldier's/veteran's experience in that war. It is thus a primary source that reflects at least one way that experience was interpreted at the time.

The Manchurian Candidate, on the other hand, can function as either a primary source or a secondary source, depending on the questions one asks of it. It can be treated as a secondary source on McCarthyism and the return of Korean War veterans, produced almost a decade after McCarthy's fall; or it can be viewed as a primary source to help us understand the climate of the Kennedy years, long after McCarthy was discredited. What is important for the students to understand is that, whether viewed as a primary or a secondary source, *The Manchurian Candidate* reflects the very common attitude during the late 1950s and early 1960s that the principal problem with McCarthy was not his warnings about communist subversion, but the fact that the cartoonish lengths to which he took his crusade actually undermined legitimate anti-communism. In other words, it is important to explain to students why this film was not and in fact almost certainly could not have been made a decade earlier.

I actually start my class with *Birth of a Nation*, even though it is not a foreign policy film, to make the same point. It functions as both an historical interpretation of Reconstruction—a secondary source from the perspective of fifty years after the end of the Civil War—and a primary source reflecting the social and cultural attitudes of the Progressive Era in which it was made. The same can be said, of course, for works of history, so it is perhaps useful to think of analyzing a motion picture's interpretation of history as an exercise in historiography.

That brings us to the second category—films that provide evidence for social and cultural history—which is the one most closely connected to the kind of analysis my colleagues in this forum are doing in their classes. The virtue of this category, which includes films that we will typically but not always treat as primary sources, is that the film doesn't even have to be about foreign policy to reflect foreign policy attitudes. Of the films mentioned here by my colleagues, *Them!* is probably the best example of a film that functions in this capacity, since it offers us a crystal-clear expression of Cold War anxieties without actually addressing particular Cold War issues (save for the atomic test in the movie, which is introduced primarily to jumpstart the science-fiction plot and is not dealt with on its own terms). In my class, I use *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which is even further removed from the concerns of the Cold War proper, to serve the same purpose. It is probably

worth pointing out here that sci-fi pictures are particularly good vehicles for teaching how films can convey social and cultural history, even when they do not contain any obvious representation of historical events. In my post-9/11 class, I have used both *District 9* and *28 Weeks Later* in this way, to varying effect.

Before moving on, I also want to discuss the films Molly Wood uses from the 1980s, which straddle the divide between addressing historical issues explicitly and doing so obliquely. Each one reflects in its own way generalized Reagan-era anxieties about the coming of World War III, although I would also argue that *Red Dawn* and *The Day After* actually take a position on Reagan's more confrontational stance toward communism in the early 1980s. (*Red Dawn* endorses it, whereas *The Day After* questions it.) *War Games*, meanwhile, is a broader critique of the entire logic of mutual assured destruction.

Let me conclude by offering a few reflections on what I have learned teaching a film course using this methodology. Readers will probably not be surprised that it is difficult to get students to think historiographically about feature films and even harder to get them to think in those terms about most documentaries. Although students are not opposed to analyzing films, they are most comfortable with engaging issues of historical fact, and they enjoy films that are straightforward—films that appear to be "just the facts"—more than films that make a complicated ideological statement. (For example, of the Vietnam films, they prefer *We Were Soldiers* to *The Deer Hunter* or *Apocalypse Now*; in the post-9/11 class, their favorite film is usually the HBO series *Generation Kill*.) They also tend to resist course readings that offer a complicated analysis of a film, and it is a struggle to get them to move beyond accuracy when assessing a film's contribution to the study of history in their writing assignments. In the end, I always feel as if I have at least some success in convincing students to come around to my methodology. However, there is no question that, even at the end of the course, many students still think that the most useful films for understanding history are the ones that adhere most closely to literal presentations of historical events, cast in the terms of widely accepted historical narratives.

Also unsurprising is the fact that students are particularly resistant to analyzing contemporary films about contemporary events as primary sources to hunt for clues about the social and cultural history of our own time. In other words, it is one thing to look back and see how a World War II-era film about World War II, such as *Pride of the Marines*, reflects what we now understand to be a jaundiced view; it is another thing entirely to get them to think historically about events within their own lifetime and accept that fifty years from now, most everyone will look back at *Zero Dark Thirty* or *American Sniper* and see films that are more useful for understanding the time period in which they were made rather than the events they depict.

I have struggled, twice now, to get students to think critically about whether *Zero Dark Thirty* justifies torture. I was surprised to find that I had more success with *American Sniper*, which I taught for the first time in the summer of 2015. Although I expected that I would strike out in trying to get students to view that film as anything other than a slightly embellished version of "the way it really was" rather than a twenty-first-century version of *Sergeant York*, they were willing to engage the politics of the film more

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than I expected. I suspect that was in part because I had an unusually thoughtful group of students that term, but in addition I had carefully assembled a packet of readings that evaluated *American Sniper* from a variety of different perspectives. There was an article that referred to the film as a "dishonest whitewash" and another that referred to critics of the film as "ninnies." There were also several articles that reflected impartially on how the film stoked the "culture wars" and how it blurred ideological lines, and there were articles about and from veterans talking about whether *American Sniper* represented the war as they knew it. At the end I included several articles addressing campus controversies at the University of North Carolina and the University of Michigan about screening the film absent a rejoinder or critical forum conveying the Iraqi perspective. The lesson here is that the best way to get students to consider different interpretations of a particular film is to introduce them to a diverse set of readings that make different arguments about the film.

In the end, despite some of my difficulties in getting students to consider films—especially contemporary films—from a historiographical perspective, I have never been sorry for making the effort. I still think the use of films is an effective way to get students to ask the kinds of questions they are generally reluctant to ask of historical works—to think analytically about the ideological content of the material they are consuming. Indeed, I would have to say that I have had much greater success in using films to teach undergraduates methods of critical thinking than I have had trying to get them to think historiographically about the books and articles they read.

*P*assport invites members of SHAFR to submit brief proposals for potential historiographical articles, pedagogical essays, and commentary/opinion pieces for the "Last Word" column. Proposals should be sent to Andrew_Johns@byu.edu.