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Free America versus Captain America: The rise of political expression on war in the American film industry

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Introduction

      Government involvement in the American film industry during the Second World

War and its aftermath restricted filmmakers' ability to freely express their opinions on

American foreign policy. Specifically, filmmakers were restricted to producing films that

bolstered America's image as a positive force abroad, a democratic beacon of hope. But

in our contemporary political environment, why are directors able to insert either pro- or

anti-war messages in their films? I hypothesize that the decrease in government oversight

of the American film industry and its use as a government propaganda machine has

allowed filmmakers to illustrate a wide range of opinions on foreign policy issues

through pro and anti-war films. Proving this causal relationship highlights how today's

filmmakers are able to react to the United States' overseas policies instead of

regurgitating information at the behest of our government. The dual existence of films

that highlight the extraordinary efforts of our armed forces and films that showcase the

pitfalls and lack of accountability in U.S. foreign policy serves as evidence to substantiate

my claims that the American film industry is now host to open-minded filmmakers with

broad ranges of opinions. Tracing the evolution of the film industry's production codes

and censorship guidelines after the termination of the Office of War Information in1945

will provide answers as to why filmmakers exercised more freedom in the later part of

the Vietnam War and the Iraq War compared to World War II.

      Chief among my alternative explanations and arguments as to why filmmakers

have become more able to comment on foreign policy are: the lack of censorship in the

film industry, Hollywood's contemporary inclination towards liberalism, and more

educated American public exercising its free speech, a byproduct of more widespread and

easily accessible media sources. While these may offer alternative explanations to my

hypothesis, these theories do not exclusively clash with it either. The liberal Hollywood

argument does not account for independent cinema, filmmakers who produce projects not

backed by the studio system, such as Kathryn Bigelow's arguably pro-war and 2009 Best

Picture winner *The Hurt Locker*. Moreover, during the latter half of the Vietnam era

Hollywood released films like Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo*, a popular pro-war film that

shared its sentiments with an initially war-approving American public. Our contemporary

liberal Hollywood therefore is in fact a transformation and a reaction to changing

attitudes towards war, not simply a natural inclination. Also, a more educated America

refusing to buy into government propaganda is in fact causal to the elimination of

government involvement in the film industry. A more informed Americans public meant

that films as propaganda no longer held the same value as weapons to influence the

masses as they did in World War II. The transition from the strict guidelines of the

Motion Picture Production Code to the current rating system of the Motion Picture

Association of America may also serve as an alternative explanation. The Production

Code was a self-censoring remnant of the OWI and used by the American film Industry

from 1930 until 1968. My research will explore how in the later years of the Vietnam

War, changing social conditions and public attitudes towards the war forced filmmakers

to abandon the restrictions of the Production Code and adopt a system that would allow

filmmakers to react as freely as the American public. The Production code in and of itself

however, was directly linked to government oversight and the adoption of a freer system

is linked to the realization by the film industry that government no longer exercised

regulated control over them, which in fact supports my null hypothesis. These

explanations are directly related to wider significances of my question as well.

   The topic of why filmmakers are free to react to U.S. foreign policy now

compared to the restriction placed on them during World War II is interdisciplinary by

nature as it is important to the academic study of film and political science. These broader

significances include: the responsibilities of a free society in wartime, the legitimacy of

censorship and its implications, and naturally the link between film and politics, or

whether films are a good barometer of political sentiment. Regarding the responsibilities

of the film industry, films arguably have an effect on the morale and perspectives of the

American people, and the recent flood of anti-war films may have a link to strong

disapproval of the war just as pro-war propaganda films in WWII persuaded people to

support the war effort. Should filmmakers support the American government in its efforts

overseas despite ideological difference in the interest of America's public image? An

answer to the question with the First Amendment in mind would be no. Filmmakers as

American citizens have every right to express how they feel about particular issues

through the right to free speech, and the restrictions by the Office of War Information in

WWII were essentially a violation of this right. Our government cannot simply tell

people what to do, but the medium of film in WWII gave our government a tool to

subliminally and subtly do exactly this. This is not to say that government has not found

other avenues, such exercising influence over news outlets, but influencing public views

by restricting filmmakers is no longer a viable option. Hollywood still exercises self-

censorship through the current rating system, generally only censoring things that depicts

the utmost obscenity or condones something illegal for the protection of the public, but

the government no longer interferes through regulated agencies like the OWI or its subdivided Bureau of Motion Pictures. This is also connected to films illustrating a range of opinion and the link between film and politics. Although the predominance of contemporary Hollywood films are liberal with the glut of anti-war films like *Green Zone, Rendition,* and *Iron Man*, films like *The Hurt Locker* and *Captain America: The First Avenger* are able to throw veils over partisanship and place the military on a pedestal to evoke pro-war sentiment. The prevalence of one ideology over another in films can serve as an indicator of a particular political sentiment shared by the majority of Americans, and the varying range of both pro and anti-war films can substantiate my claims that filmmakers are in fact free to promote messages of their choice without government restrictions.

Methodology:

My method to prove the causal relationship between dual existence of both pro- and anti-war film and a lack of government oversight will examine three eras of United States film history: World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq War. I will use a triangular design that incorporates quantitative coding, qualitative critical film reviews, and researching filmmaking and the American film industry through secondary texts and personal interviews. To properly answer the question of why filmmakers are less restricted, I must examine the history associated with the films I am studying, study the relevant film theory, analyze the films themselves, and interview individuals in the industry such as directors, film critics, and publicists to understand the level of freedom filmmakers have with their own products.

The secondary histories necessary to my research place films in their respective social context. Thomas Doherty, Paul Fusel, Fred Turner, Louis Giannetti, Matt Gallagher, and Jonathan Rosenbaum all reflect upon the history of film and the evolution towards a freer expression of opinion on topics of war. These authors look at the trend of post-war realism in the aftermath of WWII as the basis for the more genuine portrayals of war we see in contemporary cinema, and the struggle for this type of filmmaking to survive under the guidelines of the Motion Picture Production Code.

Film theorists like Jean-Loup Bourget, Maria Pramaggiore, Tom Wallis, Judith Wright, Robin Wood, Leo Braudy, and Marshall Cohen discuss the pluralism in film theory and the necessity to acknowledge all critical theory to properly critique a film. In order to determine whether a film is pro or anti-war, I must acknowledge the guidelines of the related theories. Wood's analyses of auteur theory outlines the level of influence a director has in the final product and his intent; spectator theory accounts for the audiences perception; and editing theory accounts for the subtext in films. It is essential to use film theory on a holistic level when reviewing films for pro or anti-war messages in order to account for every element in the film. Qualitatively analyzing the films themselves with the knowledge of historical background and social context as well as film theory will ultimately determine if each film is in fact pro or anti-war. I have interviewed publicists involved in the marketing of *Green Zone* and *Iron Man,* Simon Dunstan and Paul Ockleford respectively, to understand how filmmakers want the public to perceive their films. I also have access to interviews with BBC film critics Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo, both of whom are well versed in film theory for trained critical reactions (to war films and objective viewers interpretations of my cases. The time periods and film cases I

have chosen to study reflect the evolution of freer filmmakers and are considered popular among the American public.

Regarding my case studies, films from the WWII era were much more restricted compared to films from the latter part of the Vietnam War and the Iraq War after the termination of the Production Code in 1968 (Giannetti, Eyman 241.) The preponderance of films Hollywood produced to coax Americans into the war effort in WWII had such an overbearing use of propaganda that it overshadowed the creativity and entertainment, although there were some tales of adventure that truly engaged Americans in the pro-war mentality (Giannetti, Eyman 249). To showcase the full scope of propaganda during World War II I will look at the films: *Why We Fight, Foreign Correspondent, 49th Parallel*, and *Sergeant York*. Conversely, to illustrate that anti-war films were in fact not permitted during World War II, I will use John Huston's *Let There Be Light* as case study of banned films during the era. After 1968, films with subject matter like Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* were permitted, which highlighted the psychological distress soldiers experienced during the Vietnam War, while Sylvester Stallone's *First Blood* in 1982 after the war embraced Reagan's lavish military spending and reflected on the thrill of being part of the war effort (Turner 92).

Regarding the contemporary era and the Iraq War, most films have embraced an anti-war perspective with the exception of a few. Films like *Iron Man,* a superhero film*, and *Green Zone* about the falsehood of WMD's in Iraq and America's distrust of the government, were both popular anti-war films. Filmmaker Gavin Hood's 2007 film *Rendition* is a realistically shot emotional suspense story centering on anti-war issues of human rights with respect to detainees and terrorism. On the contrary Kathryn Bigelow's

realistic portrayal of the Iraq War and the horrors bomb squad units have to experience were addressed in with in the 2009 thriller *The Hurt Locker*. The film is able to idolize American soldiers, as does Joe Johnston's 2011 *Captain America: The First Avenger* in a mock propaganda approach that perhaps inadvertently is also pro-war. I will also look at Gregor Jordan's *Unthinkable* as a unique outlier to my cases, which is a film that takes no clear position on the issues of torture.

To empirically measure the extent to which these films are pro-or antiwar, I will develop a coding system that looks at a film's subtext, director's intent, audience perception, and dominant sociological genre status, or whether a particular film is a propaganda film or a war film. This collection of quantitative will involve multiple individuals who are well versed in the context of the films I have chosen as cases and will hand-code these films to determine if how supportive or against U.S. foreign policy they are. If the results of the coding system are a wide range of foreign policy opinion after the 1968 termination of the Production Code, my hypothesis of government oversight will be proven correct. These four qualities of the coding system are derived from the most relevant elements of critical film theory and each of the coders must be informed and knowledgeable about these theories.

According to Elmer Davis, director of OWI in 1942, "'The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized'" (Fussel 75). It is certain that war films prior to 1945 were pro-war propaganda, but this alone does prove a causal relationship between contemporary freedom of expression in film and lack of government oversight. The coding system and qualitative film reviews

are meant to prove the film industry has evolved and outgrown government regulations to allow filmmakers to express a wide range of opinions.

<u>Literature Review</u>

The relevant literature to the study of why post World War II filmmakers are able to produce both pro and anti-war films is heavily centered in critical film theory and the historical background of a filmmaker's respective era. If I am to prove whether directors during the Vietnam and Iraq Wars had more freedom to react to foreign policy compared to World War II filmmakers, my evaluations of their respective films must be supported by the appropriate film theories. The first section of this literature review will explore a number of theoretical approaches to critiquing propaganda and war films, focusing heavily on the umbrella idea of film language and editing, sociological, cinematographic, and auteur theories. Following this examination I will discuss the relevance of historical background and social context to the political implications of film paying special consideration to how the decrease in government oversight of the film industry led to more freedom for filmmakers. History and film theory are inextricably linked when critiquing propaganda and war films for pro or anti-war sentiment.

I. Theory as way of critiquing war films

Before we appraise the extent of how pro or anti-war a film is, we must first understand the relevant film theories used to classify and critique films. Films communicate, enforce, and suggest meanings and therefore can be considered a language in and of themselves (Braudy, Cohen). Braudy and Cohen recognize that this language is a synthesis between the word and the shot, and this idea has laid the groundwork all future theories. Directors craft both dialogue and visual, and we as viewers interpret this

language to convey a particular message in war films, generally one that is either pro or anti-war. Conversely, Stephen Prince argues that interpretation of cinema is more iconic than linguistic, meaning that viewers understand films because they resemble realities with which viewers are familiar. However, Prince does not reject the notion of film language as he acknowledges that "a series of shots is equivalent to a sentence, and it is the organization of shots in the film chain that supports the idea that film constitutes a language." (Braudy, Cohen 5-7). Naturally, this is also the heart of editing theory, in which the arrangement of shot sequences is considered the paramount element of filmmaking. But what stands out most about Prince is his iconographic theory in that people recognize similarities between film and their lives by transferring real world skills to the cinematic situation (Braudy, Cohen 7). The capacity to understand iconic signs "is shared cross-culturally and this ability helps to explain the intelligibility and global popularity of cinema" (Stam, Miller 30). Stam and Miller explain this with the use of the same images of the swastika and German marching in Leni Reifestahl's *Triumph of the Will* and Frank Capra's *Why We Fight*. Both are propaganda films with the purposes of condemning enemy powers. Americans interpreted the same images differently than Germans based on different life experiences. This helps answer the question of a director's intent and why audiences respond the ways that they do when critiquing film for pro or anti-war sentiment.

Jean-Loup Bourget highlights how the conflict between apparent content and independent stylistic devices characterize social context in film. This tension between subtext and text, or the script and all the material that actually appears onscreen respectively, actually gives us a way to merge the two seemingly competing theoretical

approaches of auteur theory and the iconological approach (Bourget 53). The former asserts that a movie is the product of a single creative individual and the latter suggests that a movie is a series of pictures whose real meaning may not be understood unless the technical and artistic elements of cinematography, editing, filtration and the like are understood. She branches off of Robin Wood's argument for the necessity of a more holistic critique of film calling attention to the fact that using one theory, auteur theory for instance, is often not enough to understand the every facet of a particular film.

Wood looks at the vast array of film theories and how these theories are not necessarily polarized from one another. For instance, while montage or editing theory considers the piecing together of shots as the essential creative act at of film whereas auteur theory holds the director's vision to be of the utmost importance. Each can offer insight into different elements of a particular film. He argues that critics and films scholars should aim to see a film as holistically as possible, trying to draw on the validities of each theory without committing themselves exclusively to any one. With respect to these two crucial theories, my question seeks to answer why directors have become freer to react to foreign policy after World War II, so naturally auteur theory would help support this question most appropriately. But to ignore editing theory would be to effectively ignore the subtext of the film. When critiquing a film, I do not believe that these theories compete with one another, but rather add to one another. These theories serve as a roadmap of sorts to cover all crucial information when evaluating the production of a film.

Pramaggiore and Wallis provide tools to extrapolate deeper meanings from what may seem to be simply procedural steps in making film. Cinematographic spectator

theory highlights the importance of camera work considering that, angle, distance, and movement are always chosen for a particular reason whether it signifies character dominance or the tone of a particular scene. Every elements of a shot helps create the underlying subtext of the film. An understanding all of the technical elements of camerawork is necessary to understand the relationship between ideologies in film with respect to spectatorship (Pramaggiore, Wallis 171). For instance, are all films equivalent to propaganda, intentionally and systematically disseminating deceptive information through subtext in order to promote an idea or cause, or are films self-reflective apparatuses that constantly remind viewers that they are watching films and allow them to make their own decisions? Films with constant shifting in cinematographic style call attention to the fact that people are watching a film, while films with a static style tend to absorb the viewer more. With respect to contemporary film, most directors opt for a constant style of camera work, either filming with supported or stationary cameras or handheld cameras for example (Pramaggiore, Wallis 177). This points to the preponderance of contemporary filmmakers attempting to convince viewers of a particular message. Aside from theory that concerns film production, the labeling associated with sociological film theory helps classify films.

Judith Wright outlines a theoretical approach to looking at genre films through what she calls the status quo of film, or sociological film theory. Every film has a master status, whether it is action, western, or horror, which overrides its auxiliary status traits. According to her use of genre theory, propaganda is a master status of film and we can attribute the survival of propaganda films during World War II to their function. Propaganda genre films persuade audience members to stop reflecting upon themselves

and their environment, and to deter them from their only viable other choice, which is to think independently against the system. I do not believe she considers all propaganda films to be inherently ill intentioned, but I agree with her in that they strip away individual thinking. The same can be said about pro and anti-war films today, but I think Americans are now educated enough to reflect upon any film regardless of its message because of the number of new media outlets that have arose since the World War II and believe our government recognizes this progress.

II.   **The importance of historical background to place films in social contexts**

In order to examine the less restricted films of the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, it is crucial to dissect the use of pro-war propaganda in World War II and the pressure on filmmakers to produce these films. Thomas Doherty points out that World War II saw the use of propaganda film used as a major tool of social influence to change public perception on foreign policy (Doherty 18). Considered one the strongest weapons by many film critics and academics, propaganda in American cinema played a crucial role in swaying public opinion and garnering public support for the war during the early 1940's (Higham, Greenberg 56-60). After the First World War, the American people adopted an attitude of isolationism and pacifism that followed through until the 1940's. Films like Lewis Milestone's famous 1930 *All Quiet on the Western Front* is an anti-war film of the First World War that personifies the pain and agony endured throughout the horrors of war (Fussell 31). However, during the war years, even prior to American entrance into the war, Hollywood productions centered around pro war efforts encouraged by the United States government (Thompson, Bordwell 87). The shift from overt pro-war propaganda films to depiction of increased realism in a modern age with the increase of

news sources, information distribution, and a more educated population of the United

States.

The World War II era shocked many Americans out of isolationism and into

attitudes of nationalism and patriotism in part from pro war films of the 1940's. A good

deal of Hollywood's most recognizable stars served in the U.S. armed forces, but those

who stayed in the film industry fought in way that was just as powerful. President

Roosevelt said of movie houses, "They are a necessary and beneficial part of the war

effort" (Doherty 6). With the lack of our contemporary television media outlets, cinemas

were an astronomically important part of information dissemination as well the

entertainment industry. Aside from fictional action adventures and films based on the

exploits of heroic soldiers, one of the most important American propaganda contributions

came from director Frank Capra. He created a number of documentaries depicting the

atrocities and horrible nature of American enemies in his *Why we Fight* series

(Rosenbaum 97). Frank Capra used the images of Leni Reifestahl's German propaganda

film *Triumph of the Will*, which was commissioned by Adolf Hitler to instill a sense of

unity in the German people. *Triumph of the Will* had "supplied the American screen with

its most powerful and lasting images if the Nazis in in their most monstrous, realistic

portrayal" (Doherty 18). According to Edward Jay Epstein, These images were acquired

by the United States government and subsequently spliced into U.S. cinema and news

outlets (Epstein 47). Years later, Frank Capra presented these images, reformatted and for

a clearly different purpose, to the American people. This connects directly to auteur

theory and director's intent; here the same images were edited together in the same way,

but Reifenstahl and Capra both had two distinct visions. Editing theory is therefore not

enough full appraise the purpose of each of these films, and this substantiates my holistic approach to film theory.

A very effective movie to encourage American patriotism was Howard Hawk's 1941 *Sergeant York* where Gary Cooper took on the role of Alvin York, initially a Christian conscientious objector to the First World War, who eventually became one of this country's most commended heroes. As we see in the modern day, Hollywood often adapts the stories of wars and conflicts to make a social commentary on present conflict. Previously however, Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 suspense, spy film *Foreign Correspondent* was remarked upon by Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany, that it was "a first class production which no doubt will make a certain impression upon the broad masses of people in enemy countries" (Doherty 123). The final scene where Johnny Jones announces over the radio, "America is the light in the world, and it is being called upon to defend England," is still arguable subliminal propaganda as the film features the looming onset of a fictitious war, but mentions Adolf Hitler's name as a source and draws very clear parallels to actual circumstances that Americans were easily able to deduce. Since the British were made to look as though they were in desperate need of help, the film's ending did not particularly overwhelm our overseas allies.

One of the most notable examples of shocking American's out of isolationism was British filmmaker Michael Powell's 1941 *49th Parallel* shown in American cinemas. Powell's intention was to make a film to swing opinion in the still neutral United States to shock our country out of isolationism and bring us into the war. The film relates the story of stranded German submariners, represented as wicked and cruel, but beatable, who travel as fugitives across Canada seeking refuge in the still neutral United States.

"Yet the reptilian adversary must not be too slippery and invincible else foster defeatism. Ultimately, the Nazis had to be defanged," said Doherty describing the intent of the film (Doherty 131). This film showcased Nazi ethics, and ultimately their disunity and betrayal of one another as their undoing; the world would know that Nazi's could be defeated and the United States should not serve as a safe haven for them. The final scene shows an American serviceman, Andy Brock, punch the last remaining Nazi in the face as he is shipped back to Canada on freight train, a response to which Americans could relate. While details like these were subtle, the film industry now had a corporeal enemy that the allies could literally hit onscreen. As moviegoer watched, they cannot help but feel some level of nationalism and pride that altered sentiments of isolationism into interventionism. While these films did encourage patriotism as the United States had hoped, they lacked a certain realism that showed the damage and suffering of war. The pressure for director's to make these films had a clear causal relationship with government oversight.

Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg indicate that The Bureau of Motion Pictures was formed under the Office of War Information to interact with Hollywood. In the eyes of the American government, every film had the capacity to weaken or improve America's war effort, the perception of its foreign policy, and America's reputation in the international community (Higham, Greenberg 68). According to Elmer Davis, director of OWI in 1942, "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized" (Higham, Greenberg 75). The effects of the OWI's termination in 1945 were clearly visible in the film industry with a shift to post-war

realism, a trend that exposed the darker side of the war to which Americans had not been heavily exposed. The blend of World War II and its aftermath, film noir, and the now widely disseminated information of the atrocities of the Holocaust convinced moviegoers that there was more happening than the simple picture Hollywood had painted for them (Koppes, Black 103-110). John Huston's *Let There Be Light* was banned by the War Department for nearly 40 years because it ventured to present veterans of battle suffering from shell shock and other combat-related psychological disorders. When finally released in 1982, *Let There Be Light* proved to be a characteristically John Huston epathetic view our country's damaged soldiers ,not unlike the Stanley Kubrick film *Full Metal Jacket (*Giannetti, Eyman 273*)*. This cements the idea that government oversight played a large role in the types of movies filmmakers were allowed to produce.

The years after the Second World War had come to a close, changing social conditions in the United States and abroad, catalyzed a breakthrough of social realism that accompanied the advent of French film noir. Film noir can best be described as "mood, images, men fantastically entrapped by deceitful women, city streets at three in the morning, streetlights reflected in puddles left from a drizzling rain, dingy hotel rooms containing characters for whom there is no escape" (Pramaggiore, Wallis 153). Noir provided a more worldly and pessimistic style than those to which Americans had grown accustomed. This was a style only briefly introduced to Americans in films like Fritz Lang's 1937 You Only Live Once that was nonexistent in the completely patriotic, single-minded styles of Howard Hawks and Frank Capra. The blend of World War II and its aftermath, film noir, and the now widely disseminated information of the atrocities of the Holocaust convinced moviegoers that there was more happening than simple picture

Hollywood had painted for them (War Films). Those paving the way in accurately

exposing the destruction left behind in postwar Europe were film noir and the Italian

neorealist directors. Over the course of the 1950's, Hollywood production techniques

started to adjust to the more objective European influences. This postwar realism

however, preceded the Red Scare in Hollywood.

The Red Scare sparked anti-Communist panic that began in 1947 and its effects

reverberated all the way until the later half of the 1950's. The hysteria was arguably

catalyzed by the invasion of Eastern Europe by Stalin and the escalation of the Korean

War. "The broader social context for these events was the shift in geopolitical power after

WWII. Although the Soviet Union had been a U.S. ally during the war, the Soviet regime

was increasingly viewed as a threat to U.S. interests," the result of which was a craze

against everything Communist (Thompson, Bordwell 218). The United States Congress's

House Committee on Un-American Activities started to look into allegations that

Communist propaganda was permeating throughout films in the Hollywood system. In

the 1930's the HUAC was established to investigate Nazi propaganda in American films,

but it had launched a crusade against Hollywood as it did during the Red Scare.

"Members of the film community were called on to testify before the committee and to

provide names of acquaintances and co-workers whom they believed to have been

Communist sympathizers," and some those prosecuted were not and had never been part

of the American Communist Party (Pramaggiore, Wallis 336). Ten witnesses, who were

later labeled as the Hollywood Ten, were a group of predominantly screenwriters who did

not cooperate entirely with the committee and were imprisoned for contempt of

Congress. The Hollywood Ten along with over 400 members of Hollywood ultimately

found themselves blacklisted after Senator Joseph McCarthy joined this purge of the

Hollywood system (Thomson, Bordwell 221). The president of the Motion Picture

Association of America, Eric Johnson, issued the Waldorf Statement that identified over

300 workers in the film industry who were allegedly Communist supporters, but none of

these claims were ever authenticated (Hollywood as History). Since Hollywood was

under scrutiny and the members of the film industry petrified with fear of accusations of

being a Communist supporter, the studios made a wave of anti-Communist films, the

preponderance of which were wildly unpopular and commercially unsuccessful. This is

seemingly the pattern that the film industry follows with respect to political issues,

especially those dealing with foreign concerns; "the powerful executives who control

media corporations today have the same vested interest as those who signed the Waldorf

Statement" (Pramaggiore, Wallis 337). The end of the 1950's however, saw directors

candidly resisting the blacklist and this also came at time of the dissolution of the

Production Code in Hollywood, which changed the course of the system and the type of

film that were acceptable and able to be shown to the American public.

According to film scholar Jonathan Rosenbaum, The Motion Picture Production

Code, a self-censoring remnant of the OWI, was used by the American film Industry

from 1930 until 1968, and was essentially a collection of rules and regulation that

dictated the ethics of what could and could not be shown on screen. After the Red Scare

and during the beginning of the 1960s, subject matter involved more adult and sexual

content and independent reactionary thinking about the Vietnam War (Rosenbaum 176).

Hollywood was also facing extreme competition from the spread of technology,

specifically the greater distribution and use of television, and needed away to rival the

new easy to access entertainment. Rosenbaum underscores that the government no longer saw the film industry as "a weapon to brainwash the American people" (Rosenbaum 163). By 1968, the Motion Picture Production Code was formally eliminated and replaced with our modern day Motion Picture Association of America's rating system, which shepherded in a period where sexual content, violence, realism, and free reaction came to the forefront more than ever before (Turner 117). This shift in Hollywood's approach to cinema seemed almost necessary to its survival considering the shift in the attitudes of the American public (Thompson, Bordwell 263).

Thompson and Bordwell have come to the conclusion that intensification of the war in Vietnam was the main reason for Hollywood's change in attitude, in that the industry recognized that the Production Code was outdated. The Production Code limited the industry to produce only pro-military films. Before the Production Code was dissolved, the American people were to some extent submissive or apathetic to sending American troops to Vietnam, "but in the last years of the war, majority opinion veered against continued U.S. involvement in what was perceived as a civil war, in which America had no vital interests" (Turner 117). It was a decade dominated by young people, rebellion, revolt and by 1968, America had become a split nation torn by feelings of the war and the civil rights movement (Turner 121). The Motion Picture Association of America replaced the Production Code and this new independent Hollywood, less synchronized with the agenda of the United States government, was able to produce such dichotomous films as *First Blood* and *Full Metal Jacket* (Thomson, Bordwell 267). With Reagan's lavish military spending came pro-war action-adventure, war films, which featured "big stars and dazzling special effects during war sequences, to illustrate how the

US *should* have fought the war. Sylvester Stallone appeared in the 'feel-good' action/war Rambo 'trilogy' as a misfit, cartoonish, and self-righteous super-hero, a revenge-seeking, buffed up, brooding ex-Green Beret Vietnam veteran (of Special Operations Command) named John Rambo" (Turner 143). Sylvester Stallone singlehandedly "'refought' the Vietnam War", getting Americans exited about military action and fighting the Vietnamese, overlooking the overwhelming disapproval of the war just a decade earlier (Turner 145). Conversely, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* is completely unnerving in part because of it's unpredictable editing that constantly keeps the audience off guard, especially in battle scenes and the depiction of the psychological distress of soliders (Giannetti, Eyman 242). This transformation in Hollywood was the foundation of the social commentary in films we see today and the freer take on foreign policy issues.

According to Giannetti and Eyman, films of the new millennium are now the expression of individual consciousness more than in any other period, and I believe this had an immeasurably strong impact on war films. What is more, the individualization of films has led more credence to auteur theory (Giannetti, Eyman 343). This validates my claim that it is the director's vision and intent in films like *Iron Man* and *The Hurt Locker* to provide a anti or pro-war message respectively to the audience. It is the director that is chiefly in control of supplying this message, which makes auteur theory indispensible to the critique of contemporary war films.

The new millennium also continued the development of photo-realism in film with the improvement of technology. Films concerning the Iraq War have emerged all throughout the decade and as we see, they illustrate war as "much more brutal affairs than the depiction in World War II films" (Gallagher 86). Matt Gallagher discusses *The Hurt*

Locker in detail acknowledging that while there are groups of Americans soldiers, including himself, who claim there are inaccuracies in the tactics used by Americans in the film, it very nearly perfectly captures the tension of war with steady cameras throughout and the emotions of brotherhood soldiers experience (Gallagher 97). He calls it an extremely realistic take on the war as it emphasizes the bravery it takes to be an American solider (Gallagher 99). Even Gallagher in his analysis of the film as a solider, despite his limited knowledge of film theory, used elements of cinematographic spectator theory and auteur theory to make his judgment validating that historical social context and film theory are intertwined when appraising film for meaning.

American audiences also tend to have an aversion to excessive displays of reality. Movies like *The Kingdom*, *Rendition*, and *Lions for Lambs* "were all financial failure[s], probably because they all [reflected] a general aura of confusion and helplessness far removed from the moral clarity people want in their movies" (Thompson, Bordwell 343). Filmmaker Gavin Hood's 2007 anti-war film *Rendition* revolves around an American woman whose husband, a man with Egyptian heritage and a profession as a chemical engineer, is wrongly accuse of terrorism and associated with known terrorists. He is arrested and confined in North Africa without due process and clandestinely tortured in a holding facility. *Rendition* illustrated the United States government "more negatively than any other film of the decade" (Giannetti, Eyman 365). At time where Americans were not particularly sympathetic towards terrorist groups, the trailer essentially unfolded the core ideas of the movie and audiences were almost automatically repelled. While this is an example spectator theory so is *Iron Man* in a completely opposite way. Iron Man was introduced to Americans in 1963 during the crisis in Vietnam, and to see the

superhero brought to the big screen tackling our contemporary world was an enticing prospect for audiences (Gianetti, Eyman 345). Not a film pertaining to the Iraq War directly, it endorsed popular anti-war ideologies and offered audiences a temporary getaway with fantastical fiction. In accordance with a trend found even in classical Hollywood of World War II, by concentrating chiefly on the individual, films like Iron Man often demonstrate American culture's propensity to place the rights of individuals above ideas of community or utilitarianism (Pramaggiore, Wallis 428). It is a synthesis of escapist fictional violence and anti-war attitudes. Moreover, the role of Tony Stark, the man behind Iron Man's mask, was personalized to Robert Downey Jr. who audiences were eager to see, which is once again a display of spectator theory.

Although often viewed separately, historical social context and a holistic approach to film theory must both be considered when critiquing a film for pro or anti-war sentiments. Using one film theory, like auteur theory for example may be enough to explain the director's intent, but this theory alone cannot assess the entire subtext of a film or whether a film is in fact propaganda or not. A firm understanding of all critical film theory and the time period in which a particular film is produced are crucial in making proper assessments of war films and limiting subjectivity.

Multi-Method Analysis of Critiquing War Films

Quantitative Method: Coding for Pro/ Anti-War Messages in Film:

1) The Film's Subtext

This draws heavily from how the conflict between apparent content and independent stylistic devices characterize social context in film. This tension between subtext and text,

or the script and all the material that actually appears onscreen, actually gives us a way to merge the two seemingly competing theoretical approaches of auteur theory and the iconological approach as editing theory. This is the way in which both the script is crafted and the director's guidance helps to create the underlying subtext of the film.

Example: My interpretation of *The Hurt Locker*'s montage of shots highlighting the purposelessness of living a domestic and consumer-based life juxtaposed to the closing shot of Sergeant James redeploying. (1-Pro-War)

1) Pro-War

2) Mixed or Neutral

3) Anti-War

2) **Perceived Director's Intent**

Films of the new millennium are now the expression of individual consciousness more than in any other period, and I believe this had an immeasurably strong impact on war films. What is more, the individualization of films has led more credence to auteur theory, which auteur holds the director's vision to be of the utmost importance.

Example: "It was always my goal to make *Iron Man* more than just a Marvel movie. I wanted to show people that the world needs to be responsible for the damage it causes, but I didn't want to throw it people's faces either. *Iron Man*'s mask is an awesome way to hide that message." – Jon Favreau (3-Anti)

1) Pro-War

2) Mixed or Neutral

3) Anti-War

3) **Audience Reaction**

Cinematographic spectator theory highlights the importance of camera work considering that, angle, distance, and movement are always chosen for a particular reason whether it signifies character dominance or the tone of a particular scene. Every elements of a shot helps create a particular reaction from the audience. An understanding of the technical elements of camerawork is necessary to understand the relationship between ideologies in film and social context as perceived by the viewer.

Example: My immediate reaction to watching *Full Metal Jacket* without someone else's influence would characterize it as a strongly anti-war film (5).

1) Strongly Pro-War

2) Pro-War

3) Mixed or Neutral

4) Anti-War

5) Strongly Anti-War

4) **Sociological Film Theory- Master Genre Classification**

This is a theoretical approach to looking at genre films through what she (who?) calls the status quo of film, or sociological film theory. Every film has a master status, whether it is action, western, or horror, which overrides its auxiliary status traits. According to her use of genre theory, propaganda is a master status of film and we can attribute the survival of propaganda films during World War II to their function. These 8 relevant genres to my study decrease in the level of impact they have on viewers according to a study conducted by film scholar Judith Wright.

Example: I would characterize *Iron Man* as an action film and does make me think of political impactions nearly as much as the war genre film *Green Zone*.

1) Propaganda

2) War

3) History or Historical Documentary

4) Melodrama

5) Comedy

6) Action (Popcorn Genre Subdivision)

7) Suspense

8) Science Fiction

Criteria for Coding Pro/ Anti-War Messages in Film

The primary criteria for scoring films based on this coding scheme is a firm understanding of what defines pro- and anti-war films. On the most fundamental level, pro-war films are identified here as those that support foreign policy and war efforts of the United States government or embrace the heroism associated with being a solider and serving one's country. Anti-war films conversely showcase reasons why Americans should not embrace the war effort, generally focusing on false information, human rights violations, the harsh conditions that soldiers must endure, and the devastation associated with war. In the event of an outlier in the study, a mixed or neutral score has been included if a particular film does not take a clear stance on the issue of war or offers insight into both pro- and anti-war arguments.

The film's subtext category largely relies on close observation of the technical and aesthetic elements of editing in film theory. *The Hurt Locker*'s closing scene for instance is edited in such a way that it plays off the objective characterization of the film's protagonists and contributes to an overall pro-war and pro-military message

without taking a controversial stance. By this reasoning the film's subtext must be labeled as pro-war. Based on an understanding of the shot composition, the order in which scenes are placed, and message these technical elements create, the coder must score the film pro-war, mixed or neutral, or anti-war.

The director's intent category relies on the director's vision prior to the start of principal photography and the coder's subjective take on how heavily the director has influenced the final product of the film. While a director's original intent may be anti-war, the final product may in fact be something else entirely. Based on personal interviews I have acquired and recorded commentary by each respective director, coders must sore the director's original intent pro-war, mixed or neutral, or anti-war.

The audience reaction, which relies on spectator theory and cinematographic theory, gauges the immediate reaction of individual coders to a particular film. A broader range of coding scores have been added, included strongly pro-war and strongly anti-war, to account for the range of emotions described in spectator theory. Because a film's edited subtext is often difficult to gauge the broader the scoring range is and directors do not want to be labeled as extremists, the scoring guidelines of those respective categories have been narrowed.

Taking into account that the master genre classification category would likely be the most subjective, an expansive list of genres has been incorporated into the coding scheme to account for all genre elements associated with each particular film. Each coder must intuitively select the genre that best describes the film as whole, while considering the other genre elements auxiliary status traits. This allows for an analysis that gauges how closely individuals associate each film with war or propaganda and how non-war

films or those that are not necessarily predominantly war or propaganda may still evoke political pro- or anti-war messages (Wright 44). Propaganda as a genre can be identified as an institutional effort to deliberately spread ideas influence a certain cause or movement. War as a genre is identified as a film that focuses on a historical wartime conflict that relies primarily on factual information. Historical documentaries are completely factual narrations depicting real footage, though they may still take a stance on war through editing and post-production, much like *Why We Fight*. Melodramas focus mainly on the romance between two individuals with other elements of the story such as war serving as a backdrop, very much like *Casablanca*. Comedies provide humor to audience members while other elements of the film are merely mediums by which to convey the gags. Popcorn action films are generally not regarded as extremely insightful or thought provoking, but are simply meant to be a visual spectacle often showcasing violence. *Transformers* for instance cannot be considered a war film by definition as it does illustrate a real conflict, but does depict grand scenes of fictional. Suspense films are typically characterized as relying on psychological tension and excitement, intentionally trying to shock audience members at the most unexpected and opportune moments. Science fiction films may incorporate any number of genre elements, but provide scientific explanations to fantastical situations (Wright 45). The key component for coding and quantifying genre in film is to bear in mind that one genre must always overshadow the others.

Data Results:

Name of Coder: Jeff Litt	**Coding Category:**	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		1	1	1	1
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	2	1
49th Parallel		1	1	2	1
Sergeant York		1	1	1	1
Let There Be Light		3	3	4	3
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	6
Green Zone		3	3	2	2
Unthinkable		2	2	3	7
Rendition		3	3	5	2
The Hurt Locker		1	1	2	2
Captain America		1	2	1	6

Name of Coder: Arragon Perrone	**Coding Category:**	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	1	2
49th Parallel		1	1	1	2
Sergeant York		1	1	1	2
Let There Be Light		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	6
Green Zone		3	3	2	2
Unthinkable		2	2	3	2
Rendition		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The Hurt Locker		1	1	2	2
Captain America		2	2	1	6

Name of Coder: Alexandra Raleigh	**Coding Category:**	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		1	1	1	1
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	2	1
49th Parallel		1	1	2	1
Sergeant York		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Let There Be Light		3	3	5	3
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	6
Green Zone		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Unthinkable		2	2	3	2
Rendition		3	3	5	2
The Hurt Locker		1	1	2	2
Captain America		1	2	1	6

Name of Coder: Mark Kermode (BBC Film Critic)	**Coding Category:**	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		1	1	1	1
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	2	1
49th Parallel		1	1	2	1
Sergeant York		1	1	1	1
Let There Be Light		3	3	5	3
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	8
Green Zone		3	3	5	2
Unthinkable		2	2	3	7
Rendition		3	3	5	2
The Hurt Locker		3*	3*	5*	2
Captain America		1	2	1	8

Name of Coder: Simon Mayo (BBC Film Critic)	Coding Category:	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		1	1	1	1
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	2	1
49th Parallel		1	1	2	1
Sergeant York		1	1	1	1
Let There Be Light		3	3	5	3
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	2
Green Zone		3	3	5	2
Unthinkable		2	2	3	7
Rendition		3	3	5	2
The Hurt Locker		1	1	2	2
Captain America		1	2	1	2

Name of Coder: Simon Dunstan (Publicist Premier PR)	Coding Category:	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		1	1	1	1
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	2	1
49th Parallel		1	1	2	1
Sergeant York		1	1	1	1
Let There Be Light		3	3	5	3
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	2
Green Zone		3	3	5	1*
Unthinkable		2	2	3	7
Rendition		3	3	5	1*
The Hurt Locker		3*	3*	4*	2
Captain America		1	2	1	2

Name of Coder: Paul Ockleford (Publicist Premier PR)	**Coding Category:**	Film's Subtext	Director's Intent	Audience Reaction	Genre Classification
Name of Film:					
Why We Fight		1	1	1	1
Foreign Correspondent		1	1	2	1
49th Parallel		1	1	2	1
Sergeant York		1	1	1	1
Let There Be Light		3	3	5	2
Full Metal Jacket		3	3	5	2
First Blood		1	1	2	6
Iron Man		3	3	4	2
Green Zone		3	3	5	1*
Unthinkable		2	2	1*	7
Rendition		3	3	5	1*
The Hurt Locker		1	1	2	2
Captain America		1	2	1	2

Quantitative Data Analysis:

The scores of each coding category remain fairly consistent for each of the coders. With the exception of John Huston's *Let There Be Light*, all coders scored every film's subtext, prior to 1945, as pro-war. This category is largely reflective of the final product of the film and its completion in post-production. After the principal photography, or the primary shooting of the film, has wrapped, post-production editors and the director piece together shots that ultimately create the finished product. From observation, the director's intent generally guides the film's subtext and *Why We Fight, Foreign Correspondent, 49th Parallel, Sergeant York* consistently scored as having a pro-war subtext in addition to a pro-war director's intent immediate audience reaction a pro-war immediate audience reaction. Moreover, all four of these films were scored as propaganda, which solidifies

government involvement in the World War II American film industry through quantifiable data.

Conversely, John Huston's *Let There Be Light* received unwavering anti-war scores from each coder and was consistently coded as being a documentary. As a film that disparaged the government's efforts in the film industry during World War II and called attention to neglected and wounded soldiers, each coder found it to be extraordinarily anti-war in nature and its near 40 year government ban establishes a firm causal link between government oversight and the freedom of filmmakers to produce anti-war films during the Seconds World War.

The next two films that were coded, *Full Metal Jacket* and *First Blood* mark the reflection period and aftermath of the Vietnam War and highlight the dichotomous relationship of wanting to forget and relive highlighted by scholar Fred Turner. *Full Metal Jacket* was unfailingly scored as anti-war across the first three categories and a war film in genre classification, once again proving the causal relationship between a new freedom of expression and a lack of government oversight. In a post 1968 America after the elimination of the Production Code, strong anti-war films were permitted and the scores of the five coders prove this relationship. *First Blood* was considered an action film and was not scored as a war film by any of the coders, but all agreed that it unquestionably had pro-war political implication in the wake of Vietnam and Reagan's high military spending. This also directly links my quantitative method to previous literature and my qualitative method.

The most diverse coding responses emerged when coders scored film from the contemporary Iraq War era. While *Green Zone* and *Rendition* were steadily scored as

anti-war, five of the coder's considered it a war film, while two British film publicists scored it as propaganda. Reasoning for this was, "They are such an in your face anti-war films that they basically represent the how liberal filmmakers think they know best" (Ockleford). While this does not diminish the validity of my hypothesis, it does give credence to the alternative explanation that contemporary Hollywood is viewed as predominantly liberal, even outside of the United States, and this is also a broader interpretation of what constitutes the propaganda film genre.

While not propaganda five coders believed that *The Hurt Locker* is a pro-war film that was best characterized by the war genre, while two disagreed. They claimed that the quote, "for war is a drug," shown before the start of the film and the addiction of the main character to war presented at the end of the film is a clear anti-war message that war poisons the minds of good men. In accordance with these results, all coders besides these two believed there to be a pro-war subtext highlighted by its closing scenes. This is testament to how different people can draw different conclusions from the same films in spite of what the director's intent actually was. This does not damage my hypothesis in anyway however, as these results still uphold that filmmakers in our contemporary era of cinema can express themselves freely and audiences are free to draw their own conclusion.

The only film of my case studies the contemporary era that coders agreed was strongly pro-war was *Captain America*. As a Marvel film that breaks believability through its extensive use of science fiction and imaginary characters, it would seem unlikely that it suggests such a strong pro-war message, but every coder held that its evocative and reminiscent use of World War II propaganda serves as an appropriate

parallel for contemporary America's conflict in Iraq. Genre classifications held a majority for action while some considered it to be science fiction, the most removed from genre from war. Quantifiably *Captain America* as well as *Iron Man* are the most open to genre interpretation considering their subject matter. However, while *Iron Man* was intended to be an anti-war film by director Jon Favreau and is perceived as such, Joe Johnston intended to make a neutral film that was actually quite a pro-war final product as perceived by the public.

The only neutral film of the case studies with respect to pro- and anti-war political implications is Gregor Jordan's *Unthinkable*. No coder believed the film's subtext on torture took a clear stand and the immediate audience reaction from all coders was mixed as well. Jordan's intent as supplied by DVD commentary was to make a film that considered both the strengths and pitfalls of torture during wartime and refused to take a definitive stand on either side. *Unthinkable* is unique among my case studies and recent American film history as it is the only film that seemingly does not take a decisive stand with respect to subtext and the director's original goal. Coders were divided on whether to label it as a war film or suspense film with a narrow majority siding with suspense with war as clear backdrop. Therefore, this proves that although a film's master status may not be war or propaganda, the backdrop of war may still arouse powerful pro- and anti-war political implications.

While the structure of my coding system has proven to be effective and has yielded results that support the existence of both pro- and anti-war films in a post-Production Code era, these scores alone do not account for the historical and social context of each film. The unanimous anti-war scores of *Let There Be Light* show that

both pro- and anti-war films existed during WWII, but it does not account for the ban by the Office of War Information, which proves the causal relationship asserted by my hypothesis. Further qualitative analysis is necessary to draw conclusions from this data.

Qualitative Reviews of Case Studies:

Despite the impracticality of providing a definitive interpretation to any particular film, these qualitative observations will look at the context of my case studies in order to support the results of my coding scheme and hypothesis. Taking into consideration film theory, the technical and artistic elements that provide insight into the director's intent, interviews, studio influence, and the social implications of the whole or parts of each film, these observations will draw inferences about the pro-war, anti-war, neutral, or ambivalent nature of each film.

Why We Fight:

The expected audience reaction or spectator theory, editing theory, and auteur theory are all useful tool to pull apart the pro-war messages of these films. The first in this group, Frank Capra's *Why we Fight* is actually a series of seven documentaries and they have been identified as such by my coders and myself. *Prelude to War* (1942), *The Nazi's Strike* (1943), *Divide and Conquer* (1943), *The Battle of Britain* (1943), *The Battle of Russia* (1943), *The Battle of China* (1944), and *War Comes to America* (1945) may have been all been released years apart but contain the same essentially the same messages that are relentlessly drilled into the audience.

Capra's 1942 *Prelude to War* emphasized the dichotomy of western liberal democracies, the free world, and the fascisms festering overseas, described as the slave world, using separate images of a purely white planet and a purely black planet competing for domination. He replaces the upbeat music of *Triumph of the Will* with darker tones and pounding drums synchronized to Riefenstahl's footage. There is a stronger prominence on close shots of marching feet to stress the menacing images of Nazis and allusions to the idea of Hitler trying to promote himself as a god. Given that the full force of the United States government was backing the production of these films and the predominance of news outlets focused on promoting U.S. involvement in the war, the attitudes of protesters holding signs showcased in *Prelude to War* declaring, "No foreign entanglement," quickly shifted to nationalistic support for the war. Bearing in mind editing theory, Capra's persuasion was also coupled with real-life and fictional accounts of valiant solider of the war effort, both past and present.

Hollywood required a concrete, tangible enemy that Americans would grow to understand, through the representations of the United States government, and want to fight and expunge. While Capra painted the Nazis and Japanese in their most unflattering possible light, he also highlighted the respectable qualities of our allies like Russia in his *Battle of Russia*. In the documentary, Capra underscores the country's ethnic diversity to give a positive impression to Americans. General Douglas MacArthur commends the Russians for their strategic defense of their nation regarding their retreat through country and scorched earth tactics. Not once is communism mentioned to allow Americans to more easily connect with our allies and empathize with the Russian Oath, "Blood for Blood! Death for Death" (Doherty 21). This is exactly the type of mindset President

Roosevelt and the United States armed forces needed from America to shock them out of isolationism. The *Why we Fight* series was essentially a set of educational films used to train and instruct soldiers to the way of thinking that facilitated the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

Sergeant York:

Many of the Hollywood action movies of WWII featured images of terrifying Germans and even Japanese, while Americans were portrayed as religious and righteous men of a nation, obliged to purge the world of the evils of the axis powers. While it is only naturally for every director to have his or her own style, it is by simple logic that we paying closer attention to the spectator and editing theories to analyze pro-war WWII films, because regulated studios and directors expected their audiences to react a specific way after viewing their films. For instance, in order to combat the wave of conscientious objectors to the war effort, Howard Hawkes told the story of Alvin York, initially a conscientious objector of World War, in his 1941 film *Sergeant York* (Koppes, Black 119). Although York initially refused to authorize a film version of his life story, a deal was eventually struck because of York's financial situation and the Academy Award winner for "Best Picture" of 1941 was put into development (Koppes, Black 123). This was also a way for Hollywood to adapt the story of previous war to comment on a contemporary war, an example of iconography theory, just as Zach Snyder used the Cold War in his fictional 2009 *Watchmen* to make a commentary on the still present danger of nuclear weapons. *Sergeant York* is however much less subtle than anything released in

new millennium and is basically medium to drill holes in logic of devout Christians who object to the idea of war. In one famous scene the wind blows York's Bible to a page with the lines, ""Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's." York instantly understands that he should serve in the military and goes on to become a great marksman and war hero, in what can only be described as the most exploitive use of twisted Bible logic of the year.

Foreign Correspondent, and *49th Parallel*:

Both Alfred Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* and British director Michael Powell's *49th Parallel* were designed to shock Americans out of isolationism and to support the war effort overseas. No background research is actually necessary to understand why these films share this commonality other than simply watching them and walking away with a still freethinking break. Once again spectator theory's expected audience reaction serves as a useful tool and substantiates the idea that propagandized film is a language to communicate ideas.

Joseph Goebbels essentially calling *Foreign Correspondent* a propaganda masterpiece is indication enough that the film had a clear political agenda . Although it does bear the unmistakable Hitchcockian atmosphere, it is hard to see the film as anything other than a collection of set pieces to construct a massive propaganda machine. Even the famous scene featuring an assassination in the rain is just a small part in much grander scheme. When Johnny Jones announces over the radio, that America is being called upon, almost as if it is a superhero that needs to save the world, it is quite easy to believe that at the time most audience members would feel a sense of responsibility to

act. This being a time when Americans were far less educated and access to information was far more limited, nobody stood a chance at resisting the film's message.

The British too generated a number of pro war films meant to encourage strength against the Nazi's that were shown to Americans to sway opinions away from isolationism. When a group of German submariners become stranded in Canada in *49ᵗʰ Parallel*, they attempt to escape to the political safe haven of the United States. Powell's intention was to make a film to swing opinion in the still neutral United States to shock our country out of isolationism and bring us into the war. Showing Americans that their country was a refuge for such heartless monsters like the Nazi's naturally sparked a reaction of wanting to fight them. Using the iconographic approach, Powell uses a hardnosed stereotypical American, Andy Brock, to literally punch the last remaining Nazi in his face, as they are both shipped back to Canada on a freight train at the end of the film. The order of the scene is timed appropriately and the expected audience reaction could have been none other than every viewer wanting to be the guy that got the opportunity to punch a Nazi in the face.

Let there be Light:

Of all the films on my list of case studies, my hypothesis hinges on the banning of John Huston's 1946 *Let there be Light*, to prove both the correlation and causation of government oversight inhibiting the free expression of filmmakers. From the research presented in my literature review, we can see that showing the traumatization of soldiers prior to 1968 was considered unacceptable, and especially since the United States Army commissioned this film, it makes perfect sense that it was prohibited (Pramaggiore,

Wallis 106) While the documentary presents scenes of psychologically distressed

soldiers in hospitals, the narrator comments how twenty percent of soldiers that have

served in combat situations experience some form of mental distress. In one notable

scene, just a doctor approaches one solider, the soldier flinches and jumps away in

paranoia. Due to the "damaging consequences the film could have on the number of

civilians willing to enlist in the army, it was banned upon its completion" (Doherty 156).

Since the U.S. Army had the ability to ban such controversial material, it is only logical

that it would out of self-interest and in the interest of the goals of all earlier propaganda

films released for the American public to see. It is important here to keep auteur theory in

mind as the film is both written and directed by John Huston, and without the consent of

the government, it was by and large his anti-war vision. Huston was not free to express

anti-war ideas in a country where films were still heavily censored prior to 1968.

Full Metal Jacket **and** *First Blood:*

Stanley Kubrick's 1987 *Full Metal Jacket* isn't without its sense of humor. The

first thirty minutes of a drill sergeant demoralizing his soldiers with an onslaught of

homophobic insults is still one of the funniest moments recorded on film for those with a

twisted a sense of humor. But what is initially quite funny onscreen eventually devolves

into a study on the psychological stress soldiers experience in wartime. Kubrick's films

often underscored notions of violence and the corruption and lack of ethics in the

governmental institutions. The brutally realistic *A Clockwork Orange* from 1971 is an

often satiric commentary on propaganda, violence and its moral repercussions, the

restraints of violence and especially violence associated with sex. 1964's *Dr. Strangelove*

even satirizes the rational idea of mutually assured destruction and the breakdown of international communication. *Full Metal Jacket* must therefore be examined with a close eye on auteur theory, in that Kubrick inserts a certain trademark of social commentary into each one of his films, usually veiled at least at first with some level of humor or wit.

In the film's opening sequence the recruits' heads are shaved. The rebellious long hair of the 1960s, usually associated with being antiestablishment or anti-government, is swept away as the men are prepped for their futures. One might consider this a pro-war sequence out of context, but in context along with the somber melody in the background, the close-up shots of these men show them to be despondent, as if their freedom is being shaved away. Throughout the entire movie, Kubrick uses close ups to magnify the freewill being drained from the faces of these soldiers. By doing this Kubrick is able to focus very effectively on the way in which soldiers are molded. He shows the steady attack on individualism and personality that these men must experience in basic training, and further along in the film, he is able to show the building awareness that a particular solider is beginning to lose his more human, compassionate side. The most profound and shocking scene of the film comes after the recruits graduate and Private "Gomer Pyle" kills his drill sergeant and then commits suicide. Pyle is most heavily subjected to psychological torture by his drill instructor and this scene most aptly captures the demoralizing and negative attributes of the armed forces. Never in the day of the Production Code would Kubrick be able to get away with such a message and the banning of *Let there be Light* is a testament to this.

Conversely, the Sylvester Stallone star vehicle *First Blood* director by Ted Kotcheff and released in 1982 during President Reagan's abundant military spending,

veers completely in the opposite direction both in tone and message. With quick shots and fast-paced action of a John Rambo, an ex soldier of U.S. Army Special Forces unit, both editing theory and iconographic theory are more appropriate as analytical tools. Although the film begins after the war in Vietnam, we learn that Rambo has earned the Medal of Honor for his services in the war, which already glorifies the idea of war and the soldier's life, but not overtly so and not in a tasteless propagandizing way. When *First* Blood was released the treatment and rights of soldiers and veterans were still very much (Turner 76). The film's message about how soldiers returning from active duty are sidelined by a a country that so strongly disapproved of the war really makes the audience sympathize with the military and the hardships of its soldiers. In this first film of the series, our protagonist is first and foremost a victim of circumstance and prejudicial Americans.

As the last of Special Forces unit, Rambo is alone in this word and using the iconographic approach, the director portrays Rambo as a hardened, gruff drifter that most Americans, including the film's contemporary audience, would shun. This shunning by a local sheriff creates a slippery slope that makes Rambo a fugitive on violent quest to save himself. But while *Full Metal Jacket* uses iconography to make spectators appalled at the traumatization of helpless soldiers and angry at the idea of war, *First Blood* focuses on the struggle of a single man, and spectators watch in stupefied awe as this one-man bulldozer plows through everything in his path. As audience members we can't help but root for the ex soldier who has been wronged by a society that has relied on him, and we are encouraged to show a higher level of respect for our armed forces.

Green Zone and _The Hurt Locker_:

Paul Greengrass's 2010 *Green Zone* is perhaps the most anti-war movie of this of my case studies. But this particular film also highlights the financial interests of Hollywood as studios and directors alike often cast specific actors in roles that have been tailored to them, in part to increase ticket sales and because audiences commonly have preconceived notions about particular actors. Paul Greengrass's 2010 film *Green Zone* is an example of this star specific strategy. Greengrass cast Matt Damon in the roll of Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller who investigates informed locations of weapons of mass destruction in the Green Zone of Baghdad. Their previous collaboration was the 2007 film *The Bourne Ultimatum* and the pairing of the two was instinctively seen as the foundation of an action-suspense thriller. Universal Pictures and Greengrass apparently expected this strategy to work, but the film's results at the domestic box office were poor. With issues ranging from disbanding the Iraqi army and false intelligence of WMD's where the main character fights to find the truth, the film was arguably too close to home for many Americans.

It is clear enough that our largely liberal film industry shares the popular sentiments of the American public about the Iraq War; however, contemporary filmgoers pay the high price of a movie ticket to escape from the depressing realities of our world, and *Green Zone* calls attention to those realties. According to spectator theory, audiences are much more prone to paying the ticket price for films like *Iron Man* or *Captain America*, not only because they are considered blockbuster superhero films, but because they still offer two hours of fun escapism.

Conversely, Kathryn Bigelow's realistic portrayal of the Iraq War and the horrors bomb squad units have to experience were addressed with in the 2009 thriller *The Hurt Locker*. Audience members feel compassion for the soldiers when they shoot, and in this way, the full impact of the Iraq War. It is an extremely photorealistic take on the war, but despite its great number of accolades, the films subject matter follows the trend of not appealing to a great deal of moviegoers during its limited theatrical release (*The Hurt Locker*). In an interview Bigelow states that, "My intent was to show the extraordinary lives that these soldiers live, but I didn't have a pro- or anti-war agenda. It's non-partisan, but does focus on the courage of these men. The audience is really supposed to respect what they do by the end" (Bigelow). This is a film that caused some disagreement among my coders, but it can very well be interpreted either way. While some consider the protagonist Sergeant William James' inability to return to a normal life after being exposed to war, others see this character trait as way to distinguish soldiers above ordinary civilians as they feel a calling to something higher than an ordinary life concerned with consumerism. Bigelow does not execute this portrayal in remotely the same vein as *Full Metal Jacket*'s portrayal of damaged soldiers, but as she says, in much more respectful tribute to them. Debates about the values that this particular film showcases are causal proof that filmmakers are no longer inhibited by governmental regulations.

Unthinkable and *Rendition*:

Gregor Jordan's 2010 *Unthinkable*, condenses the most cringe-worthy moments of television's *24* into ninety-seven minutes on the horrors and implications of torture.

Surprisingly, Jordan is able to do this as objectively as possible, and the results of my

coding predominantly support this analysis. The film concerns the American Muslim

Stephen Arthur Younger (Michael Sheen), who has planted bombs across American

cities, and his assigned black-ops interrogator Henry Harold Humphries (Samuel L.

Jackson), who seems to have to limits in the name of achieving results. The character of

Agent Helen Brody (Carrie-Anne Moss) seems to be there just as means to provide

intermittent counterarguments to Humphries lack of concern for human empathy or

limits. While the dialogue is there to convey the weight of the film's message, this is very

much a film based on Jean-Loup Bourget's notion of subtext and text. The tension

between subtext and text allows us to look at both auteur theory and iconographic theory

and see how Jordan has used his actors onscreen to manipulate the message in the script.

The results of my coding have labeled this film as a neutral war movie, not because it

chooses to not take particular stance on the issue of torture and how to deal with the issue

in the face of war, but because it offers arguments for both sides effectively. Humphries

conducts all forms of physical torture on Younger and even goes so far as to murder his

wife in front of him while Agent Brody watches in horror. Just as Humphries is about to

murder Younger's children, Brody intervenes to the relief of the audience despite to the

looming possibility that a bomb may detonate at any moment. The film is able to get us to

empathize with the antagonist and prisoner, and because of that leaves of torn on the

moral issue of whether to cross the line or not to save the lives of millions.

  Rendition, directed by Gavin Hood and released in the 2007, serves as appropriate

counterpoint to the largely unbiased *Unthinkable*. The main storyline revolves around the

questionable detaining of Egyptian-born chemical engineer Anwar El-Ibrahimi after the

attempted assignation of a police official. Upon returning to the U.S., American officers

detain Anwar and torture him until he gives what is later revealed to be a false

confession. Not once in the film does the audience get a glimpse into the possible benefits

or legitimate uses of torture to obtain information in situations of war, and both the

expected audience reaction and director's intent was probably one aimed at making

viewers feel contempt for the United States government. Not only would I classify this

film as anti-war, but I would also go so far as to suggest that it could be considered anti-

American.

It is also a point of contention whether a film about a fictional torture incident

even fits the standards of a film that can be classified as pro- or anti-war as it is limited to

an isolated incident. But my coders and I believe that such isolated incidents, especially

those revolving around the Middle East, stem from ongoing state of war, and a

microcosm like this still has the potential to communicate a potent a larger anti-war

message. The film however performed poorly at the box office *(Rendition)*. At a time

when Americans were not particularly sympathetic towards terrorist groups, the trailer

laid out the general ideas of the film and it is safe to assume that American audiences

weren't eager to see a photorealistic take on a torture scenario that was so clearly one

sided in favor of those being tortured. *Unthinkable* did not have a great box office success

either, but it was also never given a U.S. theatrical release so it's unfair to compare the

two (*Unthinkable* IMDb). One can only predict that *Unthinkable* wouldn't have faired

much better even with its star power given *Rendition* had the star power of both Jake

Gyllenhaal and Reese Wthierspoon behind it, and the trend seems to show that

Americans tend to turn away from films that deal directly with the conflict in the Middle

East.

Iron Man **and** *Captain America***:**

Released in 2008, Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* admittedly cannot escape its roots as a

comic book superhero movie, nor is is not trying to, but the director has clearly made a

point to comment on the state of modern war, the deadly potential of weapons of mass

destruction, and the responsibility of arms dealers and manufacturers for the deaths that

their weapons cause. We are first introduced to the not so humble Tony Stark, the

embodiment of American arrogance, riding as a passenger in a military Humvee,

flaunting his celebrity-like status in the faces of U.S. soldiers. Initially reminiscent of

Yuri Orlov, the unlikable protagonist and arms dealer from Andrew Niccol's 2005 film

Lord of War, Stark has distanced himself from the emotional destructive capacity of his

weapons. After a demonstration of his new Jericho Bomb, a non-nuclear missile that can

level an entire mountain range, he slaps his chrome briefcase on a makeshift table, pops it

open, and reveals an automated champagne dispenser. His military friend Colonel James

Rhodes clearly watches this display of glamorizing destruction with disgust, but lets his

personal views take a backseat to whatever miracle upon which this unlikely friendship

was built.

The catalyst of his transformation however occurs almost immediately in the film,

when Stark's Humvee is ambushed and he is severely wounded. Fast-forward past twenty

minutes of exposition explain how he became of weapons tycoon by legacy of his father

and we get to his escape from a Middle Eastern cave using the first conception of the Iron

Man suit. This singular experience has seemingly changed every one of his core values about the nature of war and his involvement in it. At a press conference after his arrival back on U.S. soil, reporters are shocked with usually flashy and cocky stark says: "I never got to say goodbye to my father. There's questions I would've asked him. I would've asked him how he felt about what his company did, if he was conflicted, if he ever had doubts. Or maybe he was every inch of man we remember from the newsreels. I saw young Americans killed by the very weapons I created to defend them and protect them. And I saw that I had become part of a system that is comfortable with zero-accountability." The screenplay's dialogue by far presents the strongest and most obvious case *for Iron* Man to be labeled as an anti-war film. This plays along with idea of spectator and editing theory, placing scenes in specific order to convey a particular idea or change in a character. When his assistant and love interest threatens to walk out after seeing that her boss has essentially become an international terrorist-fighting vigilante, he says: "You stood by my side all these years while I reaped the benefits of destruction. Now that I'm trying to protect the people I've put in harm's way, you're going to walk out?" Stark certainly has a way of convincing his fictional colleagues, but his words have a strong impact on the audience as well.

The entire film also draws attention to the harm to which soldiers are exposed. Despite his high-tech machinery the initial armor worn by Stark, which looks as if it was built from spare parts, leaves him looking not entirely protected.. Even in a later sequence when Stark is flying in the final design of the Iron Man armor, his figure looks shaky and exposed from wide shots and zoomed-out canted camera angles, suggesting the vulnerability of and lack of control in a soldier's life.

Captain America, released in 2011 and directed by Joe Johnston is another Marvel Studios film whose protagonist in fact comes from the same world as Tony Stark, yet this film approaches the subject of war in the polar opposite direction. This is also an indication that the studio has left more of the design of completed film to the vision of the director, more of reason to keep auteur theory in mind when critiquing both of these films. Johnston is therefore primarily responsible for the vision of the completed film, which validates the idea that individual filmmakers are free to express themselves even while being financed by a major studio. *Captain America* is therefore a film that must be critiqued with auteur theory in mind. Johnston discusses in an interview that, "I was trying to make film in the same vein as those WWII films, but by doing that… you basically make a propaganda film" (*Captain America*). Granted, *Let there be Light,* is a testament to how not all WWII films were propaganda, (only those that were not banned), but the tone and 1940's feel of *Captain America* evoke a very pro-war sentiment.

Steve Rogers, the man who would be Captain America, starts the film as a scrawny guy who wants to join the army and won't take no for an answer. His friends describe him as the type of guy "who just wants to do the right thing," and spectator theory suggests that we as audience members are supposed to identify doing the right thing with serving one's country within the context of the film (*Captain America*). He is chosen to be the subject of a super soldier program and after his transformation he is turned into a propaganda machine by the army. Using editing theory to analyze a montage where Captain America is paraded in front of the American people to generate support for the war effort, we can see that the film actually reflects on the exploitive use of propaganda in WWII, and it is this reason that film strays away from being classified

as propaganda by my coders. It is however still very much a pro-war film, because the audience is directed to empathize with the sincerity of Captain America's efforts to fight the repression of Germany. Applying spectator theory to this film also reveals that the audience members will cheer for Captain America and the successful completion of his mission, as they did for Rambo in *First Blood*, because of a natural inclination to form a connection with the protagonist and his values.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Since the elimination of government regulation of the film industry, by way of the Office of War Information, the Communist witch-hunts, and the Production Code, filmmakers have created movies that tackle political subject matter and issues of war with the ability to express themselves freely. Therefore, my hypothesis that filmmakers are now able to produce both pro-and anti-war films due to a lack of government oversight is correct. In such tense times as WWII, The OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures always posited the question to studios: "Will this film help win the war?" (Koppes, Black 84). With the Bureau of Motion Picture's ability to review and insert ideas directly into the scripts owned by major studios like MGM, directors were arguably small pawns in a system that was mass-producing pro-war imagery and messages. This is era of filmmaking hardly lends any credence to auteur theory, which was very much brought to life after the end of the Production Code, but rather editing theory as overseen by the OWI.

But the question has still been raised of why it is necessary to know the appropriate film theories in order to classify a film as pro- or anti-war. To answer this, I

propose an analogy: a person who knows how to drive with limited automotive knowledge can test-drive a Lamborghini and evaluate that it drives well based on the feel of the car. However, this person cannot identify the various types of machinery and their functions that allow the car to drive so well; he simply knows though instinct that it does. With respect to films, any contemporary person can clearly identify that propaganda films of WWII are pro-war just as he can identify that Iron Man is an unambiguous anti-war movie, as long he is familiar with the political climate of each film's respective era, (this being analogous to a person knowing how to drive). But like the driver with limited automotive knowledge, a person who is not familiar with the appropriate film theories will not understand or be able to explain the different working elements that help create the message of a particular film. Explanations of these elements are crucial to proving my hypothesis of whether government oversight of filmmakers prevented them from producing both pro- and anti-war films. The potential mis-categorization of films is certainly possible without being familiar with film theory, but without that knowledge it is perfectly possible to understand a film's basic subtext. But without first understanding the validity of auteur theory, the one theory that suggests a film is the product of an individual above all else, or understanding what the ordering of editing theory or expected audience reaction of a film is, it becomes very difficult to prove a causal relationship between government oversight and the lack of both pro- and anti-war films.

In our contemporary America where both pro- and anti-war films are created largely by the visions of individual filmmakers and unrestricted screenplay writers, the most notable films have moved away from the direct, regulated and prejudiced documentaries and films of WWII to more subtle themes embedded in fictional

narratives. An obvious explanation as to why Americans have not seen an Iraq War counterpart to Frank Capra's *Why we Fight* series is that audiences now have televised media outlets such as Fox or MSNBS to learn every possible bias. This is in no way an affront to these media outlets, but rather the primary explanation as to why Americans are more educated about foreign policy conflicts than they once were. We cannot attribute the ability of filmmakers to make both pro- and anti-war films based on the widespread access to news outlets however, which in and of its is an evolution from its limited dissemination during WWII. Because congressional opposition to the function of the OWI was the stimulus for it's termination, we saw the advent of both the expansion of news and film without political censorship, and the former bolstered the ability of the latter to grow and take on a new form. It is because of a more educated America that filmmakers cannot use such phrases as "'Hitler's buck-toothed pals' in world conquest," as Frank Capra did to describe the Japanese in *Prelude to War*. This has become a new form of self-censorship through the MPAA the film industry has adopted in the face of a more diverse America that will not stand for such blatant racism.

In terms of entertainment value and sales, such documentaries as *Prelude to War* would undoubtedly perform poorly at the box office considering the recent trends of many Americans' aversion to films that concern real foreign policy issues. The film industry is always concerned with sales and its various studios are concerned with their reputations. Widespread political information dissemination and a more educated and diverse America are the reasons why such self-censorship and close attention to offensive or unappealing content exist today. One might suppose that such financial concern of their products would make filmmakers produce only films that side with the dominant

outlook on war, and with such massive disapproval of the Iraq War that we would only see anti-war films.

While my qualitative reviews and quantitative data of my case studies do show a current favoring of anti-war films, there are still films being produced with intended pro-war or neutral messages, which proves my hypothesis. *The Hurt Locker* caused some divide among my coders, but the director's intent of making a film that shows soldiers as better version of ordinary civilians have caused most viewers to perceive the film as pro-war. *Captain America*, produced under the same studio as *Iron Man*, was unanimously labeled as pro-war, which substantiates the claim that individual director's still have license to create their own films even on studio systems.

So while at times the ideas of filmmakers still align themselves with the agenda of our government institutions, just as we have seen with *Captain America* or the just released *Act of Valor* starring active duty Navy Seals, the two are not synchronized. But this also rules out the alternative explanation that a liberal Hollywood is the reason for this new direction. The ability of filmmakers who may produce a film with a dissenting pro-war message are not silenced by studios as seen with Marvel's *Captain America* or Voltage Pictures' *The Hurt Locker*. This leads into the significance of the topic.

My data that popular films now typically reproduce the leading social outlook and as a result, film scholars and political scientists alike often examine films as assessments of the "social norms of a culture during the era of that particular film's production" (Bourget 57). Therefore, there will be a constant collaboration between the film industry and political scientists in the future to study public positions on foreign policy. The film industry has moved from a state of controlled propaganda to a barometer

of popular public ideology in respect to issues of war and foreign affairs. According to

film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, What is designed to make people feel good at the

movies has a profound relation to what they think and feel about the world around them"

(Rosenbaum 3). Hollywood formed a type of forced partnership with the United States

government in WWII, but after the revealing era of McCarthyism and shedding of the

Production Code, the industry has become an independent entity, with the ability to

confirm public views on foreign policy. As long as the filmmakers remain free from

political censorship and regulation, films concerning issues of war are and will continue

to be case studies of predominant American ideologies. But this also sparks a discussion

about the responsibility of a free society during wartime.

The argument can be made that filmmakers should produce films that endorse the

foreign policies of the American government to promote a strong national image. In a

country where policy makers or more specifically the president engages in an

international war, and the overwhelming majority of iconic films released during this

period promote anti-war messages, it creates the image of a divided country. While this

may seem to weaken the strength of our national image, a constitutionalist response to

this scenario would still endorse the ability of filmmakers to create both pro- and anti-war

films. At the risk of reverting back to the oppression and regulation of the OWI, no

matter what foreign conflict our country may face, sacrificing the ability of filmmakers to

make anti-war films is a slippery slope to sacrificing our First Amendment right to the

freedom of speech. French director Jean Cocteau says, "A film is a petrified fountain of

thought," and if political scientists are to use films as tool to gauge public opinion on war

in contemporary America and the foreseeable future, filmmakers must be allowed to

express themselves freely, without the supervision of a government agency.

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