WORLD WAR II IN POPULAR AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE:
FILM AND VIDEO GAMES AFTER 9/11

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ABSTRACT

From the opening of the World War II Memorial at the National Mall in 2003, to the recently Oscar-nominated movie, Inglourious Basterds in 2010, to the immensely popular video game series first introduced in 2003 called Call of Duty, it becomes apparent that the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed a visual resurrection of scenes and themes from the Second World War. In turn, the context of the post-9/11 world, otherwise known as the “war on terrorism,” changed the way representations of the Second World War are both created and perceived. This leads to the central question of this research—why is World War II an important subject in popular American visual culture after the events of 9/11? Consequentially, is the revival of World War II themes in recent popular American visual culture a venue to address problems of social values confronting American culture?

This research answers that question through an analysis and evaluation of the different intellectual, political, and emotional responses garnered by American audiences from specific films namely, Clint Eastwood’s Flags of Our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima, Bryan Singer’s Valkyrie, and Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds. As video games continue to gain prominence in being the most popular form of entertainment in
American households, this research focuses on highly acclaimed first-person shooter games namely, *Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor: Airborne*, and *Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway*. The research makes a connection between the post-9/11 contexts from which specific movies and video games were created, presented, and received with World War II as its subject. Inquiries are made about their concept, treatment, and reception.

Subsequently, a comparative analysis deciphers any trends the post-9/11 climate contributes to the popular American visual culture of film and video games.

Through this research it will be determined that World War II is an important subject in popular American visual culture because different angles of what it is to be “American” in this critical time of heightened anxiety are made available, today’s American popular visual culture has branded was as entertainment, and the tradition of utilizing popular visual culture to dig deeper into the many political, social, and emotional facets of war continues to be more powerful than ever in a post-9/11 society.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD WAR II REVIVAL IN POPULAR AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE

Today’s post-9/11 society has witnessed a visual revival of scenes and themes from World War II ranging from paintings, cinema, monuments, memorials, to video games. An example of this would be a recent film like Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds*, which was Oscar-nominated film for Best Picture in the 2010 Academy Awards. Another surprising film of popularity among audiences would be the gripping suspense thriller, *Valkyrie*, a movie about the failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1944. The successful turn out in the box office of these two recent movies was definitely not just because it starred Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise, two of Hollywood’s celebrated actors and leading men. Though that factor may have helped in pulling audiences to go to the movie theaters, it was the backdrop from which the movie’s story was told, namely the Second World War. This is a war, which has always had a universal appeal and interest to American audiences.

The World War II renaissance in the 21st century was also seen in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. In the recent years, D.C. has witnessed the birth of the *World War II Memorial* at the National Mall in 2003 and the *National Museum of the Marine Corps* in 2004 at Quantico, Virginia. Moreover, in the field of electronic entertainment, video games such as the *Call of Duty* and the *Medal of Honor* series reigned over the gaming industry. Essentially, the somewhat sudden spurt and proliferation of movies,
monuments, and even video games with World War II as its theme garnered intellectual, emotional, and political responses.

Given the context of the post-9/11 world, the “war on terrorism” influenced the way these representations of the Second World War were perceived. Inevitably, current issues on the war in the Middle East and the contention it brings in confronting American social values suddenly became a central source for examining the significance and impact of these World War II visual revivals. Was the revival of World War II themes in recent popular American visual culture a venue to address problems of social values confronting American culture? Comparable to the visual revivals of World War II in cinema during the late 1960s and in the 1980s, the proliferation of the same theme after the events of 9/11 calls for a cross-examination of possible reasons for its resurrection.

Scope of Research

The scope of this research will be restrained to film and video games. Narrowing the focus of this research into these two significantly interrelated and similar forms of popular American visual culture is logical for the purposes of this investigation. The sheer ubiquity of these art and media forms will allow for drawing observations, conclusions, and recommendations that widely impact American culture in general.

The pervasiveness of movies and video games is difficult to be left unnoticed everyday. Movies can be viewed nowadays from anywhere. Literally the digital vault to the movies is right in your pocket and in your living room. Movies can be nicely viewed on your iPod no matter where you are, on the subway, waiting for a bus, or simply at home and bored. At home, watching a movie is now as simple as picking up the remote
and searching the menu of your cable provider. No longer is the library of movies confined to the local *Blockbuster* down on the corner.

Video games are everywhere as well. As long as you have the Internet, the choices of games are endless. If you own a video game console like *Sony PlayStation*, finding a game of your choice wouldn’t be that hard as they are sold in about every popular retailer you can think of. And your cell phone can be a device to download even more video games. Its omnipresence makes it no surprise that about 75 percent of American households now play video games.\(^1\) Given the relevance and cultural impact that that these two art and media forms in American culture, analyzing recent movies and video games about the Second World War make this study important in deciphering trends, along with possible societal and cultural effects.

*Research Question*

The central question posed in this thesis is, why is World War II an important subject in popular American visual culture after the events of 9/11? The amount of movies and video games with World War II as its subject, leads one to make further inquiry into the reasons for its prominence. What is it about the Second World War that makes it such a compelling subject and theme for the artistic imagination of filmmakers and video game designers? Do the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have any connection with the visual revival? Can the resurrection of World War II be classified as a revival more than merely a stimulation given the context of a post-9/11 society?

This thesis, by analyzing specific films and video games with World War II as its theme released before and after 9/11; studying the different intellectual, political, and
emotional responses garnered; and examining the socio-political contexts from which it was presented, will identify probably reasons for the renewed prominence of World War II themes in American popular visual culture today. Through this inspection, it will be deduced that Americans are in a position to redefine the meaning of what it is to be “American” in this critical time of heightened anxiety. Today’s American popular visual culture has branded war as entertainment, that the tradition of utilizing popular visual culture digs deeper into the many political, social, and emotional facets of war and continues to be more powerful than ever in a post-9/11 society.

**Methodology**

This research will be segmented into five major chapters. Chapter 1 provides a background of World War II and how it has remained a cherished memory in American culture and society. Events that have impacted America economically, politically, and socially determine why World War II has been labeled as the “Good War” that produced *The Greatest Generation*. What is the importance of World War II? What were the consequences of World War II for American culture? With the death toll of the war in the millions, why do Americans refer to World War II as the “Good War?”

Sixty years have passed, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 altered American understanding of war, global security, and nationalism. But how did the events of 9/11 affect that understanding? Chapter 2 takes a look at the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the ripple effect they had on American society. This catastrophic and world-altering event produced a number of issues and challenges to Americans. Definitions of patriotism were shaken, the capacity of the American government was questioned, and
the studios of Hollywood found themselves off-guard with a completely new audience as the events of 9/11 instantly changed the way Americans see the world.

After determining the social and cultural relevance of both events to American culture, a connection will be made between World War II and the cultural paradigm of the post-9/11 society. This will be obtained by analyzing various films and video games produced before and after 9/11 that pertain to the subject of World War II.

Chapter 4 is the analysis of various films with World War II as their subjects. A discussion will begin by looking into Hollywood’s role in representing the Second World War. What functional use and relevance do movies with World War II as its subject have given the context of post-9/11 America? The importance of Steven Spielberg’s 1998 World War II movie, *Saving Private Ryan* will be discussed. Why is this movie so highly revered as a great World War II movie by many critics? Moreover, four films will be discussed in relation to the conventions set by Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*, namely, Clint Eastwood’s *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima;* Bryan Singer’s *Valkyrie;* and Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds.* How has the representation of war changed because of the events of 9/11 as exemplified in these four films in relation to the highly esteemed “Spielbergian” view of World War II? Are these films anti-war? This chapter attempts to reconcile the myth of war and challenge the need for Americans to redefine the definitions of patriotism given the 9/11 contexts.

Following the substantiation of arguments through an analysis of various films, a critical examination will be made of video games. Chapter 5 answers the main question, what is it about World War II that makes it such an appealing post-9/11 subject for video
games, specifically first-person shooter games? Moreover, how different are the responses garnered from playing a video game different from watching a film? This chapter will look into the power and influence of video games to American culture. Furthermore, war games in particular will be examined in terms of their purpose and appeal to the video gaming community. The discussion in this chapter will focus on three of the most popular World War II-genre first-person shooting games in the industry, namely the Call of Duty series, Medal of Honor Airborne, and Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway. Why have these games gained so much popularity? Where was the concept for these games derived? What is the trend in video games today? Is World War II still a leading theme in first-person shooter games?

This research will conclude with an evaluation of both cinema and video games in representing World War II to garner intellectual, emotional, or political responses from audience and video game player in today’s post-9/11 society. Chapter 6 discusses these conclusions derived from the analysis of this research. Universal themes and human values contained within the events and “visual legacy” of the Second World War will be identified. In relation, other films and video games that are not within the World War II-genre will be described. What impact did they have to the American audience? How are other films and video games shaping the understanding of war in a post-9/11 society? Likewise, the question of about the continued importance of World War II as a subject in films and video games will be tackled. As challenged by the wrath of modern warfare, core values such as freedom, peace, and democracy will be defined in the context of
today’s post-9/11 society, through experiences gained by watching a movie or playing a video game, regardless of whether it is set in World War II or not.
CHAPTER 2

WORLD WAR II: THE AMERICAN MEMORY

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941, transformed the lives of every American.¹ Ever since the involvement of the United States in World War II, this historical and momentous event has endured to be both a significant and remarkable event in American and world history. The impact of World War II caused a profound ripple effect on American culture and society.² The social, economic, and political effects could be discerned even to this day. But how could a war, resulting in a multitude of deaths and horror, become a source of indomitable American pride?³

The Second World War has remained an important and cherished memory in American culture and society because of three reasons: the war is benchmarked as the “Good War,” the war produced the “Greatest Generation,” and the war continues to serves as a convenient venue for looking back at what is called a “usable past.” This chapter will expand on these three reasons and broaden an understanding of the imprint the Second World War continues to make even to today’s post-9/11 society.

The Good War

Looking back at World War II was never easy. With over 50 million deaths as a result of the war, it was a moment of grim and dark moments in the world’s history.⁴ In the book The Best War Ever: America and World War II, Michael C.C. Adams describes the war:

The war was not a discrete event that ended when the last enemy surrendered unconditionally, leaving America the most powerful superpower in the world.
The war was a profoundly disturbing moment in the flow of history, the aftereffect of which, like waves radiating out from a pebble dropped in water, continue now.\[^5\]

Despite this inexorable fact, Americans have given more attention to the war’s moments of “national strength, collective courage, idealism and other desirable traits.”\[^6\] By doing so, Americans are able to glorify moments of victory and pride.\[^7\] World War II is then called the “Good War” because for America, had so many positive results.\[^8\] The “Good War” produced a prosperous America as it permitted economic growth, social change, and military success.

In terms of deaths, America experienced the least number of any combatant nation. Less than 1 percent of the total deaths resulting from the war belonged to Americans.\[^9\] This can be attributed to the fact that American territory was not in the war front. Compared to the 2.3 million Japanese casualties, 5.6 million deaths in Germany, 10 million dead in China, and an overwhelming 20 million lives lost in the Soviet Union; there were only 300,000 Americans who died. Only 1 million Americans were wounded and 500,000 thousand badly injured.\[^10\] In addition to the least amount of casualties in the war, America experienced economic and cultural prosperity, all contributions to America’s apprehension of the Second World War as the “Good War.”

Because of World War II, America accomplished an impressive economic recovery, especially after the Great Depression’s economic slump. In 1940, America’s gross national product was $97 billion.\[^11\] Only 4 years later, as America became involved in the war, the gross national product skyrocketed to $190 billion.\[^12\]
In terms of employment, those who were unemployed during the Great Depression found themselves being assimilated into the armed forces. Those who were left in the home front sought out employment giving almost everyone a chance to compete for job opportunities. Even the role of women in the workforce increased 10 percent from 22 percent to 32 percent in the manufacturing industry. Furthermore, African-Americans composed 8 percent of war-related jobs. All in all, the labor force massively expanded, providing opportunities to segments of society who once were secluded and restrained to seek out such job venues.

Another booming industry because of the Second World War was the field of entertainment. Movies shown at that time served as a “fantasy release” from the distress brought about by the Great Depression. They entertained audiences with escapism, idealism, and patriotism about the on-going war. “Movie attendance, around sixty million per week in the 1930s, rose to an all-time peak of ninety million during the war.” Hollywood, therefore, contributed to making World War II “the best war ever.” Even Donald Duck played an essential role in instilling nationalism. According to Adams, “Daffy Duck got drafted, Donald Duck told filmgoers how saving would beat the axis, and Bugs Bunny sold war bonds.” The war was packaged into a form of entertainment that lifted national spirit, instilled a sense of collective purpose, and inculcated a feeling of patriotism in bringing America into victory to defeat the enemy. What made the Second World War the “Good War” was the overall picture of a victorious united nation, consolidated for a greater purpose to serve the common good.
It defined the home front’s security and economic prosperity. It was the time in history called the “golden age.”\textsuperscript{22} All of this was enhanced by the fact that the destructive power of the war was not physically seen on the home front.\textsuperscript{23} World War II has therefore become a primarily positive moment in recollecting American history.

\textit{The Greatest Generation}

It was not only the visibly aggregation of Americans coming together for the common good that makes World War II a cherished memory. It is the individual stories that comprise the total World War II reality. However, as those who fought and strived in the Second World War are aging, statistics shows that thousands are now dying by the day.\textsuperscript{24} This a primary reason journalist, Tom Brokaw, ventured to put together his New York Times Bestselling book, “The Greatest Generation.” As a tribute to those who fought and lived through the struggles of World War II, Brokaw proudly recognizes them as the “greatest generation any society has produced.”\textsuperscript{25}

Published in 1998, marking the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Second World War, Brokaw’s book was coupled with an NBC documentary aired the same year. The highly acclaimed book along with the documentary is a collection of stories of struggle, triumph, downfall, and glory of various Americans during the Second World War. The compiled stories tell of soldiers, women and families during America’s golden age of the 1940s.

What may have appealed to readers and audiences about the \textit{Greatest Generation} was Brokaw’s “family portrait” and “family album” approach in painting a picture of historical events.\textsuperscript{26} By employing such an artistic technique in telling real-life events, the human experience during war and postwar time is emphasized. Special attention is given
to the microcosm of the human experience as part of the macrocosm of the bigger ordeal of World War II.

According to Brokaw, the war brought about a generation who unselfishly sacrificed their lives for the common good. Apart from the national involvement of the men and women who faced and served the perils of World War II for the sake of protecting the home front and defeating the axis powers, Brokaw underlines the fact that this was a generation that did not demand any praise from the generation that followed. To Brokaw, this is what made the generation great—that even after the war came to an end, they returned to America to rebuild a civilian life. Even if they led an extraordinary and adventurous life during the war, they hardly bragged about it when the war ended.

In the book, Brokaw describes the Americans as the country entered the war:

When the United States entered World War II, the U.S. government turned to ordinary Americans and asked of them extraordinary service, sacrifice, and heroics. Many Americans met those high expectations, and then returned home to lead extraordinary lives.

Through recollecting the authentic and poignant personal stories of American life during the war, did Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation* spark a “World War II” mania? The impact Brokaw’s book was enhanced by the release of two Hollywood blockbuster hits in the same year, also with World War II as subject. Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* and Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line* were films also intended to celebrate the war’s 50th anniversary. Consequently, other movie hits like Michael Bay’s *Pearl Harbor* followed suit early in 2001. Furthermore, *The World War II Memorial* opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 2003. This leads one to ask, was the
revival of the World War II story primarily to commemorate those veterans who still live today? Perhaps by telling the story of the past, the future can learn from it. Just like Brokaw’s presentation of World War II through writing *The Greatest Generation*, the World War II story “includes something for everyone” because of the vast array of human experiences that can be told.\(^\text{32}\)

The continuing resurrection of World War II in American culture creates various interpretations about the meanings of war and sacrifice. Through the selection of this part of American history Americans seek venues to see moments of pride in times of uncertainty, making it a subject of great importance. In this case, Brokaw utilizes World War II as a call to future generations to learn from the humility and courage of the *Greatest Generation*.

*The Golden Age: The Selection of History*

Aside from being remembered as the “Good War” and the war that produced the “Greatest Generation,” the events of World War II have remained an unending story to be told to generations that followed because they serve as a “usable past.” In times of peril and societal problems, people tend to look into a selected slice from history in order to understand present events.\(^\text{33}\) “In creating a ‘usable past,’ we seek formulas to apply in solving today’s problems.”\(^\text{34}\)

In the case of World War II, the ‘usable past’ of the war is often used a reminiscence to see moments of American victory, glory, and courage during times of great difficulty and challenge.\(^\text{35}\) What is commonly remembered about World War II is America’s image during the war and the impact it had on American values. Like any
great moments of human tragedy, these can be translated into sources of drawing expedient values.

Examples of functional and engaging past happenings are dramatic disasters, such as the sinking of the Titanic, which serve as warnings, or great triumphs, such as World War II. We tend to dwell on the victories because they make us feel good about ourselves. We see them as events that showcase our national strength, collective courage, idealism, and other desirable traits.\(^{36}\)

Especially in the post-World War II American society, looking back at World War II has always been a prominent occurrence. As warfare has become more abstruse and the identification of the enemy more uncertain, looking back at the “Good War” brings back and recaptures memories of glory of “a simpler time when issues were clear and everyone knew where they stood.”\(^{37}\) According to Adams, the need to locate the moral fabric of American society can be easily seen by looking back at the American achievement of World War II.\(^{38}\) Consequently, the “usable past” of World War II brings to mind the ideal soldier, eager and unified to fight the common goal of the war.\(^{39}\) This is oftentimes contrasted to the soldier of the Vietnam War who was seen as unsure and baffled over the purpose of the war.\(^{40}\)

The challenge of being highly selective in defining the “usable past” is the myth that is created about World War II and the so-called “golden age” of America.\(^{41}\) Looking back and applying this event to current problems plaguing society may cause incongruence and be taken out of context. Just like any time period, the conditions of the 1940s were distinctive in terms of their political, social, and economic standing.

Another problem is that narrowing the view of World War II to simply the “golden age” creates a misconception that there were minimal social problems
encountered then. Problems of increased divorce rates, juvenile delinquency, and other complications confronting society were not absent even in the time of the “Good War.” According to Adams, “Americans do themselves a disservice when they assume that their predecessors did everything better than they do.”

There are still lingering issues that World War II has induced that remain unsettled to this day. Such issues include the contention about nuclear armament and the trepidation it resonates to international relations. Likewise, issues concerning race and civil rights that were raised because of World War II continue to be topics of national agenda and debate even to this day. Because of this, there has become a dichotomy in looking and understanding the American World War II experience:

The difficulty of this task was made apparent in 1994, with the uproar that greeted the Smithsonian Institution’s announcement of a planned exhibit that would focus on the atomic bombs that were dropped in August 1945, using the Enola Gay itself as the centerpiece of the exhibit…race, class, and age were critically important lines of demarcation for the American wartime landscape. That might well be one of the most important legacies of the home-front war, for they remain so today.

The question now becomes, does the relevance of the “usable past” of World War II still endure today? The events of September 11, 2001 have posed a new threat to America. The global struggle to battle terrorism in the 21st century has modified our concepts of war. Therefore, what impact did the events of 9/11 have on America? How did the impact differ from America’s response to World War II? How relevant has World War II become in understanding modern warfare? The following chapter will explore the impact of events of 9/11 to America and the implications it brought in shaping American culture and society. Furthermore, the next chapter will discuss several issues that
confronted America along with various artistic, political, and societal responses that emerged.
CHAPTER 3

9/11: AMERICA’S WAR ON TERRORISM

The terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 was another pivotal moment in American history.\(^1\) Comparable to the attack of the Japanese on Pearl Harbor 60 years prior, it was an atrocious and inconceivable event.\(^2\) Two planes crashed into The World Trade Center in New York City, an office building that occupied more than 30,000 employees.\(^3\) Nancy Foner, in the book, *Wounded City: The Social Impact of 9/11*, talks about the death toll of the attacks. About 2,749 lives were lost in the World Trade Center.\(^4\) There were about 17,000 who were injured and more than 7,000 were missing.\(^5\) A remarkable 18,000 rescuers worked at the site following the attacks.\(^6\)

The emotional trauma, however, was not restricted to the residents of New York. People across American and around the globe witnessed the horrific attacks via live video streaming on television, which included the United States government and the military.\(^7\) Marc Redfield in *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* even compares the television news coverage of 9/11 to a “big-budget disaster movie.”\(^8\) Seeing the planes crash into the World Trade Center was a scene that was unimaginable to reality. It was a scene that seemed to have come from a Hollywood movie. To Redfield, “The September 11 attacks were a reality that *had* to become a spectacle.”\(^9\)

The terrorist attacks of 9/11, clearly not too far from what regular movie-goers could agree with Redfield in finding palpable similarities to a Hollywood action-movie “spectacle,” have left Americans in awe as “daily life was turned upside down.”\(^10\) Kathy
Charmaz, in the “Tenets of Terror,” posed questions about the impact of 9/11:

Myths of safety, security, personal invulnerability, and collective invincibility disintegrated with the falling of the Towers. What would come of the power wrested in the attacks and countered by subsequent American military actions? Would this elusive war realign old alliances, rewrite world opinion, and reverse economic arrangements? With the dawning of the 21st century had life taken ominous new form? Would these events mark the end of the American century, as we had known it, more effectively than any calendar?

David Simpson asks the congruous question, “Has the world changed? If it has, then it what ways?” This chapter will discuss some of the social and cultural impacts of 9/11 to America today. There are three issues that confront American society after the events of 9/11 namely, the need to redefine the meaning of American patriotism, the demand to apprehend the role of American government in assuring individual and national security, and Hollywood’s renewed challenge of representing the concept of war to a post-9/11 American public.

*American Patriotism*

Immediately after the attacks of 9/11, there was a pressing need to display the American flag. Similar to the famous mounting of the American flag in Iwo Jima during World War II, the image of Manhattan’s fire fighters raising the flag above the rubble at Ground Zero was another source of inspiration for the American people. In addition, news commentators and journalists were integral in injecting symbols of patriotism to American minds. However, symbols of “revenge, retaliation, and war” seemed to be the primary driving force of the media to captivate American audiences. Henry Grioux states “major television networks capitalized on a militarized notion of patriotism.” News programs utilized headlines such as “America at War,” “America
Strikes Back” or “America United.” Coincidentally, these messages from the media seemed to be aligned with the Bush administration’s call for every American to perform acts of patriotism.

Painting the United States as a beacon of civilization, Bush urged Americans to perform voluntary acts of public service, be alert of signs of potential terrorism at home, support massive increases in the military budget, endorse an energy policy that involves more drilling for oil, accept a huge tax cut for the rich and major corporations, and tolerate the suspension of some basic civil liberties and freedoms that would grant more power to the police, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and other security forces.

The conjunction of the media’s role in sparking sense of patriotism among Americans along with the Bush administration’s suspension of some civil liberties for the sake of national security has resulted in heightened fear and growing anxiety among Americans. A controversial form of censorship in expressing ideas, such as anti-war sentiments about the “historical, ideological, and political contexts of the attacks and the underlying cause of terrorism” had become especially under fire in American public schools and higher education.

This threat to American democracy was a major topic Henry Giroux discusses in the book, 9/11 in American Culture. Giroux further tackles the frail democracy America faced as a nation because of the attacks of 9/11: “Already imperiled before the aftershocks of the terrorist attacks, democracy appears even more fragile in this time of crisis as new antiterrorist laws are being passed that make it easier to undermine those basic civil liberties that protect individuals against invasive and potentially repressive government actions.” Furthermore, Giroux continues to point out the media’s role in
stirring feelings of “war, patriotism, and revenge” among the American public immediately after 9/11. Such action from the media simply aggravated the already emotional and aching America.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, the sentiment of revenge and retaliation appeared to be the primary focus of the war on terrorism. The “militarization of visual culture and space” all contributed to a disregard of key ideologies of “democratic values and social justice.”\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, did giving up civil liberties obscure or enhance the American understanding of patriotism?

Hollywood played a crucial role in resisting the sudden limitations set on civil liberties and censorship though the films created after 9/11. Filmmakers, however, continued to feed in to the visual culture of militarization.\textsuperscript{26} To Giroux, the film industries release of movies such as \textit{Behind Enemy Lines}, \textit{Black Hawk Down}, \textit{Spy Games}, \textit{We Were Soldiers} and \textit{Wind Talkers}, including the HBO mini-series \textit{Band of Brothers} patronized the ongoing “infatuation with the military experience.”\textsuperscript{27} What role then do filmmakers have in contributing to the American understanding of patriotism in a post-9/11 society?

The meaning of patriotism immediately after the events of 9/11, as argued by Giroux, became a subject of critical debate. “At stake here is the need to establish a vision of society and a global order that safeguards the most basic civil liberties and notions of human rights.” Clearly, the role of filmmakers became more important than ever in communicating ideas about the concepts of war, terrorism, democracy, and patriotism. By providing the public with narratives of war, filmmakers gave a venue for Americans to contemplate and understand the military experience. Whether it is the film’s purpose to actively respond by engaging in a public discourse of questioning the
threat to American democracy or to simply capitalize on the on-going “militarization of visual culture,” Hollywood filmmakers played and continue to play a vital role in presenting various perspectives about the notion of war while reconciling possible ambiguities of the “war on terrorism.”

*Fahrenheit 9/11*

Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* released in 2004 is an example of a response to the increasing need of the American public to understand the role of the government and its response to the attacks of 9/11. The film was a “highly controversial political film” that deeply questioned the authority of the Bush administration.\(^{28}\)

The aggressive nature of the film, however, did not hinder the movie’s success. After winning the Oscar in 2002 for his documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore received the Golden Palm at Cannes Film Festival two years later for *Fahrenheit 9/11*.\(^{29}\) In addition, the movie earned 100 million dollars in the box-office in just a few weeks.\(^{30}\)

The documentary questions the government’s decisions about waging a war in Iraq along with imposed “international and domestic policies in fundamental ways.”\(^{31}\) According to Christian W. Thomsen in *Hollywood: Recent Developments*, Moore presents two stories in *Fahrenheit 9/11*:

The first consists of his personal feud against the Bush clan and their involvement with the Bin Ladens, Saudi oil magnates, princely investors who own 1/7 of America. The second is his attack on the Iraq politics of the George W. Bush administration and its war on Iraq. In his eyes the war is not only unjustified, but a deliberate misleading of the public and betrayal of the American nation, their constitution, the ideals of democracy and the people themselves.\(^{32}\)
Fahrenheit 9/11 caused a flare of discussion and debate not only about the Bush administration’s political response to the attacks of 9/11, but also stimulated a cross-examination of various subjects such as “the role of the military, the power of the mass media, the nature of conservatism, the danger of censorship, and the meaning of democracy.”

According to Rober Brent Toplin in Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11: How One Film Divided a Nation, the power of Fahrenheit 9/11 was so strong that it ignited a remarkable debate “about the direction of U.S. domestic politics and foreign policy” like no other documentary before. More importantly, the film brought out questions about the significance of 9/11 and “the appropriateness of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.” Moore’s documentary, therefore, was crucial in influencing America’s perception of the U.S. government as well as the ramifications about 9/11. Moore revolutionized the role of documentaries as a film that can be both successful and entertaining.

What role then did the rest of Hollywood play apart from contributing to the “militarization of visual culture” as described by Giroux? Christian W. Thomsen asks the important questions: “Did Hollywood anticipate, conjure up, contribute to 9/11? What was its reaction to 9/11?” With the “traumatic blow and shock” that struck the United States, Hollywood was faced with a renewed challenge of presenting images of war and violence. Fundamentally, what relevance did Hollywood movies have in shaping the American perspective of the world after the events of 9/11 given the need to redefine meanings of patriotism and the role of the U.S. government?

Post 9/11 Hollywood
Signs demonstrating an integral change in the “American cultural landscape” were visible immediately after the events of 9/11. Following 9/11, Hollywood was confronted with a renewed challenge to present images of war and terrorism. This was most apparent in the movie industry when studios delayed the showing of particular films that had to do with subjects of the American military, terrorism and foreign policy. In addition, movies with scenes depicting the Pentagon or the World Trade Center were deleted.

An example of a film that was delayed in its release was *Collateral Damage*. The Arnold Schwarzenegger film about a firefighter who “loses his family in a terrorist attack on a skyscraper” was supposed to hit theaters October 2001 but was released on January 2002. However, other studios responded to the attacks of 9/11 as a sign to hasten the release of certain films that commercialized on the concept of patriotism. An example of such film was Ridley Scott’s *Black Hawk Down*. Moreover, *Behind Enemy Lines*, was another movie that underlined patriotism as its primary theme. Thomsen continues to describe this immediate Hollywood response to 9/11:

Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* was pushed back for almost a year because of brutal fighting scenes between 19th-century rival Irish and Italian gangs in New York, MGM’s remake of *Rollerball* was delayed for month and Robert Redford’s *Spy Game*, with gigantic destructions in the Near East, was cut for its Pentagon aerial photos…Patriotic war films and light entertainment with comedies, CGI monster and fantasy-films dominated Hollywood’s output in the months immediately following 9/11.

What then is Hollywood’s continued response of representing the subject of war and terrorism, almost 10 years after the events of 9/11? According to Thomsen,
“Terrorism changed the nature of war. The Second World War is finally over. No Saving Private Ryan battles will be fought anymore and consequently war tactics and war films have to change as well.” This statement compels one to ask—what function do World War II films have in a post-9/11 society? Is Thomsen correct in concluding that since the reality of war has changed in the age of terrorism so will its representation in Hollywood movies? The succeeding chapter will examine various World War II films released after 9/11. An examination will be made on World War II’s relevance even after the attacks of 9/11 in relation to its continued prominence in popular American visual culture.
CHAPTER 4
WORLD WAR II AT THE MOVIES

In May 2001, Michael Bay’s *Pearl Harbor* premiered. Once again, American audiences were reminded of the “cause and effect, good versus evil understanding of World War II.” Ironically, just a few months later, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 occurred. As Erika Doss describes, “It was hardly surprising, then, that four months later, Pearl Harbor became the most ‘enduring analogy’ to 9/11.” George W. Bush at that time even called the attacks as “The Pearl Harbor of the 21st century…” Immediately, there was an instant resonance of World War II with the terrorist attacks. Doss even goes further in revealing “DAY OF INFAMY” as newspaper headlines on September 12th. Such collective disposition, according to Doss, was reminiscent of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “description of the Pearl Harbor attack as ‘a date which will live in infamy.’”

As a result, with the ongoing war in the Middle East becoming increasingly unpopular, politicians find referencing World War II still as a useful tool to gain support for the war. In the article *The Image as History: Clint Eastwood’s Unmaking of an American Myth*, David J. Morris explains the functional use of looking back at World War II in a post-9/11 society:

As our post-9/11 world grows ever murkier and more troubling, we grasp for the precious set of symbols and images which helps steady us as a nation and evokes the time when everyone seemed to be pulling together, the time where the issues and our enemies were clear. The darker the news from Iraq gets, the more we need our sanitized view of World War II to make us feel better about ourselves.
This was inevitable as Americans were accustomed to referring to the Second World War as a “golden age” that fought the “Good War” and produced the *Greatest Generation*. Through Morris’ explanation about the significance of utilizing World War II to ignite nationalism, togetherness, and collective feelings of optimism about the war in Iraq, Michael Adams becomes correct when stating that World War II is a ‘usable past.’ In this regard, World War II has suddenly amounted to an extremely ‘usable past,’ if not, over-used past, especially in Hollywood. Morris’ argument then directs one to question the repercussions movies have in presenting World War II as a subject.

*The Love Affair*

Undeniably, Hollywood continues to stand firm in its role of being at the forefront of taking part of what Morris calls the “love affair with all things World War II.” The history of films utilizing World War II as its theme can be traced back to the war itself even before America was officially involved. The American moviegoer does not fail to notice these needed “precious set of symbols and images” because of the theme’s undying prominence in American cinema.

The American obsession with World War II seemed to be most recently apparent, especially in 1998. The “love affair” appeared to be at its bloom upon the release of Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* and Tom Brokaw’s book *The Greatest Generation* that same year. Marking the Second World War’s fiftieth anniversary, only a few years before the attacks of 9/11, was seen as a perfect time to honor those who served in the war.
Other American World War II movies released at that time included, *The Thin Red Line, When Trumpets Fade, and Jakob the Liar*. However, Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* was most pivotal and influential in shaping the future of war movies.\(^{14}\)

What impact did this movie have in strongly modeling America’s notion of World War II? According to Morris, *Saving Private Ryan* “in some ways can be viewed as the paragon of the classic World War II movie, ends on a solemnly patriotic note, that of the American flag backlit by the sun, waving grandly in the Normandy breeze.”\(^{15}\)

The movie was such a hit because, according to Albert Auster in his article “*Saving Private Ryan* and American Triumphalism,” Spielberg was the “perfect person to direct an epic of World War II.”\(^{16}\) Prior to *Saving Private Ryan*, Spielberg had already directed films with the Second World War as its subject, such as *Schindler’s List* and other movies with some reference to the war like in *Raiders of the Ark* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.\(^{17}\) It is, however, Spielberg’s remarkable ability to ignite the “collective memory” and integrate a “seal of heroism” that made *Saving Private Ryan* a movie of “American triumphalism.”\(^{18}\)

Both the consummate entertainer and the *homme sérieux* are on hand from the first frames of *Saving Private Ryan* when Spielberg establishes a somber mood with images of a screen-filling American flag, mournful John Williams music, and an elderly American man and his family passing by the graves of the honored Normandy dead. With a few broad strokes Spielberg touches the collective memory, evoking feelings both elegiac and patriotic. It is collective memory that Spielberg relies on in the film’s first twenty-five Goyaesque minutes of war horrors rather than the actual mind and experience of aged veteran we see in the cemetery.\(^{19}\)

In addition to Spielberg’s capacity to present the somber yet uplift the spirit, *Saving Private Ryan* dramatizes the most violent, grotesque, and bloody sequences.\(^{20}\)
Auster’s discussion about this aspect of the movie points out that Spielberg was influenced by many anti-war movies. His interest in World War II was probably born from the anti-war sentiment of the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{21} To Auster, however, in \textit{Saving Private Ryan} it “…is more realistic to see the scenes as anti-death than as antiwar.” This way, the “random nature” of death is emphasized in the battle scenes and death reigns supreme in Spielberg’s movie.\textsuperscript{22}

The “optimistic tragedy” that characterizes \textit{Saving Private Ryan} suddenly becomes a tone that sparks a strong feeling and sensation about being American.\textsuperscript{23} Great inspiration is derived from the young men, who turned out to be America’s “finest men,” who sacrificed their lives “in the face of the world’s most formidable war machine.”\textsuperscript{24} Parallel to Brokaw’s \textit{The Greatest Generation}, \textit{Saving Private Ryan} undoubtedly was a movie that honored, remembered, and glorified the American soldier.\textsuperscript{25} That’s why it came as no surprise that the powerful impact this film resonated in other World War II films that followed, such as \textit{Pearl Harbor} and \textit{Thirteen Days}.\textsuperscript{26} Spielberg defined the ideal American in a way which was aligned with Brokaw’s proposition about the \textit{Greatest Generation}. A great American is one who is willing to sacrifice for the country for the greater good, no matter what the odds.

After 9/11, there seems to have been yet another wave of World War II movies. There are several movies that support Christian Thomsen’s statement that the representation of war has changed because of the events of 9/11 and the ongoing war on terrorism. This chapter will discuss four American films that exemplify Thomsen’s argument, namely: \textit{Flags of Our Fathers}, \textit{Letters for Iwo Jima}, \textit{Valkyrie}, and \textit{Inglorious
*Basterds.* These four movies will be discussed in terms of how different they are from the popular pre-9/11 “Spielbergian” view of World War II. In addition, discussion will show how these four films serve as a basis for reconciling the myth of war and its importance in understanding the meaning of patriotism in post-9/11 American society.

*Flags of Our Fathers*

The movie *Flags of Our Fathers*, directed by Clint Eastwood, is derived from the book, *Flags of Our Fathers*, published in 2000 and written by James Bradley. It focuses on the lives of three soldiers who were part of the famous photo of Marines raising the American flag on top Mount Suribachi in Iwo Jima.

Claudia Puig of *USA Today* notes *Flags of Our Fathers* for the performances of the actors Ryan Philippe, Jesse Bradford, and Ryan Beach, who played the three main soldiers in the film. She describes Eastwood’s “rare action film” as “superbly acted, hauntingly powerful and deeply insightful.”

In connection with present attitudes, Robert Sklar discusses the photograph’s importance after the events of 9/11:

On October 14, 2001, five Sundays after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, *The New York Times* Arts & Leisure section filled the top half of its front page with the famous World War II photograph of five Marines and a Navy medic raising the American flag on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima. The accompanying article, assessing the role of popular arts during national crises, called that photo ‘the most dramatic image of war and togetherness and hope for victory ever to emerge’ from that time of conflict. Photo and article ran under a large-type headline, ‘Salve for a Wounded People.’

Sklar continues to emphasize the usage of this same image by Eastwood about five years later, when it became a basis for creating the movie *Flags of Our Fathers* to
respond to current events. There are three reasons that determine his usage of Flags of Our Fathers as a response to redefine the representation of war in a post-9/11 society. In Eastwood’s Flags of Our Fathers, he makes a World War II movie as an anti-World War II movie and producing a war film that adopts an unconventional way of presenting the reality of war.

Morris makes a strong argument that Eastwood, in making Flags of Our Fathers, had robust intentions of creating a World War II that is unlike the World War II movie paragon established by Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan. To Morris, Flags of Our Fathers builds a more profound effect than just commemorating and resurrecting the glory of America in World War II. In addition, he states Flags of Our Fathers as a rebuttal to politicians who exploit referring to World War II in their political agendas to instill sentiments of American patriotism among the public:

With Flags of our Fathers, Eastwood seems to be bent upon inverting the World War II movie formula and debunking the major body of myth that politicians have come to depend upon so dearly. Rather than having made an antiwar movie, he has created what amounts to an anti-World War II movie and has done so in the most dramatic way possible, namely by showing us the troubling and untold story of the war’s most iconic image, that of the Marine flag-raising atop Mount Suribachi.

The movie, Flags of Our Fathers, therefore becomes a movie about the image that has become “an instant icon of American patriotism.” The movie spotlights the truth that this beloved image, in some ways, is a source of deception to the American people. It was used to make Americans believe that victory was in sight when in fact the photograph was taken only on the fifth of the thirty-five day battle at Iwo Jima. Throughout the movie, it becomes apparent that certain government officials, because of
Joe Rosenthal’s photograph atop Mount Suribachi, were using the three soldiers for wartime initiatives to increase war bonds.\textsuperscript{37} As the movie progresses, these soldiers who are flown back home away from combat and declared heroes, took a deeply emotional toll, especially on Ira Hayes, a Native American soldier.\textsuperscript{38}

Robert Sklar’s movie review article on \textit{Flags of Our Fathers} suggests support for Morris argument that the movie was an “anti-World War II” film. He describes the movie’s refusal to show the concept of the Second World War as the “Good War,” or to portray a nation that produced Tom Brokaw’s inception of the “Greatest Generation.”\textsuperscript{39} In addition, Morris articulates that when he watched \textit{Flags of Our Fathers}, “I could hardly believe it was made by an American, so insistent it is upon not just seeing but also understanding.”\textsuperscript{40}

What makes \textit{Flags of Our Fathers} different from the celebrated “Spielbergized version of war” as instituted by \textit{Saving Private Ryan} is the way events are presented.\textsuperscript{41} Morris describes the movie’s “flashback structure” as seemingly “to mimic post-traumatic stress disorder in the way it insistently revisits horrific events as survivors of combat do, and in its seeming compulsion to find order in the welter of human memory.”\textsuperscript{42} Therefore, the most striking and memorable and poignant moments in \textit{Flags of Our Fathers} are not the scenes of combat:\textsuperscript{43}

To be sure, there is unmistakable heroism on display when the Marines hit the beaches, but Eastwood seems intent upon focusing our attention on the aftermath of the battle and the flag-raising, and accordingly the most powerful scenes are the quietest ones: Ira Hayes, the most troubled of the flag-raisers, confessing through tears, ‘I can’t take them calling me a hero’; the scene of the marines quietly struggling with the flag atop Suribachi; the movie’s closing shot of the surviving marines swimming in the ocean as the battle winds down.\textsuperscript{44}
Morris continues describing the movie’s approach in presenting the Second World War as comparable to “great war literature.” To Morris, “the most interesting things happen when no one is shooting.” In relation to Morris’ observation, Sklar further maintains Morris’ view on the unconventional treatment Eastwood employs in *Flags of Our Fathers*. Morris states, “The film challenges nearly all the expectations of blockbuster viewing. Its story unexpectedly moves back and forth among at least four different time periods…”

The method Eastwood uses in presenting the Second World War suddenly becomes pertinent to the present times. According to Morris, Eastwood, by presenting the impact of the photo of the flag raising in Iwo Jima makes a clear connection with the ill-famed photos from Abu Ghraib. Though Eastwood denies making any connection between the film and current events at the time of the movie’s release, Morris strongly asserts that the theme of *Flags of Our Fathers* clearly suggest the contrary. Therefore, the movie emphasizes the power of the image and how “accidental images have come to define America and her wars.”

During the Bush administration, Morris defines several images that have exemplified the war in Iraq. The three images Morris identifies are the “US Marines pulling down the Saddam statue in Firdos Square…President Bush aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln with the ‘Mission Accomplished’ banner behind him; and a hooded Iraqi prisoner…standing atop a small box, electrodes taped to his fingertips.” This is in stark contrast with the image of Iwo Jima that America has grown to associate with “American soldiery.” Does this mean that America has truly “fallen as a nation” as
Morris proposes? Regardless of what the answer is to this question, Morris is right in pronouncing that Eastwood has succeeded in presenting war and the negative side that may come with it, even when we are deceived by powerful images that makes one think otherwise.

*Letters from Iwo Jima*

Only three months after the showing of *Flags of Our Fathers*, Eastwood released another World War II movie called *Letters from Iwo Jima*. This movie is told from the viewpoint of the Japanese, instead of presenting the conventional American view of the war experience. The unusual and “astonishing” move by Eastwood, according to Hart, “was made by an American director, who simply decided that telling only one side of a war story is not enough.” Stephen Holden of the *New York Times* even commented on Eastwood’s move to make such a film, “So goodbye for now to Private Ryan and traditional Hollywood notions of America go-it-alone heroism and ‘the good war’ fought by ‘the greatest generation.’”

*Letter from Iwo Jima* follows the lives of Japanese soldiers ordered to fight and protect Iwo Jima from an American invasion. Realizing that this mission would mean death, the soldiers start writing letters to their families and loved ones, hence the title of the movie. These were letters that were discovered in 2005 when a suitcase was found containing letters written by Lt. Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi to his family during the Iwo Jima campaign. The letters were compiled and published in Japan and became the inspiration for Eastwood’s film.
Like *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Letters from Iwo Jima* challenges the conventions of what is popularly regarded as a World War II movie. *Letters from Iwo Jima* changes the manner in which popular American cinema presents the Second World War. In this movie, Eastwood presents the side of the Japanese in the most humanizing way possible:

*Letter from Iwo Jima*, the companion piece to *Flags of Our Fathers*, manages to trump the first film in its defiance of expectations and breaks down the final convention of World War II film in that it humanizes an enemy who has so steadfastly remained a cipher in American cinema. Even the genocidal Nazis have fared better under the lens than the Imperial Japanese military, but, in a rare feat of cinematic alchemy, Eastwood shows us an aspect of the war that had defied most attempts at depiction, even in Japan, where the war has been systematically ignored by the culture.64

Kuribayashi, played by Ken Watanabe, popularly known for his role in *The Last Samurai* is the main character of *Letters from Iwo Jima*.65 He is portrayed as “a wholly admirable figure—energetic, likeable, sophisticated, clever, humane.”66 The character of Kuribayashi and that of his fellow soldier, Baron Nishi show a different side of the Japanese as conventionally shown in previous American World War II movies.67 Sklar observes this as if it was Eastwood’s contemplation about the myths about “Hollywood’s World War II” and his aspiration to respond by showing a different view of the war as rarely seen.68

Moreover, Kent Jones, in his commentary about the film, supports the idea of Eastwood’s representation of the American enemy in the most humanizing way possible. Jones declares that aside from presenting the Japanese experience in Iwo Jima of the “exhaustion of war and the horror of battle,” *Letters from Iwo Jima* asserts the soldier’s “small acts of friendship, love, sympathy, and harmonious reflection…”69 He cites a
specific scene in the movie where this is best exemplified: “a *kempetai* Shimizu (Ryo Kase) firing a round from his pistol in the air and thus disobeying his superior’s order to shoot a barking dog before its horrified owner and her children.” It is in the small events such as these that strike the viewers emotions most strongly. This is what James Bowman in the article, “Eastwoodian Aftermaths,” published in the *American Spectator*, identified as the “sentimentalist’s view of human conflict resulting from mere ignorance of other cultures.”

Contrary to the unconventional approach Eastwood uses in presenting the Second World War in *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Letters from Iwo Jima* meets the “standard genre expectations.” The story is presented in a more chronological order rather than the manifold flashbacks in *Flags of Our Fathers*. Consequentially, Sklar calls *Letters from Iwo Jima* the “more satisfying familiar, and perhaps successfully achieved from the two films.” As Sklar explains the reason for the appeal of *Letters from Iwo Jima*, “If *Flags* burdens the spectator with the sorrows that follow on victory, *Letters* paradoxically uplifts through the suffering and defeat.”

Why then was *Letters from Iwo Jima* more successful in the amount of moviegoers compared to *Flags of Our Fathers*? What does this say about the public’s response about the different representations of World War II given the post-9/11 climate? Perhaps the American audience was not used to seeing such a different perspective on a fairly negative aspect about the American side during Second World War. *Letters from Iwo Jima*, on the other hand, presented audiences with characters they can look up to. Even if these were characters that comprised the enemy during World War II, contained
within the movie were universal themes and human values that audiences can relate to such as heroism, kindness, and compassion. In addition, the favorable response of *Letters from Iwo Jima* with *Flags of Our Fathers* may indicate that with the ongoing war in the Middle East, American audiences may have developed a certain inclination towards the “Spielgerian” representation of World War II in movies. When an American soldier is being portrayed negatively, it stains the un tarnished “Spielbergian” view of the World War II veteran.

*Valkyrie*

Two years after the release of *Letters from Iwo Jima*, came another World War II movie, this time showcasing the German side of the conflict. The movie is about the true-life story of Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg’s attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler. This plot, as history shows, was a failed endeavor. Bryan Singer is the director of *Valkyrie*, the same director who contributed to the Hollywood superhero heritage, such as *Superman Returns* and *X-Men*.

There were questions, however, about the movie’s probable success. Ron Grover of *Business Week Online* asked the question prior to the *Valkyrie*’s release, “Will audiences warm to a Nazi, even one who tries to do good? Will they warm to Cruise wearing that goofy eye patch?” To the amazement of many, *Valkyrie* surprisingly earned almost $62 million upon its opening Christmas Day of 2008.

Reasons for the movie’s fortune in the United States could be attributed to the fact that the story about the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler during the Second World War was popular known only in Europe. Furthermore the movie, starring Tom Cruise,
as Claus von Stauffenberg, appealed to the American audience because it seemed to be “a
sort-of Mission: Impossible with Nazis.” Grover agrees on this and comments on the
“Nazi-esque version of Mission: Impossible” of Valkyrie. He describes Valkyrie as
“tight” and “suspenseful” and “manages to keep you on the edge of your seat, even
though you know Hitler survived the attempt.”

Fundamentally, it was the character of Stauffenberg that appealed to a wide
audience. In Maria Puente’s “USA Today” article, she cites Mike Vollman, head of
Marketing for United Artists, studio that released Valkyrie, “The qualities of heroism and
courage in the face of adversity, not to mention sacrifice for the greater good, are always
relevant.” There was a certain attraction of the audience to the compelling
characteristics and courage of Stauffenberg that contributed to the films unexpected
success. Manohla Dargis of the “New York Times” identifies the source of the film’s
triumph and talks about the mystery of Valkyrie’s success:

That enigma was Claus von Stauffenberg, a count and a colonel who, thought he
lost one eye, an entire hand and several fingers while fighting on behalf of the
Reich, made several attempts to assassinate Hitler and seize control of the
government. At the core of Stauffenberg’s spectacularly ambitious plot was
Valkyrie, Hitler’s plan for the mobilization of the home army that Stauffenberg
hoped to hijack in order to quash the SS and its leaders. It didn’t work, of course,
for complicated reasons, though also because by 1944, as William L. Shirer
bluntly puts it in ‘The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,’ the conspirators were
‘terribly late.’

Moreover, Dargis connects Valkyrie’s appeal to audiences because the movie is
placed in the context of World War II. To Dargis, this was a war “that offers moral
absolutes,” that appeals to the American audience, such as the idea that “Nazis are evil”
and a “narrative,” indicating “Nazis are evil and should die.” This made understanding
the concept of war easier to comprehend than the prevailing conflict the United States faces in the war on terrorism.\textsuperscript{87}

Like \textit{Letters from Iwo Jima}, \textit{Valkyrie} presents the German story of World War II. However, unlike \textit{Letters from Iwo Jima}, which completely told in Japanese with English subtitles, \textit{Valkyrie} is told in English with varying accents from American to British to German. Mark Harris of the “New York Times” talks about the issue of accents in a World War II movie:

‘Valkyrie’ asks its viewers not only to buy Mr. Cruise as a German officer but also to accept that he and his co-stars—among them the British actors Tom Wilkinson and Kenneth Branagh and Carice van Houten, who is Dutch—speak in their own accents. The accent question is one that continues to bedevil directors of World War II movies.\textsuperscript{88}

This leads to the question—apart from the fascinating story of sacrifice and courage of Stauffenberg, was \textit{Valkyrie} a success in America because an American using a completely unaltered American accent played the hero of the movie? This was a challenge that producer of \textit{Valkyrie}, Christopher McQuarrie had to face while making the movie.\textsuperscript{89} According to Harris, McQuarrie was told “‘You can’t make a World War II movie with no American soldiers in it,’ let alone one about a conspiracy whose outcome is a foregone conclusion.”\textsuperscript{90} Perhaps by using a Hollywood star such as Tom Cruise to play Stauffenberg, the story about the “good German” who“did the right thing” will not completely emerge as a German film.\textsuperscript{91}

In certain levels, \textit{Valkyrie} has achieved a diversion from the conventional World War II movie Hollywood espouses. \textit{Valkyrie} actualizes this by showing a “Good German” as contradictory to the Germans in \textit{Saving Private Ryan}. Because of this,
Valkyrie asks the deeper questions about war such as “Is it possible to humanize Nazis without making them sympathetic? Can assassination be a patriotic, even moral act?”

These are esoteric questions that watching the movie garners. It is an inquiry that is more than looking at the glory of the Americans or the Allied Forces during World War II. As Puente points out, it is queries such as this that “raises questions of contemporary relevance.”

Inglourious Basterds

In 2008, there was another American World War II movie that raised a lot of discussion—Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds. As Tarantino put it, “This ain’t your daddy’s World War II movie.” Gene Seymour in his movie review, “Riot on the Western Front,” even warned audience to stay away from the movie if you “prefer war movies to stay reasonably close to factual detail—in almost any sense you can define as ‘reasonable’…” Nevertheless, Tarantino’s odd take on the World War II Hollywood genre, which Harvey and Bob Weinstein described as “a film that wowed audiences the way that only Quentin Tarantino can,” was a mega hit. The movie’s positive reception among movie critics likewise benefited the movie’s ticket sales. The movie’s leading star, Brad Pitt, was also an important factor that led to the attraction of a wider female audience of 43%, according to Scott Bowle’s USA Today review. Overall, Inglorious Basterds was a blockbuster hit around the world, as it was release in more than 42 countries globally.

Brad Pitt plays army lieutenant Aldo Raine, the “sleepy-eyed, laid back good ole boy from Tennesse charged with leading a squad of Jewish American soldiers behind
enemy lines to slaughter and scalp as many Nazis as they can.”\textsuperscript{101} It is however, Colonel
Landa, played by Christoph Waltz, who is called by Dennis Lim “the ultimate Tarantino
creation.”\textsuperscript{102} Lim describes Lim’s character as “one surprisingly multifaceted cartoon
villain: a genial sadist, an oppressively polite interrogator, a hyper-articulated polyglot
whose verbal dexterity is his scariest weapon.”\textsuperscript{103}

The story of \textit{Inglourious Basterds} revolves around the mission of Aldo Raine’s
Nazi-killing team to kill as much Nazis as they can, which ultimately leads to an
opportunity to assassinate Hitler in a movie premiere in France.\textsuperscript{104} The storyline taken
completely far from historical fact was precisely Tarantino’s “recipe for indie-
voiduality.”\textsuperscript{105} What seems to be your typical World War II movie suddenly converts to
“an often funny alternate history.”\textsuperscript{106}

As the Bastards’ reign of terror leaves mutilated, hairless corpses strewn across
the Third Reich, Shosanna Dreyfus (Melanie Laurent), a French-Jewish refugee
who barely survived her family’s massacre at the instigation of SS colonel Hans
Landa (Cristoph Waltz), has been quietly managing her own cinematheque in
Nazi-occupied Paris. But both her humble movie palace and her lissome person
attract the unwanted affection of Federick Zoller, a movie fan and German private
whose single-handed slaughter of over 200 Allied soldiers from a sniper’s nest
makes him the Reich’s Alvin York and Audie Murphy combined. Joseph
Goebbels has even supervised a movie about the private’s exploits—strarring
Zoller as himself, Murphy-style.

Using his war hero’s capital, Zoller persuades Goebbels to move the film’s
exclusive screening for the Nazi elite from a ritzy Parisian palace to Shosanna’s
smaller, classier theater. She plots to use this grand occasion to wreak her
apocalyptic vendetta against the Reich’s leaders, including the fuhrer himself.
What complicates matters is that unknown to her (or to them), Aldo’s angels of
death have the exact same plan in mind.\textsuperscript{107}

In telling the story, Tarantino adopts an old style of filmmaking, contrary to
typical blockbuster movies that use an amount of visual effects and camera tricks.\textsuperscript{108} In
addition, the typical fast and dynamic Tarantino pace as evidenced in his prior works such as *Kill Bill*, seems to be tamed in *Inglourious Basterds.* Jaime Weinman, however, in his article “What Happened to Quentin Tarantino?” questions the director’s consummate use of movie clichés.

Those films had characters who emerged as people, but virtually every character in *Inglourious Basterds* is not only a movie cliché, but an over-the-top version. Pitt, talking with a deliberately absurd Southern accent, is a tough, stoic man of action like John Wayne or Lee Marvin. Hitler is a babbling, sweaty, comical figure reminiscent of the way he was portrayed in American WWII movies; the British characters talk in stiff-upper-lip jargon also lifted from old movies; and the French, of course, are obsessed with cinema and wine.

According to Anthony Breznican in “All Eyes Point to Tarantino,” it is probably the very nature of *Inglourious Basterds* that makes the film such an open subject for debate and discussion. Certain audiences may have problems with such a powerfully altered view of history. To critic Emanuel Levy in response to the movie’s controversial nature, “it doesn’t need to be real. It’s more about the role of cinema in shaping our perspective. And it’s a real war filtered through Tarantino’s vision.”

The international cast of *Inglourious Basterds*, that was a congregation of actors speaking in their native languages, such as German, Italian, and English, was something that fascinated not only Pitt, as he shared in an interview about how he felt working with such a diverse set of actors, but also was a choice Tarantino consciously made. Antithetical to the treatment of Singer’s *Valkyrie*, which had an issue of varying accents that were not true to the characters in the movie, *Inglourious Basterds* deliberately makes sure that Germans actors played Germans and the French actors played French.
The movie, which Tarantino has commented on as early as 2001, raises questions more about war movies than war itself. Inglourious Basterds presents a variety of characters whose lives orbit around the world of cinema in some shape or form:

Laurent’s character owns a movie theatre, and the plot revolves around the decision to use her theatre for the premiere of a German propaganda movie starring a war hero turned actor (Daniel Bruhl). A British spy (Michael Fassbender) was an academic film critic in civilian life, and his double-agent contact (Diane Kruger) is an actress. And of course there’s a part in the film for Goebbels, the man who literally wanted to use movies to take over the world.

Moreover, Weinman makes a valid point in emphasizing the meaning behind Inglourious Basterds and its emphasis on the role of movies in daily life. Tarantino cleverly displays the impact of film for either good or evil and how “people confuse them with reality.” Given that Inglourious Basterds shows an alternative side to what possibly may have been the reality, the audience then wonders if the Jews would have “behaved like mindless monsters” towards the Nazis just like Shoshanna and the Basterds did in the movie?

Inglourious Basterds indubitably topples all conventions of the “Spielbergized version of war.” Tarantino even comments on this blatantly in Kristin Hohenadel’s article, “Bunch of Guys on a Mission Movie,” published in the New York Times. Tarantino speaks of World War II movies where there are “Germans speaking English with a German accent or sounding like British thespians.” Clearly, in Inglourious Basterds, in which 70 percent of the dialogue is spoken in either French or German,
Tarantino jokes, “If Spielberg hadn’t made ‘Schindler’s List’ yet… I think to think that after our movie he’d be shamed into doing it in German.”

In comparison with the Eastwood’s *Flags of Our Fathers, Letters from Iwo Jima*, and even *Valkyrie*, this Tarantino film makes war into entertainment. There is something absurdly enjoyable about watching *Inglourious Basterds*. After a film viewing of the movie in the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan, Chancellor Arnold M. Eisen, in a panel discussion, described his feeling after watching *Inglourious Basterds*, “‘Wow, that was fun…I’m not supposed to feel that way, I know—I’m Jewish…” What is it about Tarantino’s style that made scalping heads, blood, gore, and Nazis a formula for a “fun” movie to watch?

Consequently, this disquieting thrill of enjoying *Inglourious Basterds* led to a number of questions relating to the prevalence of terrorism today in the a world going through the “war on terrorism.” Paul Vitello in his *New York Times* article, “Seeing Nazis Massacred, Followed by a Discussion,” notes one of the important questions asked, “Killing Hitler seems all right, but when people today set fire to and blow up buildings, raining bullets on the survivors and rescuers, isn’t that terrorism?” Perhaps this was exactly Tarantino’s wanted. In some way, he has made a movie applicable and pertinent to the a post-9/11 society, illustrating the powerful influence cinema has in garnering emotional responses and stimulating thoughts on current political, societal, and cultural conditions.

All in all the four movies discussed in this chapter, *Flags of Our Fathers, Letters from Iwo Jima, Valkyrie*, and *Inglourious Basterds*, totally exhibit a challenge to the
myths of war. In *Flags of Our Fathers*, it was made clear that the Second World War was not entirely a “Good War” or a “golden age” from the American front. Despite America’s victory in the war, soldiers who were called “heroes” such as Ira Hayes, found themselves confused and baffled by the disjunction between what the reality of being in the war front was with the reality the government was implanting at the home front. In *Letter from Iwo Jima*, the malevolent image of the Japanese enemy during World War II as represented in past Hollywood films was shown in a completely different light. Suddenly, the enemy is humanized leading to the understanding that the enemy during war can be just like us. *Valkyrie*, on the other hand, reveals the good and surprising side of the Nazis. The myth about the sinister and menacing enemy is brought once again to a very humanizing level. In other words, World War II cannot simply be rigidly classified as a war between good and evil. Lastly, *Inglourious Basterds*, not only challenged the myth of the war, but rather of the war movie. Tarantino’s movie proves that there can be a World War II movie without the twenty-minutes of intense battle with body parts flying in the air as bombs explode and squirts of blood spraying in the air whenever a gun is shot. War becomes more than just the physical combat in *Inglourious Basterds*. 
CHAPTER 5
VIDEO GAMES: WAR IN WORLD WAR II

Video games have become a core of American culture.¹ According to Jonathan Dee in the article “Playing Mogul” in the New York Times, Americans purchase more video games than watching movies in a theater or through renting.² Video games increased popularity result from the fact that they “primarily have been made and used for entertainment to an even greater extent than theater, film, or television, or almost any type of media.”³ To Mark J.P. Wolf in The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation and Beyond, “For many players, video games represent the greatest percentage of media usage in their everyday life, and for a growing number of online players, these games have become a way of life.”⁴

The video game industry has grown so large to become a powerhouse of a business.⁵ Video game advertisements are widely seen in the newspapers as well as popular retailers like “Best Buy, Wal-Mart, Target, and Toys ‘R’ Us.”⁶ Just in 2006, the video game industry set a monumental $12.5 billion in sales.⁷ This is no surprise since millions of people play video games around the world.⁸

The assortment of video game platforms adds to its appeal.⁹ There are some video games that function on personal computers while some are used as “handheld games,” like on Nintendo’s Game Boy.¹⁰ In addition, gaming consoles like the Sony PlayStation, are used to display games on your television.¹¹ According to John Beck and Mitchell Wade in The Kids are Alright: How the Gamer Generation is Changing the Workplace,
“These differences not only include delivery platform, but extend, somewhat, into the nature of the games played there and the way users play them.”

Evidently, the intricacy of video games has developed drastically over the years. Back in the mid-1970s, video games were simply very similar in form and style across the board. Video games then were limited to merely “eye-hand coordination and minimal strategy.” As the years passed, new kinds of video games emerged such as “real-time strategy games” or “RTSs,” “first-person shooters” or “FPSs,” “adventure,” “role-playing games” or “RPGs,” and “action RPGs,” “sports,” “puzzle,” and “various type of online games.”

Different kinds of video games have been used as a medium for storytelling, education, teaching, and for artistic expression. Furthermore, it is an activity players can engage in alone, with friends, or with strangers, such as being part of a huge online gaming community. When playing a video game, one is immersed in “miniature worlds on-screen which the player enters into.”

War Games

Rusel DeMaria in Reset: Changing the Way We Look at Video Games explains the power of video games. Video games gives the player an opportunity “to learn and practice skills, to achieve beneficial mental states, to feel empowered by successes, to explore fantasies, to experiment with forbidden activities, to relax, and to socialize.” War games, in particular, are a genre that actualizes this motivational phenomenon. Video games that are set in the conditions of war, wherein the player either is in the role of a leader or a soldier, is a setting that has the capacity “to motivate us to immerse
ourselves in worlds where our minds are wide open and ready to learn and persist in learning.”

Through playing war games, one can assume the position of leaders and learn the socio-political consequences of making certain decisions within the given historical or political context in the video game. In this kind of scenario, the player is given the opportunity to learn and develop “problem solving, and good strategic thinking.” DeMaria further explains this form of video game—“players get to decide policy and action, and they must accept the results, learn from failure as well as success, and gain a personal perspective on the challenges of leadership.”

Moreover, war games can present the player with “real dilemmas and decisions” in historical contexts. This leads to the inference that if a game is well researched in terms of its alignment with actual historical events, then the player can better comprehend the consequence of certain actions in context of realistic of situations. At the end, the immersion results in a player’s learning experience.

An example of a World War II video game that was developed with actual historical events is the Medal of Honor series. Specifically, Medal of Honor: Allied Assault released in 2002, presented the “chaotic and confused storming of the Normandy beaches…”, which was deemed to be inspired by Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan. In this regard, war games do more than entertain; it offers a venue to apply “strategic thinking.”

The gaming experience, however, will never be exactly the same, since video games do not impose any “physical risk or danger, and the possibilities are practically
endless."\textsuperscript{30} The motivation, however, remains strong as the player is challenged to meet goals and succeed in an environment where “we can do just about anything.”\textsuperscript{31} Of course, not all video games are based on actual events.\textsuperscript{32} War games, however, focus on assorted purposes. In war games, Rusel DeMaria in \textit{Reset: Changing the Way We Look at Video Games}, discusses the different type of war games:

Video games, too, play at war. In doing so, they seem to serve the human fascination with conflict, taking sides and prevailing over an enemy. Some are essentially action oriented, while others are more strongly focused on strategy, but all video war games involve strategy and tactics to a greater or lesser degrees. Contemporary war games are common, such as the very popular Call of Duty series. Other war games are more or less accurately based on history, while still others postulate fantasy worlds of the past, the future, or alternate dimensions.\textsuperscript{33}

In some cases, war games are used for military training purposes to simulate events that occur actual combat and war.\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps this is one of the more controversial aspects of video gaming is when it is used as a military recruitment tool. In an essay by Marcus Power entitled, “Digital War Games and Post 9/11 Geographies of Militarism,” he discusses the “increasingly close relationship between the U.S. military and the video game industry.”\textsuperscript{35} American soldiers during the Gulf War even describe the video game comparable to the war zone experience.\textsuperscript{36} This testimonial further underlines the potential of video games as being a tremendously intense activity.

In 2002, the United States Army released \textit{America’s Army}, a video game used a recruiting tool.\textsuperscript{37} Power goes on to describe the video games success. He notes that \textit{America’s Army} “has had more success than any U.S. military recruitment campaign since the Uncle Sam \textit{I Want You} ads in the Second World War.”\textsuperscript{38} The video game was used as a virtual environment wherein players can go through the different stages an
Army recruit would go through.\textsuperscript{39} It depicted real-world scenarios soldiers would undergo in training to actual situations one would encounter during any combat or military operation typical in the “War on Terror.”\textsuperscript{40}

In 2005, another version of \textit{America’s Army} was released.\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Special Forces} was similar to \textit{America’s Army} but was available online for download to everyone, as long as they were at least thirteen years of age.\textsuperscript{42} The online feature of the game allowed players to form teams and strategize to defeat the enemy. The popularity of \textit{Special Forces} was not hard to see. Tens of thousands of players would go online to play the game.\textsuperscript{43}

The many issues that this kind of recruitment tool employed by the military raises a number of questions. One question Power asks is, “Perhaps in the Iraq War, video games offered an alternative means of pre-stuffing the troops and getting them ‘pumped’ for combat?”\textsuperscript{44} To Power, this produces concern over a soldier recruit’s understanding of the war zone experience with the virtual experience.\textsuperscript{45}

These types of video games, however, may very well benefit the military beyond recruiting individuals. Similar video games like \textit{Full Spectrum Warrior}, can educate existing members of the military to see and experience through a simulation what kind of scenarios may potentially be encountered on the battle zone. Moreover, as Power asserts, such video games “are even now being used to treat the consequences of combat engagement in the form of ‘virtual therapy’ for post-traumatic stress disorder.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{First-Person Shooter}

Among the different kinds of video games, the First-Person Shooter or FPSs is the most popular.\textsuperscript{47} As the name connotes, these are games that are played from the “point of
view” of the “main character’s eyes.” While playing an FPS, you normally see the character’s hand or weapons. The preponderance of FPS among gamers can be associated with the intensity it brings to the gaming experience. DeMaria describes the pace of FPSs as “full of action and strategy.” Moreover, FPS games are set in such a way that players can “play against each other, either individually, in free-for-all games, or even in team games both online and over local networks.”

FPSs can be traced back to its birth in the 1980s when id Software’s *Wolfenstein 3D* was released. This World War II-themed video game is about a “castle populated with Nazi soldiers, growling attack dogs, and treasure chests full of loot and ammunition.” This is an example of when the point of view of the character and the player converges, thus forming a first-person point-of-view of the “ground-level view.” Consequently, a new game called *Doom* was released a year later. It was this game of “a space marine facing down hordes of demonic beasts unleashed in a Martian based by a transdimensional portal” that sparked enthusiasm among gamers on FPSs. The game’s ability to connect with other players via “local area networks” or “LANs,” and “modem-to-modem connections” gave gaming a whole new shift in experience.

This type of video game, however, has received its own share of controversy as well. According to Bob Rehak in his essay called, *Genre Profile: First-Person Shooting*, “Some critics have gone so far as to call the FPS a ‘murder simulator.’” Rehak reviews the controversy FPS games brings as it potentially impacts the gamer psychologically:

*Doom, Quake, Unreal, Half-Life, Medal of Honor, Halo:* among the most popular video games ever released, these are examples of the first-person shooter of FPS. Combining graphic sophistication and violent content for a powerful immersive
effect, the FPS also has been a lightning rod for controversy about the moral and psychological impact of video games, triggering debates about whether such games function as training simulators for aggressive and even homicidal behavior, and if so, how they should be regulated.57

Perhaps the “immersive experience” of playing FPS games results from its “sensorially immediate, and, at its most successful, almost overwhelmingly visceral” nature.58 This powerful perspective is compared to the “continuous ‘tracking shot,’ mimicking the point-of-view cameras of Hollywood…”59 In addition, by being a “shooting” game, the player is soaked in a highly-hostile situation where action is needed from the player to kill the enemy and avoid being shot in order to “stay alive.”60 Rehak continues to describe the eminently intense experience of playing FPS games:

Just as essential is the third term in its name—shooter. In its purest form, the FPS is relentlessly aggressive, its action driven by shooting and being shot at. As the primary means of interacting with opponents, ranged weapons provide the genre with its defining iconography: a gun barrel (as of a shotgun, plasma rifle, or rocket launcher) jutting from the bottom of the frame and pointing toward a real or implied crosshairs at the center of the screen. This gun, along with the hand holding it, bridges the space of the player and the space of the game, combining with 3-D graphics to create the shooter’s key illusion: you are here.61

All in all, FPS games allow the players to be free to investigate “an endlessly unfolding environment.”62 The actions made by the character of the game are determined by the player’s skill in controlling the “keyboard, mouse, or controller.”63 It is this exact characteristic of FPS that sets video games apart from other media such as “print, film, and television.”64

World War II in Video Games

World War II had such an enormous impact on the entire world that it has become an event that affected every individual in some shape or form.65 How does World War II
therefore become an important subject in video games? According to Ryan Burke in his review of the “Top Five World War II Games of 2006,” World War II games “provide not only entertainment, but a sense of appreciation and respect.” Similar to the claim of Tom Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation* that those who have lived and served through the Second World War should be commemorated, celebrated, and honored especially since most of them are dying as they are getting older, World War II video games revive the implications this historical event had and continues to have on a global basis. Many game developers, therefore, have capitalized on the Second World War as a suitable setting for various FPS games:

Video games built around World War II outnumber all other history-related games combined. In 2006 alone, an average of two new WWII games appeared each month. What lies behind this popularity? It can’t be sophisticated weaponry and gameplay alone—there’s plenty of that available in other types of games. Rather, the driving force behind the appeal of WWII games lies in the importance, relevance and all-encompassing nature of the war itself.

This chapter will continue to answer the core question of why the Second World War continues to persist as a pertinent theme and subject of FPS games. What is it about World War II that makes it appealing as a motif for FPSs, especially after the events of 9/11? In this discussion, several FPSs will be discussed such as *Call of Duty 3*, *Medal of Honor: Airborne*, and *Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway*.

*Call of Duty*

*Call of Duty 3* was hailed as “unquestionably the game of the year.” The year was 2006, when a plethora of World War II video games dominated the video gamers market. This World War II FPS is takes place in the “battle for Normandy.” What sets
this video game apart from its counterparts during that time was its new game-playing feature. In *Rolling Stone*’s “Fall Games Preview” of 2006, “What greatly shines in the next-gen versions are twenty-four-person multiplayer modes that now include vehicles in which multiple soldiers can move around.”

*Call of Duty 3* is not the only game in the series that is set in World War II. Earlier *Call of Duty* games took place in “wide-open battlefields or bombed-out city streets,” which also occur during World War II. Lev Grossman of *Time* describes *Call of Duty 2*’s playing terrain as “Battlefields it would take years to find Private Ryan in.” The video game allows you to pick either being a soldier as part of the “American, British, or Russian” troops. Indeed, the players are plunged in a vast environment to explore and experience intense action. As technology in gaming continued to advance, the *Call of Duty* game shifted its essence to more discrete strategies of warfare, such as that of snipers, “camouflaged banzai attackers,” and “networks of trenches” in *Call of Duty: World at War*.

The *Call of Duty* series of games have always aspired to an “attempt at realism.” In *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One*, the “U.S. Army’s 1st Infantry Division campaigns, including the landing at Normandy” showcased actual weapons and vehicles used during World War II. When developing the game, the creators interviewed World War II veterans to ensure authenticity of the war experience. One of those consulted was Lt. Col. Hank Kiersey, who gave input on some action details that brought the gaming experience close to how it was actually fought in World War II. U.S. Army veteran John Hillen was another soldier consulted for *Call of Duty*. The game, according to
Kiersey, enables people to hear the untold stories of World War II and how it was fought.\(^1\)

Not all the events presented in the game, however, are based on true historical fact.\(^2\) According to Bernard Dy in his article citing *Call of Duty* in “Military History,” there was an “excellent re-creation” of the Pegasus Bridge and the “surrounding area during the game’s British mission, complete with ingress via Airspeed Horsa glider.”\(^3\) It is important, however, to understand that several parts in the *Call of Duty* series are fictional.\(^4\) The ingredient of both fiction and fantastical elements, plus the new innovations in technology in game design in *Call of Duty* games brings out plenty of moments of drama based on military events.\(^5\)

The gameplay is intense and you can’t help but feel a sense of urgency as you hear gunfire in the distance only to have bullets seem to whiz past your ears a split second later. Designed from the ground up for debut on next-gen consoles such as Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, *Call of Duty 3* features advanced high-definition graphics, improved digital sound and an incredible all-new physics engine that greatly affects gameplay.\(^6\)

*Call of Duty 3*, in particular, sought inspiration from war movies.\(^7\) Mike Snider of *USA Today* talks about this influence. “Where recent World War II games were clearly inspired by more recent films such as Private Ryan and Enemy at the Gates, *Call of Duty 3*…takes some cues from classics The Longest Day and A Bridge Too Far.”\(^8\) According to Snider, cinematic effects sweeps the *Call of Duty 3*:

Cinematic flourishes abound in the game, which follows the Allies’ attempts to liberate France after D-Day: Air sorties can be seen in the distance as fellow troops advance over the detailed terrain. Whizzing bullets, resounding destinations and rampaging tanks—not to mention frenetic squad members—create a surround-sound field that rivals movies.\(^9\)
What does *Call of Duty* teach the gamer about the World War II experience? Aside from emphasizing the fact that the war was definitely not fought alone, the multiplayer component of the game exhibits the idea of how teamwork is essential in accomplishing missions and end victorious in the different campaigns. Furthermore, James Campbell in “Just Less Than Total War: Simulating World War II as Ludic Nostalgia,” discusses the experience of playing a World War II game such as *Call of Duty*. To Campbell, the gaming experience is not to completely experience World War II exactly as it was fought, but rather to experience it as if it were a World War II movie, specifically movies of the 1990s.

More specifically, they aim to give the player the experience of fighting World War II as represented in films dating from the late 1990s. To the extent that such films draw heavily on the WWII film as an already established genre, we thus have a layering effect: the games represent the recent movies, which represent the earlier movies, which putatively represent the war itself.

This explains *Call of Duty*’s highly cinematic features in graphics and sounds. Apart from attempting to reveal some actual historical detail about the Second World War, the *Call of Duty* games aspire to create a highly intense environment. Game players are not only entertained through this process, but are immersed in a scenario where drama is intensified. Though consultations were made so that several elements within the game were true to actual World War II history, the game becomes just like a movie in a sense that certain events are fictionalized to garner a stronger emotional response from its audience.

Additionally, the experience of World War II video games such as *Call of Duty*, even with its highly immersive gaming style, will never replicate an actual World War II
veteran. As Campbell points out, “a viewer may be shocked, but they will not be shot,” just the same as watching *Saving Private Ryan*. Furthermore, shooting the enemy in the video game is not an equivalent to shooting an actual human being.

What purpose then does *Call of Duty* have in relation to its World War II theme? Perhaps game developers have found the subject of World War II as a perfect playground to find ways to innovate and experiment on cutting edge graphics, sound, and different game playing techniques. In the process, as Burke observes, playing a World War II games not only brings the player into an experience that is already present in the collective memory, but it also honors those who have gone through the war.

*Medal of Honor: Airborne*

Another World War II game that has seen much popularity in the video game industry was *Medal of Honor: Airborne*. Released in 2007, this game focuses on the “U.S. Army airborne divisions’ most intense operations during the war, such as Market Garden and D-Day’s Operation Neptune.” Burke in the article, “Choose Your Own Adventure in *Medal of Honor*’s New Shooter,” describes the unpredictable feature of *Medal of Honor: Airborne:*

Each mission begins when you fly to the operation area and parachute out of a C-47. On your way down, you can get the lay of the land choose where you want to touch down. The landing zone you choose will impact the course of the operation. Once on the ground, you can tackle objectives in the order of your choosing.

These random events that the player encounters based on their swift decisions of where to land, makes the playing experience just like that of the soldiers during World War II. According to Burke, “This free-roaming, nonlinear gameplay mechanic makes for
a much more realistic and authentic experience. In this sense, it imitates the circumstance that World War II soldiers had back in the day. They weren’t given choice of where they would be stationed or dropped off in the battlefield.

Another feature *Medal of Honor: Airborne* boasts is its “unique weapon upgrade mechanic.” As the player completes missions and gains points, weapons can be modified or upgraded, providing much more accuracy in shooting the enemy. Given these new game features, Burke identifies *Medal of Honor: Airborne* as a game that has responded to “the throng of monotonously similar World War II first-person shooter series on the market.” Perhaps Burke was referring to the popular *Call of Duty* series. This drives one to ask why Electronic Arts Los Angeles, the games developer, choose to follow suit in creating a game with the same World War II theme as *Call of Duty 3*?

There could be several reasons for this move by Electronic Arts. Prior to the release of *Medal of Honor Airborne*, there was a *Medal of Honor*, which was produced by Spielberg released in 1999. Looking at the timeline of its initial release, it was sold to the public just a year after the positive receptions of the *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Greatest Generation*. Clearly, Americans were still in World War II nostalgia at this time. Moreover, in 2002, the *Medal of Honor* series of games continued as *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* was released.

What importance then do these *Medal of Honor* games have in representing World War II as its theme? Similar to the reason of the conception of the *Call of Duty* series, the *Medal of Honor* games are present to capitalize on the public’s infatuation with World War II. Coincidentally, the advancement in computer hardware served as a
beacon of light for game developers to form new ways of presenting their graphics in more realistic terms. In David Cohn’s article “Unreal Power: Epic Games Uses the Latest Technology to Remain on the Cutting Edge,” Medal of Honor: Airborne is cited in Computer Graphics World as one of those innovative games. Cohn talks about the “Unreal Engine,” a technology used for game developers such as Medal of Honor: Airborne to provide complex 3D renditions of an architectural environment and space.

Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway

Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway, released in 2008 by Ubisoft, is yet another World War II first-person shooter game. This game, however, attempts to blend in strategy with shooting action. As the player controls the character of Staff Sgt. Matt Baker, a “fictional squad leader of a reconnaissance unit of the 101st Airborne,” he leads an army of American soldiers against the Nazis. The setting of Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway, however, recounts a true mission initiated by the Allied forces in World War II.

Based on a true story of the airdrop of the 101st Airborne Division paratroopers during the Normandy invasion, this game draws from many historical documents to create a realistic WWII gaming experience. First-person shooter and squad-based combat combine to create varied game play that will keep you on your toes.

The graphics innovation that Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway brings to gaming is the concept of the “destructible cover system.” If a soldier was taking cover behind a wood fence, this barrier can be easily destroyed by gunfire instead of an armored vehicle shielding the object. In addition, the level of violence of gore is heightened in this game because of the “action camera.” This means that when a player shoots at the
enemy accurately, the blood and gore is zoomed in and presented in slow-motion, displaying yet another feat in technological advancement in game design and development.\textsuperscript{113}

Despite all these technological advancements, \textit{Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway} does not fail to strike the emotional chord among players.\textsuperscript{114} The game is successful in emphasizing “individual personality” and “personal history” of Baker’s comrades.\textsuperscript{115} Consequentially, when one or several of Baker’s men die on a mission, the emotional toll Baker struggles with is explicitly shown.\textsuperscript{116} By presenting this to the player, “the game’s emotional stakes are so high, you sympathize with the soldiers, who face the stark realities of war and the loss of their brothers in arms.”\textsuperscript{117} As Burke underlines in his review, “War of Nerves,” he believes that it is this emotional element in \textit{Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway} that players get to understand the meaning of heroism.\textsuperscript{118} Moreover, Burke contends that this game presents “something movies can’t.”\textsuperscript{119} Through the immersion in the game, a player is no longer merely a spectator, but rather an active participant in this eminently emotional and gripping experience.\textsuperscript{120}

Based on Burke’s take on \textit{Brother in Arms: Hell’s Highway}, it can be deduced that games about World War II have the capability to expose realities of what it is to be patriotic. Furthermore, by combining an intensely emotional circumstance of placing the main character’s role as a leader who ultimately becomes responsible for the death of his comrades, one can interpret the realities soldiers faced in times of war, such as that the Second World War. This video game, besides from creating a commentary on the costs of lives that are stake and the Allie’s loss of Market Garden, \textit{Brothers in Arm: Hell’s}
Highway provides some form of inspiration. Burke states, “As the game ends, Baker achieves an emotional victory by coming to terms with his demons and rallying his men…”

The Saboteur and The Velvet Assassin

All three games discussed so far in this chapter contain keyword such “duty,” “honor,” and “brothers.” All concepts suggest the patriotic nature of the game but not all World War II games released have connotations of nationalism or patriotism. However, just like movies, other games released after 9/11 use World War II as the stage. Some of them have been less successful than the three FPS games discussed previously. Why is it that FPS games seem to be more popular among the gaming community rather than RTSs or RPGs?

More recently, there have been attempts to move away from the conventional World War II video game like Call of Duty. In 2009, Velvet Assassin was released. The player controls Violette Summer in this “new stealth action game.” Contrary to the usual male protagonist, this game is inspired by the “life of 21-year-old Violette Szabo, who joined the British Special Operations Executive after her husband was killed in the North Africa campaign.”

Violette Summer is a spy with skill in “demolitions” and “unarmed combat,” which are characteristics derived from the actual life of Violette Szabo. In addition, the game differs from the typical take on World War II games in terms of the characters’ endurance in the game. “She can’t take more than one or two gunshots before the game is over.” Whether this has anything to do with the game’s silent commentary on the
strength of women in combat scenarios, the game makes it clear that the objective is stealth in a purely fictional World War II setting. As Burke describes this in “Slip Into the Role of a Deadly SOE Agent,” “In a genre glutted with generic first-person shooters and real-time strategy games, Velvet Assassin is a refreshing departure.”

Added to the list of attempts to steer away from the conventional is The Saboteur, released in 2009. The story of the game follows a fictional character of Sean Devlin, “an Irish expatriate and saboteur based on real-life war hero William Grover-Williams.” From this inspiration, one could easily tell that The Saboteur is a World War II video game concoction of killing Nazis and race driving.

According to Burke, the game’s potency lies in the “spectacular visual style.” Set in Paris during the German occupation in the Second World War, the city is presented as bleak, dark, where “life has been stripped away.” It is the Nazi flag’s rich red that starkly contrast the de-saturated city. As Devlin accomplishes missions, color slowly returns to the grim Paris.

Velvet Assassin and The Saboteur indicate an inclination towards veering away from the convention Call of Duty and Medal of Honor have set in World War II gaming. Both games try to pursue a different perspective in the typical World War II first-person shooter game. Though the storylines and plots are compelling, especially with the aid of fictitious details to make the narrative more interesting, these games fall short some way because of their inferior execution in game design. In Velvet Assassin, the artificial intelligence of the enemy is skewed and various “weapon combat mechanics” are flawed. At the same time, The Saboteur suffers similar setbacks. In The Saboteur, the
controls are “less responsive than they should be.” As Burke describes this flaw, he states that sometimes players get into all sort of odd situations. One may want to jump to a nearby rooftop only finding oneself not making it simply because the controls did not pick up quickly enough. This is in contradiction to Call of Duty, Medal of Honor: Airborne, and Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway, which all introduce some form of innovation in game design, thus leading to its popularity and success in the gaming community.

Based on these observations, World War II games become exceptional in the video game industry only if games are well made in every aspect. Even if the storyline is fascinating and interesting, the gaming community will not revere a video game if it falls short its technical features. Video game developers are therefore not only challenged to create video games with an appealing theme and narrative. Developers in the gaming industry are confronted with the responsibility to keep up with the latest technological trends and innovation in video game design. Given the numerous World War II-genre games in the video market today, along with the many attempts to present fresh takes on the war, has the subject finally become worn out in the video game industry?

From World War II to Modern Warfare

In 2007, the creators of the Call of Duty series made the bold move to “stretch its creative muscles with an original contemporary game.” As it turned out, it was a perfect move made by Infinity Ward. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare became 2007’s game of the year and “sold more than 14 million units worldwide.” Two years later, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 was released. Again, this modern-themed military game
gained tremendous popularity. It is known to be one of the “best-selling games of all time.” According to Seth Schiesel of The New York Times, “The Call of Duty franchise…has sold more than 55 million copies and generated around $3 billion in retail sales over the past seven years.”

Most attention, however, was pointed towards Modern Warfare 2’s controversial nature. In Mike Snider’s article, “Modern Warfare 2: Creativity or Controversy,” he elaborates on the game’s questionable scenes involving terrorism. This is because in today’s post-9/11 society, there has evolved controversy towards portraying terrorists. Snider cites Adam Sessler, “co-host of cable channel G4 TV series X-Play” in his article discussing the game’s controversy. Sessler states, “An argument can be made that portraying terrorism in games is less appropriate because of the medium’s interactive nature. But that’s not fair to game creators.” Conceivably, this may have been a contributing factor to the game’s profitable success. The more controversy the video game gets the more attention it gets from the public. However, is the deviation of the Call of Duty series into themes that involve more contemporary subjects and settings an indication that World War II has become less relevant in recent years? Based on Schiesel’s analysis, the Call of Duty shift to more contemporary themes did not make the theme of World War II less relevant but rather “made the games more exciting for many players.”

Coincidentally, another World War II video game convert to “modern warfare” is the Battlefield series of games, which included previous World War II games, Battlefield 1942 and Battlefield 1943. The most recent creation from Electronic Arts is Battlefield:
Bad Company 2, an arguably better FPS than Modern Warfare 2, concluded by Schiesel.\textsuperscript{141}

Yet the biggest leap in Bad Company 2 is in its single-player campaign. It is only six or eight hours long—comparable in length to the main story in Modern Warfare 2—and while it is not propelled by scripted set pieces as cinematic as those in the competition, Bad Company 2’s narrative glistens. The characters in Bad Company 2—the redneck, the hippie pilot, the geek, the weathered sergeant—are profane, quirky and usually hilarious. By contrast, the characters in Modern Warfare 2 are somber, even dour. War is obviously serious business, but the characters in Bad Company 2 seem to be having a lot more fun.\textsuperscript{142}

In addition, Schiesel declares Battlefield: Bad Company 2’s combat scenarios more convincing as an actual “modern war zone” as opposed to the “chaotic arenas with people running all over the place looking out for themselves” in Modern Warfare 2.\textsuperscript{143}

Even in war games that do not tackle the battlefield of World War II, successful war video games are still measured not only by its content, but its game design and style. Moreover, the cinematic approach in gameplay adds to the video games appeal, whether it is set in the beaches of Normandy during World War II or in the rugged terrains of Afghanistan today.

Altogether, the question now becomes, why do Americans enjoy playing video games so, specifically FTPs, regardless of its context? Through the discussion of this chapter it became evident that video games were successful when it was a World War II themed game and likewise when it transitioned into more contemporary themes. According to a research study in “Behavioral Patterns of the Game Generation,” published in the book The Kids are Alright: How the Gamer Generation Is Changing the Workplace,” about 40.8% of frequent video gamer respondents, said that they play to do
things they can’t in real life. This becomes an important statistic in understanding why many Americans enjoy playing FPSs.

It can be inferred that since one cannot go back into history and experience events such as the Second World War, the next closest thing to come close to learning what it was like back then would be to play a video game like Call of Duty. Moreover, this idea of “doing things that you can’t in real life” becomes relevant in video games. In Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway those who aspire to be a leader can simulate being one by leading a task force into an environment that is highly cinematic and accelerating. Perhaps one who always wanted to be a fighter pilot can get at least a similar taste and sensation of being one through Medal of Honor: Airborne. Fundamentally, playing games with World War II as subject enables players to not only be entertained by the exhilarating experience of being in an immersive and highly engaging environment, but rather, allows players to go back to history and see for themselves what is it about World War II that makes it such an important subject even in today’s post-9/11 society.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This research examined the popular films and video games released in the recent years as part of the cosmos of popular American visual culture. Being presented to a post-9/11 audience, the representation of World War II in both movies and in video games had varying purposes, inspiration, influence, and responses. It provided a different lens for seeing and understanding the concepts of war, conflict, and patriotism.

The central question of this research was to answer the question of why World War II is an important subject in popular American visual culture after the events of 9/11. It was essential to begin by determining how World War II echoes in the collective American memory. World War II continues to be an important and cherished memory in American culture to this day because it was benchmarked as the “Good War,” the war that produced what Tom Brokaw calls as the *Greatest Generation*, and the war that continues to be a venue for looking back to a “usable past.” As a result, the Second World War was an event in American history that has been constantly used by politicians in recent years to garner support for the ongoing “war on terrorism.” To Kenneth O’Brien and Lynn Parsons, by looking back at the “Good War,” Americans are able to draw out moments of victory and pride. In relation, Robert Stroud’s concept of the “usable past” was seen to be highly applicable to the American experience of the Second World War.

Secondly, the impact of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on American culture and society were determined. The social issues that confronted American society because of these attacks were identified. It was discovered that because of 9/11 there was an
immediate need for Americans to redefine the meaning of American patriotism, a
demand to understand the role of the American government in a post-9/11 America, and a
renewed challenge from the studios of Hollywood of representing the concept of war and
terrorism to the newly shaped post-9/11 American audience.

By analyzing more recent works in the field of cinema and video games, this
research fundamentally made a connection between the post-9/11 contexts from which
these movies and video games were created, presented, and received with World War II
as its subject. Inquiries were made about the concept, treatment, and reception of these
varied works of art and new media. Subsequently, a comparative analysis was made to
decipher any trends the climate of post-9/11 America may have contributed to these
popular American art forms.

World War II Films

In the world of American cinema, four movies were evaluated. Flags of Our
Fathers, Letters from Iwo Jima, Valkyrie, and Inglourious Basterds were analyzed in
terms of how different they were presented as compared to the “Spielbergized” Saving
Private Ryan. Flags of Our Fathers was identified as the “anti-World War II movie.” In
turn, this movie about the power of images became pertinent to more contemporary social
issues resulting from the events of 9/11, such as the abominable photos from Abu Ghraib.
Accordingly, David Morris opens a whole new commentary about the contrast between
the Rosenthal photo at Mount Suribachi with the Abu Ghraib photos in Iraq. The
comparison between these two images suggested ideas of what it means to be an
American soldier. The Rosenthal photo of World War II, which has become a source of
national pride, starkly contrasted responses derived from the Abu Ghraib photos. David Morris becomes correct in stating that the variance of these images may be powerful indications of how a particular war will be remembered even through a single photograph. Clint Eastwood, however, through *Flags of Our Fathers*, reminds audiences that images are not always what they seem. Images, just like movies, can be used to mislead, manipulate, or influence ideas, thoughts, and perceptions about concepts of conflict and war. Ironically, *Flags of Our Fathers* makes clear the similarities of how efficacious images can be especially in “defining American and her wars.”

After Eastwood showed a nebulous World War II story in *Flags of Our Fathers*, which was totally disparate from the conventional World War II American movie, *Letters from Iwo Jima* was a movie that tellingly humanized the Japanese. Through Kent Jones’ analysis on the movie, it was determined that the movie has appealed to many American audiences because of how Eastwood portrayed the main characters. Even if the characters were America’s enemy during the Second World War, Eastwood successfully presented them as likeable personalities. Altogether, the movie’s success can be attributed to Eastwood’s effective depiction of the goodness of human nature in moments of great stress, tragedy, and conflict. These factors made *Letters from Iwo Jima* a painstakingly inspiring movie that will continue to change the way the Second World War was perceived especially from the side of the Americans. The surprising success of the movie that successfully humanizes the enemy completely shifts attitudes not only about the Second World War, but about human conflict in general.
The success in the box office of *Letters from Iwo Jima* compared to *Flags of Our Fathers* could be attributed to the general emotional response one would get from watching the film. Though both movies deal with the bleak and desolate reality of war, specifically during World War II, *Letters from Iwo Jima* elevates the mood through the characters' heroism. On the other hand, the emphasis on the post-traumatic stress of the soldiers depicted in *Flags of Our Fathers*, becomes a source of despondency, especially from an American audience, learning the painful and hard truth behind the most-beloved World War II image taken at Mount Suribachi.

*Valkyrie*, on the other hand, showed a German side to the Second World War. Centering on the character of Claus von Stauffenberg, this “Mission: Impossible with Nazis” unveiled the unfamiliar story of a Nazi official who attempted to assassinate Hitler. *Valkyrie*, a movie set in Germany with characters playing lives based on true German individuals during World War II, differed from *Letters from Iwo Jima*. *Letters from Iwo Jima* was presented in Japanese with English subtitles. In *Valkyrie*, accents and languages used were completely disregarded by the director, Bryan Singer. There were varying accents all through out the movie. Some characters spoke such eloquent English with very distinct British accents; others had good English with thick American accents, while there were a few who spoke awkward English with German accents. This critical choice of Singer raises several contentions about *Valkyrie* in the context of presenting World War II as a subject to an American audience. Even if the story revolved around the story of German, Stauffenberg, and the political tension within the Nazi regime, *Valkyrie*, was a very American film. It seemed as if it was no accident that the heroic protagonist
was someone with such an explicit unfiltered American accent. There is still a possibility, however, that the varying accents may have just been out of negligence on the filmmaker’s part. Maybe this was a detail that was not of great significance to the filmmakers upon creating this suspense-thriller movie. Regardless of the intention or disregard, this thrilling movie entertained a lot of movie goers.

Differing from *Valkyrie* was *Inglourious Basterds*, which was not only a movie about the power of movies, but it was a movie about the impact of language and accents in a time of great animosity, such as World War II. It almost seemed as if *Inglourious Basterds* had suddenly become an artistic response to Singer’s *Valkyrie*. Similarly, *Inglourious Basterds*, was a movie revolving in some way with a plot to assassinate Hitler and bring the Third Reich down. *Inglourious Basterds*, however, among the three other movies discussed in this research was definitely the most enjoyable to watch despite the detestable scenes of the Basterds scalping the Nazis. In Quentin Tarantino’s words, it was clear why he said that this movie just “ain’t your daddy’s World War II movie.”

Contrary to *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, and *Valkyrie*, which were films based on true events, *Inglourious Basterds* serves as proof that a movie can still be a World War II movie even if it contains fictional character. Perhaps this is another reason why the movie was an amusing ride of entertainment. There was no intention to give special attention to very accurate historical fact. Much importance was directed towards getting a specific emotional response from the viewer of *Inglourious*
Basterds, which was a rollercoaster ride in itself. As noted by Anthony Breznican, the movie just suddenly becomes hilarious during its most bizarre moments.

Collectively, all four movies notably differed from the conventions set by Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan. Therefore, did this deviation from what is considered as the “classic World War II movie,” have anything to do with the events of 9/11? Through an examination of these four films, it was gathered that these films were not direct responses to the attacks of 9/11, but rather, we artistic responses to tackle the issue of war in a way that has never been done before. By using World War II as the backdrop of these artistic responses by the filmmakers, they have created works that open plenty of room for debate, agitation, and even controversy to an audience wearing post-9/11 lenses to view them.

Perhaps World War II seems to be such a convenient yet effective subject to dig deeper into the many political, social, and emotional facets of war. The Second World War made such a profound impact to humanity, since it was a war that involved the world. Appropriately, Maria Puente has a strong proposition in stating that “World War II never dies. It doesn’t even fade away. It lives forever in the creative fields of Hollywood.”1 Being an eternal subject for filmmakers, the four movies discussed in this research have artistic reasons for wanting to dissect the last “Good War.” By doing so, the movies introduce audiences to abstruse questions about World War II that have rarely, if never, been asked before. As Robert Thompson, a professor at Syracuse University says, “Time has passed, we’ve got perspective on what happened, and now we
can go back and examine the vast changes in American identity that can be traced to the postwar period.”²

Looking back at the Second World War with various perspectives presented in movies like *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Valkyrie*, and even *Inglourious Basterds*, can World War II still be called a “Good War?” It seems that filmmakers such as Eastwood are not only reflecting on the implications and the imprint World War II have in American culture, but rather how moments of war brings about different meanings about what it is to be American in critical times of heightened anxiety. In *Flags of Our Fathers*, there is a moral question about the role of the government in instilling feelings of patriotism among its people. As presented in the movie, political support from Americans was gained through propaganda and deception through the images the public saw. Likewise, the movie *Inglourious Basterds* presented a similar concept on the significance of visual culture in shaping public perception, specifically about war. Tarantino emphasize the power of images and its ability to mold social values and beliefs. Evidently, the movies discussed in this research are reminders about the deluding capacity of visual culture to penetrate the minds of an audience, shaken by the obscurity of war.

*Avatar and The Hurt Locker*

In the conditions of the post-9/11 American society, the back drop of World War II is not the only means by which artistic commentaries can be made on the conception of war. James Cameron’s most recent movie, *Avatar*, a science-fiction film that grapples
with obvious metaphors of military invasions and meaning of democracy with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan was a tremendous hit in the movie theaters. Moreover, this science-fiction film set astonishing records. It made a record of “$2.3 billion in worldwide box office” just in the few months of its initial release. Its immense popularity was because of the many applicable questions it asked in reference to modern issues. A. O. Scott in “Turncoats Who Become Heroes” notes these pressing puzzles about the underlying meaning of Avatar, “Is it supposed to be about Iraq, Vietnam? Global warming?” Moreover, is the character of Jake Sully “anti-American, anti-capitalist, eco-extremist?” Apparently, the multitude of questions Avatar ignited through the many issues presented in the film was a source of its popularity among American audiences. However, one must not dismiss the technological prowess that Cameron utilized in shooting the film. This 3-dimensional digital breakthrough in cinema will very much influence the way movies will be filmed, edited, and viewed in the future. Without question, this will ultimately change the way audiences will perceive the reality. Likewise, this will greatly modify the way audiences will react intellectually and emotionally. Antithetical to the more obvious “anti-war” messages of Avatar, Brian Johnson presents a different view on Kathryn Bigelow’s The Hurt Locker. To Johnson, the Oscar winning movie, which beat Avatar in winning Best Picture, more blatantly presents the soldier’s experience in Iraq while not being “explicitly anti-war.” The movie’s subtlety in injecting questions about the conditions in Iraq still effectively stimulates the American audience to examine either the larger picture of America’s place in global
politics in an age of terrorism, or the confined, yet oftentimes more important questions about life.

It seems that regardless of the theme, it may be that of the Second World War, the imaginary world of Pandora, or the streets of a post-invasion Baghdad, American audiences formulate thought provoking inquiries about the importance of the movie to current political and social conditions. Even if the artistic intentions of the filmmakers are not completely transparent, audiences are drawn to symbolism, storylines, and the characters as they mirror the universal experience of human existence.

Through this research it was deduced that movies are not the only venue from which stories can be told. Video games, an extremely powerful interactive media and swiftly growing art form, have not fallen back in captivating the American consumer. Like movies, video games has the capability to immerse an individual into an experience, which depending on the level of engagement, will lead to a stimulation of senses and thought. In the process, video games have become vital in representing the concept of war, while providing entertainment and advances in technology.

*The Digital Playground*

In the field of video games, this research gave special attention to *Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor: Airborne*, and *Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway*. All three video games’ titles, ringing with patriotism, were beacons in the video game industry for introducing cutting-edge gameplaying features. James Campbell’s argument that World War II games, most especially those released in the 1990s, aimed to extract explicitly from World War II movies, such as the treasured movie, *Saving Private Ryan*. This
observation became evident as these three video games were analyzed and evaluated in terms of its main story, setting, and treatment.

Likewise, it was also determined that World War II was an appealing venue for game developers. The World War II setting served as a digital playground to experiment in game design, specifically in first-person shooting games. After all, capitalizing on America’s success during the Second World War was an attractive selling point for game developers. *Call of Duty, Medal of Honor: Airborne, and Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway* not only provided the player with sometimes-factual historical details about weaponry, war tactics, and aircraft, but also contributed to a special understanding of what it could mean to be a “hero” during the Second World War. Whether it means risking life in a battlefield of gunfire and bombs exploding, or overcoming the emotional toll as a squad leader, these are situations a player is confronted with. The reality that not all military operations go as planned, which can painfully result in the loss of life of a comrade, is realized.

Given the violent nature of FPS games, especially of games with military themes as its composition, is it still possible to classify a game from this group as an “anti-war” video game? Perhaps the answer lies on the emotional, social, and political response one may garner upon playing a certain game. In *Brothers in Arms: Hell’s Highway*, the game dedicates extra time and features for the players to be in tune with the personality, the character, and the emotions of Staff Sgt. Matt Baker. The deaths of soldiers in your team, having that emotional connection with Baker and in turn with the player, makes the game more than just a “shooting game.” The people who are shot and die in the game are not
just characters that made you lose points, but rather are characters whose life depended on your decisions as a leader. Whether this emotional factor and thought provoking circumstances are legitimate grounds for classifying a video game as “anti-war” has yet to be verified. However, the recent shifts of originally World War II video games towards narratives and settings placed in more contemporary contexts leads one to question why there has been such a significant change.

In the Fall of 2010, yet another World War II game will undergo metamorphosis. Medal of Honor will be added to list of World War II series games shifting to the modern warfare video game genre. Even with the proven economical return game developers have received from the popularity of several World War II games, why was there a need to modify the theme within the video game? Perhaps the social values that confront American society given the events of 9/11 can be best dealt with by immersion within contemporary contexts as well, leading to the video games added appeal to the video game market.

The World War II Genre Fatigue Syndrome

By looking at these latest developments in film and video games, the question no longer is, “Why is World War II an important subject in popular American visual culture after the events of 9/11?” Suddenly, the contention becomes “Is there a World War II-genre fatigue in today’s popular American visual culture?”

Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds bestows hope in the film industry that World War II can still be a “usable” subject. Though Inglourious Basterds was more of a movie about movies than it was a war movie, it still showcases how the theme of World
War II is still a universal subject, pervasive to any issue, topic, or theme in filmmaking. The Second World War’s complexity, as it impacted the entire world in the conflict, is simply an endless domain artists can constantly look back to draw conclusions about war, death, and human behavior.

In 2006, Niall Ferguson in his article “How to Win a War” emphasized, “There’s never been a more important time for people to play World War II games.” Does this hold true even today? As long as politicians continue to use, and most likely will apply the rhetoric of World War II to garner political support from Americans for ongoing wars and wars-to-be, maybe video game developers will continue to make games centered on World War II as well. By doing so, players can understand how complex the “Good War” was and any type of war, for that matter. Even with FPS games, the emotional toll of the portrayed soldiers in the video game story is still somewhat inherently represented.

With the rapidly advancing technology, the immersion into a simulated war experience will come even closer to reality. Even with the limitations video games have in closely depicting reality, it will still be source of the learning process for generations to come on how the Second World War was more than simply being a conflict against “good” and “evil.” Besides, as presented in this research, FPSs are more than solely killing the enemy.

Going back to the question of whether there is World War II-genre fatigue in popular American visual culture, Tom Hanks is definitely one who would keep the subject alive. His picture on the front-cover of Time Magazine in March 2010, “The
World According to Tom,” was prelude to the airing of the HBO mini-series, *The Pacific*, another World War II themed film.\(^9\)

*Band of Brothers*, HBO’s best-selling DVD to date, began airing two days before 9/11; *The Pacific*, his new 10-hour epic about the Pacific theater in World War II, plays out against a very different backdrop, when the country is weary of war and American exceptionalism is a much tougher sell. World War II in the European theater was a case of massive armies arrayed against an unambiguous evil. The Pacific war was mainly fought by isolated groups of men and was overlaid by a sense that our foes were fundamentally different from us. In that sense, the war in the Pacific bears a closer relation to the complex war on terrorism the U.S. is waging now, making the new series a trickier prospect but one with potential for more depth and resonance.\(^10\)

To Douglas Brinkley, Hanks, because of *Band of Brothers* and *Saving Private Ryan*, has “a Tom Brokaw-like spokesperson for the greatest generation.”\(^11\) His work has somehow made him into “America’s highest-profile professor.”\(^12\) According to Brinkley, “He’s a man on a mission to make our back pages come alive, to keep overhauling the history we know and, in the process, get us to understand and not just the past but the choices we make today.”\(^13\) In this sense, Hanks is evidence to show that there is still a lot to be learned from the Second World War as it applies to the current post-9/11 world.

*From WWII in HD to WWII in 3D*

The History Channel recently premiered a stunning documentary *WWII in HD* during the Veterans Day weekend.\(^14\) The documentary boasted never-before seen World War II footage in color.\(^15\) Gary Strauss calls this documentary one for “military buffs thirsting for fresh looks at current and past conflicts.”\(^16\) In this unique documentary, *WWII in HD* is shown in five parts, a selected slice from 3,000 archived film, which were
resurrected for television, “restored and converted,” for viewers to see in all high-definition glory.\textsuperscript{17}

This is contrary to the World War II experience created by Ken Burns in his PBS documentary, \textit{The War}. Seeing the war in color and in high-definition certainly changes our emotional response to the events of the Second World War. In some ways, it feels as if some artists in popular American visual culture have been gradually attempting to bring audiences and video game players closer to the Second World War experience of “being there” as closely as possible. In the process of doing so, the visual culture heavily relies on the advancement of technology to make artistic statements, ultimately leading to an ever-changing emotional and even physical experience.

In the field of video games, World War II has been used as the historical and digital playground for innovating techniques and features in gameplaying. Now that video gaming has reached cinematic and stunningly realistic heights, perhaps World War II will serve as a venue for testing technological innovations in television and cinema. Being an event of action, drama, and suspense with an unending story of deeply profound lessons, its universal appeal will undeniably continue to linger for generations to come. Artists will continue to try to bring audiences closer and closer to the actual World War II experience, physically, emotionally, or intellectually. It wouldn’t be a surprise when the Second World War can be experienced, maybe not only in HD, but even this time as a \textit{WWII in 3D}.  

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The Future of World War II Today

What place does World War II have in the future of popular American visual culture? Film historian Marc Wanamaker said, “People don’t want to watch a movie about a war they’re still living through.”¹⁸ If what Wanamaker said is true, then the subject of World War II will continue to carry on in popular American culture. This research has proven that indeed the visual legacy of World War II is continuing to make its trail not only on the big screen, the video game consoles, but also in television sets in your living room. It seems that there will always be a return to the Second World War to reflect, to ponder, and to contemplate on the intricacy and absurdity of human conflict.
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CHAPTER 2


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