

SCRIPTING MEMORY: HOLLYWOOD, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND
PUBLIC MEMORY IN WWII

by

Jason Jonathan Rivas, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Nancy K. Berlage, Chair

Ellen D. Tillman

Angela F. Murphy

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Blanca, for never giving up on me. Your eagle finally found his wings.

To my fiancée, Courtney Stevens, for being the Linda to my Paul McCartney. Ram on.

To every high school dropout with a dream. We are more than just a statistic. I'm rooting for you.

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I am what I am; you can like it or love it.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Memory: the power or process of reproducing or recalling what has been learned and retained, especially through associative mechanisms; the time within which past events can be or are remembered.¹

Memories do not develop in a vacuum. They are inspired to fruition by outside events that affect our senses. Without a relationship with our senses, long term memories cannot form. Long-term memories are selective because they are tied to a specific reason why they are remembered, whether it be repetition, an association to another memory, motivation to remember something, or a connection to an emotion.

A person or group does not remember an experience until they are motivated to tapping and reinterpreting a memory through contemporary lenses. Most important to note is that the human brain does not remember a particular memory but creates a story of said memory for one to follow. In some ways, a brain is similar to a film studio in that it crafts a compelling story for audiences to follow. There is no story to remember without the influence of emotions and senses.

Take, for instance, the memory of the “Good War.” What does one associate with that oxymoronic expression? Perhaps World War II best represents many of the characteristics of a “good war” in many Americans' memories looking back on American conflicts during the 20th and early 21st centuries. The reasons for war were clear cut and which side represented "good" and "bad" to the American public. The same could not be said for various other American conflicts. World War I, for instance, the American entrance involved developing political issues between the isolated United States and

¹ “Memory,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/memory>.

Europe that ended with the former rebuking a global alliance in favor of a “return to normalcy.”² After WWII, the democratic United States and the socialist Soviet Union became the dominant political states on Earth. The differing political ideologies of both led to the Cold War, in which both sides indirectly fought the other through a series of proxy wars. The Korean and Vietnamese conflicts are, perhaps, the best-known proxy wars during the period. The former ended with an armistice and no clear winner to this day. Simultaneously, the latter left a figurative “gash” across American society, physically remembered through a national memorial that “cuts” through the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The Gulf War provided Americans with a swift and decisive victory to remember that “healed” the wounds of failure left over from Vietnam's memories. However, the American-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq reopened those wounds through controversial reasonings for said invasions and elongated military initiatives that continue to influence memories, still formulating, in Americans today.

The memory of WWII, though, does not carry the same sort of negative baggage. War came about because of a definitive truth: The Empire of Japan had attacked the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor, killing thousands of men. Men with countless families and friends back on American soil who felt the loss, as did an American government taken aback that another nation would challenge American Exceptionalism. The United States would declare war on Japan and Nazi Germany to enact revenge and stop a perceived threat to the American way of life. The United States and her allies won the war and then promoted their version of the event through various mainstream media outlets, including motion pictures. **This thesis aims to look at how various motion pictures produced**

² “Return to Normalcy” was the presidential campaign slogan of then-Senator Warren G. Harding, elected President in 1920.

during WWII aimed to reflect a particular version of the American war effort by creating an artificial memory.

Historians and scholars have noted the profound impact motion pictures have on Americans. Motion pictures provide the audiences with a simple and summarized version of world events that is easier to understand than a scholarly historical account. The general public may be hesitant to read a two-, three-, or four hundred plus page book concerning a historical event's intricacies. However, it may be more inclined to watch an abbreviated film version. These visual interpretations provide an extraordinary amount of data for public historians to examine, including the history of the medium, the relationship between the public and film, and, most importantly, the effects the film industry has had on public memory.

A popular subgenre within the motion picture industry is World War II films. Over 1,300 WWII films have been produced since the start of the war. However, why has this particular historical event become such an insatiable well for Hollywood to procure? There are many reasons why, but perhaps one of the most important are the countless stories that can be told of the millions affected by the political, economic, technological, and societal changes developed from the war. However, some stories are told from a biased perspective to provide more than a compelling story for the viewers to digest.³ In particular, government intervention during WWII has influenced the visual narratives of these films.

Propaganda is defined as the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the

³ Andrew Pulver, "Why Are We So Obsessed with Films about the Second World War?" The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 17, 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/17/why-so-obsessed-second-world-war-films>.

purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person; ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause.⁴ A good example of propaganda is motion pictures in that they tell a story from a particular point of view to elicit an emotional response from the audience. A past example can be found in the Office of War Information (OWI), a federal agency during WWII that played a central role in influencing the war's public opinion. The OWI established the Bureau of Motion Pictures, an agency tasked with influencing American films produced during the war. Their task was to guide films towards an accurate and complimentary interpretation of the federal government's war efforts while respecting filmmakers' desires to tell an independent and intriguing story, whether factually correct or not. Biases, whether artistic or political, sometimes influenced the final product in a film. **This thesis will examine how the federal government and Hollywood collaborated to construct a memory of WWII through motion pictures.** However, to research and analyze all governmental influence occurrences would require a comprehensive look at various WWII films produced during the war. Instead, this thesis will focus on how the federal government executed its work through three Hollywood motion pictures' filmmaking process. Their combined efforts influenced the collective memory of the war for the general public then and subsequent generations.

Memory and Filmmaking

“But I believe that the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society... that society causes the mind to transfigure the past...” –Maurice Halbwachs⁵

⁴ “Propaganda, Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda>.

⁵ Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

Collective memory, sometimes referred to as public memory, is shared memories and understandings of past events by a collective group of people. The concept was initially theorized by Maurice Halbwachs, considered by many in the sociological world as the founding father of social memory studies. Halbwachs believed that our past is comprised of two elements: memories that are easily accessible and remembered by others and memories that are only accessible to one individual and recalled through triggered emotions. Collective memory is dependent on individuals within a social group remembering events, people, and places. To remember is to tie oneself to the collective framework of a social group. As such, memories are acquired, recalled, recognized, and located through social interactions. The social group is united in physical or emotional form, whether through a physical location, ethnicity, geopolitical ideologies, or emotional experiences. This form of memory can also be passed on to others and constructed through emotions.⁶

In some ways, a memory of an event can be more potent than a scholarly historical interpretation of said event because of the emotional ties it has with its public. Halbwachs argued that this is because collective memory differs from history in at least two respects. One is that memory is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not artificial. The memory retains only what still lives in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive. This is because collective memory is not broken up into arbitrary periods like history, to note a change between historical periods. Memories play out like a feature film in that there are acts within a continuous story of the past. There

⁶ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press), 2006.

Dr. Nancy Berlage, "Notes from Seminar," Class lecture, Public Memory and History from Texas State University, San Marcos, TX, January-April, 2018.

are no footnotes to primary and secondary sources like there are in historical analysis; merely, emotions are the sources for memory.⁷

Collective memories may be altered to form a new form of remembrance for all to appreciate. The collective memory of a historical event may vary across different social groups, but the power of media can create a prosthetic memory from various collective memories. Allison Landsberg argued that a prosthetic memory is an “inauthentic” memory created through a popular media form that allows different groups of people to experience a memory that was once exclusive to a particular culture. Benedict Anderson built on this idea and noted that today's mass media could promote a collective memory beyond its cultural, religious, and class borders to encompass a larger group of people across different social spaces, practices, and beliefs. Thus, they create "imagined communities" who have experienced a memory of an event, based on a media's interpretation of it. The changes are invisible and hardly noticeable because the interpretation's success is based on the emotional connections made between the memory and the viewer.

Memory can also be commodified to allow a collective past, previously exclusive to one particular group, to be available to those willing to pay. Motion pictures concerning WWII illustrate this, as filmmakers interpret the historical event's collective memories for the masses. The book *Movie Lot to Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes to War and Prepares for the Future*, published in 1945, represents one of the earliest studies on depicting WWII in film. It examines how Hollywood changed its approach to filmmaking to serve the war effort. The narrative is told visually through photos of the

⁷ Dr. Berlage lecture

various Hollywood actors and servicepeople supporting the war effort. This approach is noteworthy for the thesis' argument in that the book illustrates how memory can be created through visuals and not through an individual or group's experience.⁸

Another approach to understanding how films use themes to produce a particular narrative can be found in Kathryn Kane's dissertation-turned-book, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II*. Her work looks into how Hollywood war films during WWII exemplifies a particular subgenre of film known as the Combat genre. Kane's work proved beneficial for the thesis. It uses case studies based on overarching themes shared by six combat films to argue the shared setting, plot, and character dynamics that link the films together within the subgenre. In particular, the film *Bataan* is examined in both Kane's work and within this thesis.⁹

Another essential piece of literature is Garth Jowett's *Film: The Democratic Art*. Initially a dissertation, Jowett expanded upon his academic work in developing this book for the American Film Institute.¹⁰ His work provides a social history of films and the American industry that developed from the late 19th century into the 1970s. Jowett focused his writing on the social aspects developing around films. Important topics for the thesis include censorship and the film industry during WWII. Primary sources unavailable for the thesis could be found in this secondary source, including the number of films produced during WWII and the OWI work.¹¹

⁸ *Movie Lot to Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes to War and Prepares for the Future*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1945).

⁹ Kathryn R. Kane, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Established in 1967, the American Film Institute is the nation's nonprofit organization dedicated to educating and inspiring artists and audiences through initiatives that champion the past, present, and future of the moving image.

"Home Page," American Film Institute, (American Film Institute), <https://www.afi.com/>.

¹¹ Garth S. Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art*, (Boston, MA: Focal Press, 1985).

The next two books are perhaps the most important secondary sources concerning film history. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black's *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* represents a deep dive into the socio, economic, and political discussion occurring behind the scenes in Hollywood. Koppes and Black's research informs readers of Hollywood executives' early hesitation to produced films concerning the European conflict and their full commitment to the American effort after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The book elaborates on the complicated relationship between Hollywood and the federal government, particularly the Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures' roles. Koppes and Black's methodology and bibliography provided a roadmap for the approach of the thesis.¹²

The second important piece of literature, *Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century America Through Films*, provides a textbook-style historical discussion of films and American society. Edited by Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts, the book provides an overview of films in relation to the social movements and trends of various periods. The book's strength is in its presentation of essays and primary source documents that provide a social commentary with the historical narrative. It is within this textbook for which the seeds of the thesis were first cultivated. It contains an essay concerning the propaganda elements of *Casablanca*, followed by a reproduction of the Bureau of Motion Pictures report over the film. The primary source document provided the connection between the influence of the Bureau and the motion picture industry in crafting an artificial memory of WWII.¹³

¹² Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1987).

¹³ Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts, *Hollywood's America Twentieth-Century America through Film*, (Chichester, Great Britain: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

Finally, John Bodnar's *The "Good War" in American Memory* provides a new interpretation of WWII's public memory for researchers and readers. Bodnar argues that "Americans struggled to craft both an understanding of World War II while it was being fought and a remembrance of the war after it ended."¹⁴ The "official" narrative of WWII sometimes runs parallel to the memories of those who served or experienced the war effort. The American memory of WWII as the "good war" is contested by examining war letters, monuments, personal and collective memories, and most relevant to the thesis, mass media outlets including motion pictures. Chapter five, entitled "Split Screen," delves into the feature films of the period, ranging from overt propaganda in favor of the American cause to films highlighting the emotional and physical effects of war on soldiers and veterans. Bodnar discusses the various roles films served in the war effort, essentially influencing how audiences remembered the war.

Additionally, a film's interpretation of the past is based on what the film producers and directors believe is best for their story. They often take liberties with the historical past through an "artistic license." Just as important, though, film productions interpret others' memories in such a way for them to be more socially, politically, and economically favorable for public consumption. After all, unlike academia, the film industry is a business that relies on profits to continue operating. Filmmakers are not bound to the standards of academia. The film industry is tied to what will serve their patron expectations, both general and political, such as their visual depictions of

¹⁴ John E. Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012), 1.

American life during the 1930s.¹⁵

1930's Hollywood

Motion pictures represent a form of mass media that appeals across social class boundaries. They were incredibly popular with the lower social classes as a trip to the cinema was perceived as an American social status. Films also appealed across economic classes. They became very popular with the lower classes, as films were affordable and offered people an avenue of escapism from their sometimes difficult and mundane lives during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The early 1930s presented an opportunity for filmmakers to use federal government policy as a means of storytelling. The film industry became energized by the 1932 presidential election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Once in office, he instituted his New Deal programs. FDR's political platform created a sense of optimism and hope among ordinary Americans. One such program was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which employed thousands of artists to produce various forms of media that instilled resilience and hope in their audience. Hollywood executives sensed this renewed optimism, and it seeped into the various films they were producing. For pennies on the dollar, cinemas provided Americans with an escape from the harsh realities of breadlines and unemployment plaguing the country.

Filmmakers tailored their films to push one of two ideas: escapism or reality. In escapism, genres such as musicals elicited hope among the lower classes that they could

¹⁵ Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Dr. Berlage lecture

rise from poverty through hard work and determination. Comedies also made light of the period's problematic social and political situations so that viewers could enjoy some relief from their realities. Westerns reemerged on the screen to create a revisionist history of "How the West was Won." They followed a formulaic plotline that included "violence, the oversimplification of good and evil, the hero as a rugged individual, [all] fused into larger, mythic themes of taming the frontier, curbing lawlessness, and forging a new nation."¹⁶ The western genre was useful in increasing box office appeal by mystifying the past at the expense of historical accuracy.

Reality-based films used the real-world issues of the Great Depression as backdrops for their stories. "Films in the early 1930s were full of these wronged heroes, who seemed as overwhelmed by forces outside their control as the down-at-heel punters watching them."¹⁷ It became a standard for many film studios to produce similar "rags-to-riches" films as their musical counterparts. One genre that benefitted from this new focus was heist and gangster films. These stories were fueled by a desire from audiences to see characters overcome the ill effects of the Depression through their means of survival. Narratives such as those mentioned above and fantasy and period films helped usher in the "Golden Age" of Hollywood.¹⁸

By the early 1930s, the Great Depression had affected most working-class Americans in some way. During this period, moviegoers sought relief from the political, economic struggles and anxieties of the Great Depression through comedies and

¹⁶ Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, 4th ed. (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993), 79

¹⁷ Paul Whittington, "How the Great Depression Inspired Hollywood's Golden Age," independent (Independent.ie, November 26, 2012), <https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/movies/how-the-great-depression-inspired-hollywoods-golden-age-26481978.html>.

¹⁸ "How the Great Depression Inspired Hollywood's Golden Age"

fantasies. Their upbeat plots inspired Americans to believe in a resolution for class conflicts and that success and bliss are attainable. Initially, numbers suggested the film industry was on the "sunny side of the street" regarding the Depression's effects. In 1930, an estimated 110 million Americans visited cinemas across the country. Incredibly, 60-80 million Americans still attended picture shows across the country when the economy bottomed out in 1933.¹⁹

The film business seemed to have benefitted from the optimism created from FDR's New Deal, despite the future financial difficulties that eventually befell the industry. The government program had provided an economic "Band-Aid" of relief for many Americans who, in turn, would scrounge up the 27 cents necessary for a trip to the cinema, away from the realities of 1930s America.²⁰

In hindsight, one could perceive the New Deal as the first instance in which the federal government and Hollywood, indirectly, willingly joined forces to influence American behavior. After the Empire of Japan launched its surprise attack on the American naval base in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941—Roosevelt called it "A day which will live in infamy"—a more direct, official relationship developed. As the smoke cleared, the federal government under President Roosevelt looked to the film industry for support. Able and willing, Hollywood producers and filmmakers formed an uneasy yet productive alliance to influence public opinion for the war, and in so doing, create a unique public memory.

This thesis will argue how the federal government and the U.S. film industry collaborated through the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures to incorporate pro-war

¹⁹ Mintz and Roberts 72, 75

²⁰ "How the Great Depression Inspired Hollywood's Golden Age"

propaganda into feature films. In doing so, these films produced a unique, artificial memory of WWII. However, this was not the first time the federal government looked to motion pictures to influence public opinion. Chapter one focuses on the initial attempts to build collaboration between the federal government and Hollywood under President Woodrow Wilson's leadership during WWI and how that affected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's efforts in the lead up to WWII. The first half of chapter one describes the Wilson Administration's attempts to galvanize public support for U.S. entry into WWI. His executive order to create the Committee of Public Information (CPI) initiated an uneasy relationship between the film industry and the federal government. The CPI's blatant attempts in influencing public opinion through overt propaganda and censorship, as well as the Wilson Administration's infringement of civil liberties, led to the public's rejection of WWI as a "good war." The chapter then discusses how WWI further developed a negative memory through the Senate Munitions Committee's accusation of why the United States joined the war. Afterward, another discussion concerning the Interstate Commerce Commission and its accusation of the U.S. film industry attempting to influence public opinion concerning Nazi aggression in Europe through its films. The chapter also explains why Roosevelt decided to establish the Office of War Information and Bureau of Motion Pictures. Roosevelt, too, believed in the power of influencing public opinion through motion pictures. The federal agencies' establishment allowed for an official relationship between the film industry to develop, albeit one based on volunteerism. It also provided the uneasiness Hollywood insiders felt about their role during the war through *Variety*, a film industry's trade publication. The chapter concludes with why, in the U.S. Government's opinion, the country fought in WWII and how that

message should be conveyed in films.

Chapter two breaks down the thesis's central argument: the federal government and the film industry worked together to influence WWII's public memory through feature films. They achieved this initiative through the guidance of "the Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry" The manual provided a roadmap for how Hollywood filmmakers should present the American side of WWII in their films through six themes. Roosevelt encouraged that a relationship between his administration and Hollywood be based on "volunteerism." The government provided war information and updates to film studios to use in their films if they decided to do so. The Bureau of Motion Pictures became the "in-between" agency for Hollywood and the federal government, providing the manual to film studios and providing filmmakers suggestions through script and film reviews.

The three case studies demonstrate how filmmakers produced their films with pro-war rhetoric infused into the stories. Each film represents a poignant period, as well. The first, *Mrs. Miniver*, represents one of Hollywood's earliest efforts at providing pro-war commentary to American audiences through its depiction of a British middle-class family. The second, *Casablanca*, represents perhaps the ideal Hollywood production in the eyes of the Bureau. Its simple yet effective story, infused with pro-war propaganda, created a powerful memory of the war for audiences to view. Finally, *Bataan* represents the federal government's idyllic view of the war, one presented as a "peoples' war." The film features a cast representative of the people living in the United States and how their unity represents why the American fight is a "good war."

Chapter three shows the success of the Bureau of Motion Pictures in shaping

memory. First, it documents the long reach and influence of the Bureau over Hollywood. Second, it shows the Bureau's success in its efforts by documenting the large box office receipts and the positive critical reviews of each of the three films. The information provided underscores each film's abilities to reach large audiences while also providing well-received stories that supported the American war effort. Third, the chapter illustrates how President Roosevelt and the BMP head Lowell Mellett recognized the effectiveness of motion pictures during two Academy Awards ceremonies, the pinnacle of success for filmmakers. The chapter concludes with a summary of the behind-the-scenes controversies and issues that plagued the Bureau, ultimately leading to its demise. The work of the Bureau, however, continued under a different federal agency. Despite its abbreviated existence, **the Bureau was extremely effective in shaping memory.**

II. CHAPTER ONE

The concept of history relies on the act of a given public's recording of the past as accurately as it was. However, public memory consists of recollections of one's past through the lens of a given public. An example of the two concepts contrasting a historical event occurs during World War I. Renowned British writer H.G. Wells wrote a series of articles advocating why Great Britain must fight in the Great War. The first, entitled *The War that Will End the War*, ran in *The Daily News and Leader* in August 1914. By 1918, he had compiled his articles into the collection, *The Fourth Year*, and shortened the title of the original article into *The War to End War*. Wells envisioned the phrase represented his optimism of a new world without “capitalist military civilization[s]” and reformed social world order. During the war years, the phrase caught on in Britain because of Wells’ status as a celebrated writer.²¹

That is the history of the phrase, but not the public memory of it. President Woodrow Wilson also used the phrase. However, he only said it once, but his unique role as chief executive and “spokesman” for the United States led to many Americans believing he coined the term. Although Wells created the phrase, Wilson's use of it when advocating for the U.S. to enter the foreign conflict to “make the world safe for democracy” made it a public memory many Americans attribute to his presidency.²² His usage of the catchphrase also made it an official memory of WWI in the American public's minds. That is the memory of the phrase, at odds with its exact origin.

The power to create and shape an official memory that the example above

²¹ Bertrand Russell and Richard A. Rempel, *Prophecy and Dissent, 1914-16*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 10.

²² Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99.

illustrates is the topic of this chapter. Specifically, the chapter shows how the federal government and President Franklin D. Roosevelt worked to shape the official imagery and memory of World War II by harnessing the power of the motion picture industry. Roosevelt no doubt drew lessons from President Woodrow Wilsons, who sought to manufacture public opinion during WWI. Thus, the chapter begins by analyzing those earlier efforts. In doing so, the chapter offers a crucial backstory to Roosevelt's novel approach to shaping memory. The chapter discusses some of the rhetoric that the Wilson Administration used to craft a selective public memory of WWI because Roosevelt also draw on some of the same rhetoric. The Wilson Administration's overreach of power and disregard of civil liberties provided a lesson that any approach to crafting public memory regarding WWII should be a collaborative one. The chapter addresses how the Nye Committee's investigation into WWI during the late 1930s helped solidify public memory of WWI as a bad war, as well as how the 1941 Senate examination of the film industry sought to sustain isolationist sentiment. Roosevelt would push against these efforts by shaping public imagery and memory, but he would use a different, more collaborative approach than had Wilson.

President Roosevelt sought to shape the imagery and memory of WWII primarily through the Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures under the principle of voluntarism. He established these federal agencies in 1941 to support a film industry ready and willing to serve the country during the war. Roosevelt believed that the American people would not respond positively to overt government propaganda, nor would Hollywood filmmakers respond well to government censorship. Instead, he asked for participation based on "volunteerism." This approach

respected the film industry's autonomy even while the federal government urged filmmakers to inject pro-war information into their feature films. In promoting specific attitudes and information, together the federal government and Hollywood film industry constructed a unique artificial perception, and ultimately, artificial memory of the war effort.

Persuasion, Memory, and World War I

President Woodrow Wilson's efforts to create support among Americans for WWI serves as an earlier example of the sort of action the Roosevelt administration would undertake to create solid support for WWII. World War I commenced in Europe on July 28, 1914, after hostilities between Austria-Hungary and Serbia forced European alliances to declare war on each other. It was not clear that the U.S. President would ever need to persuade his nation to support the war. For almost three years, the United States asserted neutrality and Americans were guided by the principle of isolationism. Moreover, President Woodrow Wilson's successful presidential reelection campaign of 1916 even featured the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Over time, though, President Wilson indirectly aligned the nation to Britain and her allies through economic and military aid. After a series of events related to German belligerence, the United States eventually entered WWI in 1918. It assumed the mantle of a nation serving as a protector of democracy, at home and abroad, against perceived foreign threats. However, challenges lay ahead for Wilson as public support for the war split along ethnic, political, and ideological identities. Many immigrants and their offspring aligned with their homelands' reasons for war rather than their adopted nation's reason to stay out. Additionally, Wilson had established the country's official stance toward the European

conflict as neutral in 1914, creating a public relations challenge for Wilson three years later.²³ According to eminent historian David M. Kennedy, “More than any other belligerent nation, the Wilson administration was compelled to cultivate—even to manufacture—public opinion favorable to the war effort.”²⁴ **In other words, President Wilson believed he needed a unified country behind him and sought to influence the public support for his war.**

Wilson turned to the power of the federal government to generate public support, an action Roosevelt would also later take. Wilson’s established via Executive Order the Committee on Public Information (CPI), also known as the Creel Commission.²⁵ The federal agency oversaw government propaganda efforts in support of American entry into the war. George Creel headed the committee that used various mediums to inform the general public of the American war effort in a positive manner. Creel initially derided the use of propaganda to influence public opinion. He believed the American people could develop an informed opinion of support for the war based on the agency's information.

Not long after its inception, the CPI switched from providing coverage of the war—primarily favorable—to creating propaganda that attempted to blatantly coerce as

²³ David M. Kennedy’s classic study is *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 1980, 46.

²⁴ Ibid, pg. 46.

²⁵ The Executive Order read as: “I hereby create a Committee on Public Information, to be composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and a civilian who shall be charged with the executive direction of the Committee.”

“As Civilian Chairman of this Committee, I appoint Mr. George Creel. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Navy are authorized each to detail an officer or officers to the work of the Committee.”

Woodrow Wilson, “Executive Order 2594-Creating Committee on Public Information,” Executive Order 2594-Creating Committee on Public Information | The American Presidency Project (The University of California-Santa Barbara, April 13, 1917), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-2594-creating-committee-public-information>.

many Americans as possible to favor U.S. military intervention. The CPI used films in particular to create a new sense of the war. Initially, the committee promoted upbeat and idealistic films, such as *Pershing's Crusaders* (1918) and *Our Colored Fighters* (1918). As the war progressed, however, the committee began promoting derogatory movies, including *The Prussian Cur* and *The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin*. The latter, co-written, produced, and directed by Rupert Julian for Renowned Pictures, sought to encourage anti-German sentiment by dramatizing German atrocities committed during the war. This film and others aimed to portray the American cause as heroic compared to Germany's "barbaric" actions. But these negative portrayals contributed to increased tensions with German American communities. Anti-German sentiment crescendo in 1918 when a pro-America mob lynched a young German man in Illinois.²⁶

In addition to the CPI, the nation's legislative and legal systems also worked to ensure that American society supported the war. Congress passed the Espionage Act of 1917 and an amendment, the Sedition Act of 1918, during WWI. These acts criminalized anti-war protests and censored publications printing anti-war rhetoric, thereby ignoring Americans' civil liberties and social and political groups who were against the war. These acts were challenged in court and later appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1919 on three separate accounts. In each account, though, the court ruled against the plaintiffs despite perceived infringements on the public's First Amendment right to freedom of

²⁶ Kennedy, 60-2.

"Pershing's Crusaders [Motion Picture Film]." AGSL Digital Photo Archive – Europe, (The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agseurope/id/4151/>.

"Film of 'Our Colored Fighters' to Be Released," The African American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920. (The Ohio Historical Society), <http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/html/page9ca3.html?ID=7897>.

"The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin," IMDb, (IMDb.com), March 9, 1918, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0009252/>.

On the lynching, see "Over Here: World War I on the Home Front," Digital History, (The University of Houston). http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=2&psid=3478.

speech. In *Schenck v. the United States*, Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., coined the term “clear and present danger” in justifying the court’s decision to allow the suppression of free speech during wartime. According to Holmes, “when a nation is at war, many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its efforts that their utterance will not be endured.” In *Frohwerk v. the United States*, the court ruled against a German American’s right to freedom of the press; he had questioned the war and the legality of the draft that the federal government had implemented in 1917. Holmes argued that the First Amendment right created a liability for the U.S. military’s recruitment drives. *Debs v. the United States* featured a similar ruling against the socialist and labor union advocate Eugene V. Debs.²⁷

Each of these laws and court rulings, though, created negative consequences for Wilson’s post-war initiatives. By the end of the war, the CPI had disbursed 75 million pro-war messages and war bond advertisements across the nation, along with 75,000 “Four Minute Men” who sang pro-war messages in American theaters.²⁸ Although successful, the CPI’s work was questioned by progressives and some in the American media who believed that the committee infringed on American civil liberties and provided much misinformation to the American public. The Supreme Court’s rulings in favor of the federal government’s crackdown of public dissent alienated the very progressives who previously supported Wilson’s domestic and foreign policies. Historian David Kennedy provides keen insight in assessing the power of suppressive actions: “To speak up for immigrants or defend the rights of labor was to risk being persecuted for

²⁷ Kennedy, 84-6.

²⁸ Ibid, 61

“Over Here: World War I on the Home Front.”

disloyalty. And to criticize the course of the war, or to question American or Allied peace aims, was to risk outright prosecution for treason."²⁹ With a sizable block of voters alienated, the Democratic Party lost both chambers in Congress during the 1918 midterms. This set into motion the eventual failed ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, which many Republicans did not support because of the clause concerning the formation of the League of Nations. Ultimately Wilson was unsuccessful in uniting the nation behind his foreign and domestic war agendas. His failure left Americans with a bad memory of the war, which contributed to a return to isolationist rhetoric within American society and politics that would last for several decades.³⁰

As a member of Wilson's administration, Franklin Delano Roosevelt experienced Wilson's failures firsthand, but he also likely learned from them. In March 1913, Wilson had appointed Roosevelt as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In that capacity, Roosevelt had opportunity to observe Wilson's WWI policies while assisting with coordinating the American naval effort in Washington, D.C. Negative public perceptions about Wilson and WWI policies likely adversely affected Roosevelt's political fortunes in the short term, as he was unsuccessful in his bid for Vice-President in 1920. Yet, Roosevelt also seems to have learned from Wilson's mistakes. Later, as president, Roosevelt would take a much more subtle approach to his attempts to influence public opinion and ultimately memory of WWII.³¹

²⁹ Kennedy, 88-9.

³⁰ Kennedy, 88-92

"November 5 Election in Doubt," U.S. Senate: Art & History (U.S. Senate, December 12, 2019), https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Nov_5_Election_in_Doubt.htm.

"Over Here: World War I on the Home Front."

³¹ William E. Leuchtenburg, "Franklin D. Roosevelt: Life Before the Presidency," U.S. Presidents | Franklin D. Roosevelt, (Miller Center: University of Virginia, July 24, 2018), <https://millercenter.org/president/fdroosevelt/life-before-the-presidency>. FDR Biography, (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library & Museum), <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/fdr-biography>.

Fast forward to the 1930s and the Great Depression: a renewed interest in American intervention in WWI had developed on Capitol Hill. As another war loomed in Europe, Congress members continued to voice criticisms about the role the United States had taken during WWI. No doubt, public memory framing US participation in the war as a mistake helped sustain these criticisms. In 1934, the U.S. Senate established the Senate Munitions Committee, also known as the Nye Committee, to consider whether the ammunition industry should be nationalized. The inquiry was linked to reassessments about the US in WWI: the committee organized after widespread reports surfaced accusing armament manufacturers of unduly influencing U.S. foreign policy in the lead up to American intervention in WWI. The two-year investigation discovered financial strings between the U.S. and Great Britain. The committee reported that the U.S. had invested ten times more capital in Great Britain (\$2.3 billion) than Germany (\$27 million) during the war. The committee found that a significant portion of the American public and government representatives believed the country was misled and that there were ulterior motives for the American war effort. In the committee's eyes, the U.S. entered WWI to ensure the nation's financial investments towards Great Britain's war effort would not be lost, under the pretense of protecting democracy. The committee's report bolstered general support for American isolationism rather than convincing Americans to support a nationalized arms industry. Ultimately, the Nye report helped solidify a memory of WWI characterized by disillusionment. Congress passed a series of Neutrality Acts in the late 1930s to prevent direct U.S. military involvement in future international affairs.³²

³² ““Merchants of Death,”” U.S. Senate: "Merchants of Death" (U.S. Senate, August 20, 2019), https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/merchants_of_death.htm)

The Nye report, with the negative memory of WWI that it shaped, was a blow to President Roosevelt's efforts in the late 1930s to prepare the U.S. to respond to political and military uncertainties developing in Europe. President Roosevelt increasingly believed that war with Nazi Germany was imminent for the United States, and he sought to prepare the country. But the American public was still wary of international involvement after the U.S.'s polarizing involvement in World War I. For some, the war's memory only highlighted the undercutting of civil liberties at home that the Wilson administration had promoted through propaganda, censorship, and unjust laws. The Nye Committee's conclusions further influenced the American memory of WWI as an avoidable engagement that served to benefit those economically invested in war while compromising peace and democracy at home. By early 1941, however, war seemed unavoidable. Nazi Germany had conquered most of Europe except for Great Britain. If Britain were to fall, the U.S. would lose its closest ally and the last buffer between the nation and the Nazi threat. Nevertheless, WWI's public memory continued to loom large over pre-war foreign policy, though, dampening any potential public support in favor of military intervention abroad.

Roosevelt used the medium of radio to engage in a concerted effort to successfully stoke public support for foreign involvement. The use of radio represents his early effort to manipulate the American mind through mainstream media. To gain support for his New Deal policies, Roosevelt had previously used radio to great effect with his "Fireside Chats," a series of radio broadcasts in which he spoke directly to the people about his domestic policies. He had used the intimate-sounding chats to offer ordinary Americans a clear and simple understanding of the complicated nature of his

governmental policies. Now he used the chats to garner support for war aims. **Therefore, it is safe to assume that his ability to communicate to the masses allowed him to present the European conflict in a more approachable manner than the Wilson Administration's WWI presentation.** In his 14th “Fireside Chat,” entitled “On the European War,” Roosevelt set the tone for how Americans should think about war abroad. He recognized the need for the United States to refrain from the conflict while also acknowledging its role in aiding the Allies. He encouraged Americans and the press to reserve judgment on the conflict and “discriminate” against rumors about the war in Europe. He then stated:

It is easy for you and for me to shrug our shoulders and to say that conflicts taking place thousands of miles from the continental United States, and, indeed, thousands of miles from the whole American Hemisphere, do not seriously affect the Americas -- and that all the United States has to do is to ignore them and go about (our) its own business. Passionately though we may desire detachment, we are forced to realize that every word that comes through the air, every ship that sails the sea, every battle that is fought does affect the American future.³³

Why the paradoxical message? It is safe to suggest that President Roosevelt knew the United States would eventually join the allied cause in Europe. He saw Nazi aggression as a threat to American democracy. The "Fireside Chat" became a foundation to build support for American entrance into WWII. However, he knew that 1939 was not yet the time for direct American involvement. His next four “Fireside Chats” continued laying the groundwork in favor of American intervention abroad.³⁴

Roosevelt successfully promoted his arguments on the national stage using a

³³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, September 3, 1939: Fireside Chat 14: On the European War, (Miller Center | University of Virginia, April 26, 2017), <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/september-3-1939-fireside-chat-14-european-war>.

³⁴ “Presidential Speeches | Franklin D. Roosevelt,” The Presidency/Presidential Speeches, (Miller Center | University of Virginia), July 14, 2020. https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches?field_president_target_id%5B31%5D=31.

rhetoric that emphasized the nation's important role as the guardian of democracy. He introduced the nation to the Four Freedoms concept on January 6, 1941 State of the Union Address to Congress. There he presented his pitch for U.S. intervention in Europe. Eleven months before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt advocated for the United States to abandon its self-imposed isolation and arm herself and her allies to fight against fascism. The President portrayed Adolf Hitler's conquest of Europe as a threat to democracy around the world. He argued that America's duty was to protect the four fundamental freedoms that every person should have: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The first two were from the Bill of Rights, while the latter two were inspired by the New Deal (want) and fascism abroad (Fear). His people-centered approach sought to overcome the nation's doubts concerning foreign involvement that had sunk Woodrow Wilson's dreams of a globalized, liberal democracy. The President hoped his speech would galvanize Americans into supporting increased financial and military support for Great Britain abroad and national security at home. Indeed, it would, for in August 1941, Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter with Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain. The joint declaration outlined their war aims during WWII and a post-war international governing body based on Roosevelt's Four Freedoms.³⁵

Roosevelt's diplomatic successes had not occurred without resistance. In the lead up to Pearl Harbor, conservative detractors in Congress criticized the president's "Four Freedoms" speech, saying it was merely an attempt to expand his "New Deal" platform

³⁵ "The Atlantic Conference & Charter, 1941," Office of the Historian (U.S. Department of State), <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/atlantic-conf>.
"The Yearbook of the United Nations," UN Yearbook (The United Nations), <https://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1946-47&bookpage=2>.

onto the world's stage. Many Republican Party officials felt bitter about the three consecutive presidential losses against Roosevelt. They believed the war would only increase the executive branch's power and make it more challenging to defeat the popular president. They also worried that the Four Freedoms rhetoric for human rights would stimulate public support for racial equality. Conservative Republicans found allies in southern Democrats who rejected the Four Freedoms because it could lead to renewed efforts to eliminate Jim Crow segregation laws in the South. Historian John Morton Blum noted in his book, *V was for Victory*, the impact the alliance would have on government policy. "After Pearl Harbor, the disenchanted southern congressmen... allied themselves with their Republican colleagues to protect white supremacy, reduce federal spending except on the war, eradicate various New Deal agencies, and challenge the authority of the White House." Roosevelt did not put forth much resistance to these challenges to his domestic policies, though, as he felt winning the war was far more critical.³⁶

Other members of Congress believed the United States must remain neutral and put "America First." Some put their efforts into controlling the film industry; this suggests just how strong they believed were the persuasive powers of Hollywood producers and their films. In August 1941, a U.S. Subcommittee under the Interstate Commerce Commission began investigating the U.S. film industry for allegedly infusing pro-war, pro-Britain, and anti-German propaganda into feature films for public consumption. Historian John E. Moser suggests in his article *Gigantic Engines of Propaganda': The 1941 Senate Investigation of Hollywood* that the committee's primary

³⁶ John E. Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pages 14-5.

John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II*, (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 221-2.

concern focused on how studios were using motion pictures to shape public opinion so Americans would support war efforts. He noted the committee's belief that "the eight largest motion picture companies were taking advantage of their access to the American people to promote involvement in a war that was none of America's concern."³⁷ Moser seems to acknowledge the committee's accusations as valid, noting that Americans, in general, "quickly recognized the enormous potential of movies to shape public morals and opinion."³⁸ Films about the war in Europe offered many Americans opportunities to see how various groups acted or reacted (even fictionally) to various social, political, and economic issues that were likely otherwise foreign to the moviegoer. For committee members, films provided the means to produce messages that could stimulate a nation to support European intervention. Such may have been the case in 1940 as Hollywood released several films about the European war, perhaps most notably *The Great Dictator* by United Artists. The committee viewed these films as "Overtly anti-German and pro-British in tone and substance" and as foreign propaganda used to influence public opinion and generate support for American intervention in WWII. The accusations showed that even as late as August of 1941, isolationist views concerning Nazi aggression in Europe still dictated American foreign policy.³⁹

The top-tier film studios known as the "Big Eight" forged ahead in defending their films, suggesting it was their patriotic duty to inform the public of the international issues and help spark unity among diverse social and ethnic groups. The Big Eight hired Wendell Willkie, a Republican lawyer who had been the 1940 Republican presidential

³⁷ John E. Moser, "Gigantic Engines of Propaganda": The 1941 Senate Investigation of Hollywood," (The Historian 63, no. 4 (2001)), 731-51. www.jstor.org/stable/24450496, 731-33.

³⁸ Ibid, 733

³⁹ Ibid, 731.

nominee, to serve as special counsel. Willkie argued before the subcommittee that Hollywood was “proud to admit that we have done everything possible to inform the public of the progress of our national defense program.”⁴⁰ He also maintained that the subcommittee infringed on the motion picture industry’s First Amendment rights to free speech and press.⁴¹ Willkie argued that Hollywood filmmakers had a right to portray the Nazi threat abroad in their films and that the subcommittee was attempting to create divisions between Americans. Additionally, Willkie accused the committee of attempting to turn the public against Hollywood. The Roosevelt Administration reacted positively to Willkie's hiring; if he had been a Democrat, Republican committee members could have accused him of being a government shill for Roosevelt. Indeed, Willkie agreed with the importance of Roosevelt’s approach towards a world democracy to ensure economic security abroad and prevent totalitarianism from taking root.⁴² Perhaps most noteworthy of the subcommittee’s accusations was members’ claim that the First Amendment did not protect motion pictures because they provided entertainment rather than news.⁴³ But the defense exposed how committee members had not even viewed most of the films that they accused as pro-war propaganda. And, the defense demonstrated the senators' indifference when it came to propaganda that supported their “America First” beliefs.⁴⁴ The subcommittee ultimately failed to gain support from the American public and disbanded in October 1941.

While the subcommittee hearings accentuated the debate among politicians over

⁴⁰ Ibid, 742

⁴¹ Ibid, 741-2

⁴² James E. McMillan, "McFarland And the Movies: The 1941 Senate Motion Picture Hearings," (The Journal of Arizona History 29, no. 3 (1988)), 277-302, www.jstor.org/stable/41859880, pg. 286.

⁴³ Ibid, 284

⁴⁴ Ibid, 284-87

America's role in the war, public attitudes had started to change in the 1930s. Public opinion towards the war abroad began to shift away from complete isolationism in the lead up to Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. WWII had commenced in Europe on September 1, 1939, with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland. In response, France and Great Britain had allied with Poland and declared war on Germany two days later. A Gallop Poll conducted on September 1-6, 1939, had asked Americans about what degree of support the United States should provide the allies. 74% favored food assistance, and 58% supported selling military equipment and planes. Only 18%, however, favored American military action against Germany. Indeed, a separate question concerning a possible American declaration of war on Germany polled at 8% in favor and 90% against it.⁴⁵ Over the next two years, German aggression across Europe influenced more Americans to favor some form of intervention abroad. By November 1941, just after the senate investigation had ended, an Office of Public Opinion Research poll found that 68% of Americans believed Germany's defeat was more important than the United States staying out of the war.⁴⁶ On December 7, 1941, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor thrust America into the global conflict. The United States declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941, and Germany and Italy three days later. This attack stoked support to the degree that no amount of propaganda likely could have, for a Gallup Poll on December 12-17, found that 91% of Americans supported President Roosevelt's declaration of war on Germany in addition to the formal declaration of war on Japan.⁴⁷ The attack as well as the

⁴⁵ R.J. Reinhart, "Gallup Vault: U.S. Opinion and the Start of World War II," Gallup.com, (Gallup, August 29, 2019) <https://news.gallup.com/vault/265865/gallup-vault-opinion-start-world-war.aspx>.

⁴⁶ Poll data conducted by the Office of Public Opinion Research, Nov. 21-26, 1941. "How Did Public Opinion About Entering World War II Change Between 1939 and 1941?" Americans and the Holocaust, (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/us-public-opinion-world-war-II-1939-1941>.

⁴⁷ Poll data conducted by Gallup, Dec. 12-17, 1941. Ibid.

polling data gave President Roosevelt his mandate to enter World War II.

Roosevelt needed to sustain the public's support for war over the long run. Pearl Harbor had stoked initial fervor for war, but many Americans only sought war as a means of revenge against Japan and not to protect democracy abroad. To shift their views, Roosevelt and his administration believed that they had to produce an image of the war as a battle between "good and evil." They saw the film industry as an essential front to win over the American public's hearts and minds. There is irony in Roosevelt's views. After all, the 1941 Senate Investigation of Hollywood initially had raised concerns about the film industry's ability to influence public opinion. Once the war began, Roosevelt sought to tap that potential by establishing a formal relationship between the federal government and Hollywood.

"War Were Declared": The Fifth Freedom and the mobilization of the Hollywood front⁴⁸

In the preface to the book, *Movie Lot to Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes to War and Prepares for the Future*, journalist Robert St. John noted, "There was a day when it was considered smart to be cynical about Hollywood. That was before the war."⁴⁹ That sharp insight provides a frame for understanding the new collaboration between the government and the film industry that began with war.

The political and social commentaries hidden beneath the escapist tones of Hollywood musicals like *42nd Street*, *Gold Diggers*, and *Footlight Parade* or a fantasy film like the *Wizard of Oz* no longer suited the realities of a nation at war (although the

⁴⁸ "War Were Declared" is a reference to season two, episode 17 of *Futurama*, entitled "War is the H-Word."

⁴⁹ *Movie Lot to Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes to War and Prepares for the Future*, (New York City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1945).

Cowardly Lion as William Jennings Bryan may disagree).⁵⁰ The federal government preferred a more realistic tone about the war in Hollywood productions. Many in the federal government understood the effectiveness of mass media to encourage public support for the war. President Roosevelt, however, also understood the potential public backlash to blatant government propaganda. An indirect approach in which filmmakers took the lead in promoting pro-war sentiments seemed viable and one that Hollywood executives preferred as well. Indeed, the motion picture industry had recognized the threat the Axis Powers posed before Pearl Harbor and was among the first to volunteer its services. Before the attack, filmmakers had highlighted the growing fascist threat abroad to the public. Now, Hollywood producers formally requested the Roosevelt Administration to establish a point of contact for film producers to reach out for war-related information and offer its services.⁵¹ Producers would have had multiple rationales at their disposal to justify the request. The 1941 senate hearings on Hollywood had established the idea that films had the potential power of swaying the American consciousness (even if it had not been proven during the hearings). The Big Eight had a near-monopoly over the film industry and cinemas across the country. Furthermore, with their influence, films and theaters could present the war in an easily digestible way to an American public now willing to support American intervention into WWII. These arguments aligned with Roosevelt's thinking, and the president sought to capitalize on the appeal of films.

While the film industry and Roosevelt seemed in agreement, many challenges lay

⁵⁰ Mintz and Roberts, 71-2.

⁵¹ Cedric Larson, "The Domestic Motion Picture Work of the Office of War Information," (Hollywood Quarterly 3, no. 4 (1948)) 434-43, doi:10.2307/1209318, 436.

ahead for both Hollywood and the federal government. Members of the film industry may have shown a willingness to serve the war effort, but some also held reservations concerning the government's home front agenda. Moreover, the memory of WWI's censorship practices loomed, even as President Roosevelt tried to dispel any fears of government overreach and sought to strike a balance between the government's involvement in promoting the war effort and the film industry's presentation of said promotion. In December 1941, President Roosevelt appointed Lowell Mellett as Coordinator of Government Film to serve as a liaison between Hollywood and the federal government. Mellett worked for the Office of Government Reports when appointed as Coordinator of Government Films. He had previously been a presidential aide who handled communication with the media. He saw films as a way to promote interventionist policies to the public. In his letter appointing Mellett as coordinator, Roosevelt stated, "The American motion picture is one of the most effective mediums in informing and entertaining our citizens. The motion picture must remain free in so far as national security will permit. I want no censorship of the motion picture."⁵² The language served as an encouraging sign for Hollywood executives who feared government intervention. President Roosevelt adamantly supported a film industry separated from government regulation that other industries such as steel and rubber experienced.⁵³

Many in the film industry feared censorship. The trade publication *Variety* had published in November, just before the war began, the first of a series of articles addressing what the publication referred to as "The Fifth Freedom." Inspired by

⁵² Koppes and Black Quoting Roosevelt's letter to Mellett, dated December 1941, 36, 39.

⁵³ Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 139.

Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, the magazine had noted the importance of artistic expression in a democratic society. It reminded its readers of the recent memories of WWI and the Creel Committee. With the prospect of censorship casting a dark cloud over the U.S. film industry, the article supported the importance of the Four Freedoms and pointed out the need for a Fifth Freedom: freedom of self-expression in artistic terms. A short advertisement teased in the November 21, 1941, edition of *Variety* that a future publication centered on the Fifth Freedom theme would be published in late December. However, Pearl Harbor may have changed the publication's tune as the Fifth Freedom idea would not be reintroduced until January.⁵⁴

On January 7, 1942, *Variety* published a follow-up to its November 5, 1941 article, also entitled "The Fifth Freedom." *Variety* built upon its previous article's argument against censorship in defense of artistic freedom. The opening paragraph stated,

Nothing that has happened since Pearl Harbor subtracts from the ideal of 'The Fifth Freedom.' The business, or art, of diverting people at peace is a necessary part of national life. It is even more essential to a people at war. Hence, this fundamental necessity of diversion for an entire nation, any nation, and the freedom of those who provide this diversion in all its entertainment forms, has been named by this publication as 'The Fifth Freedom.'

In essence, the publication argued the continued importance of the entertainment industry during wartime and its role as an essential pillar of any democratic society. The publication argued that the freedom to practice the arts without government intervention separated a democratic society from a totalitarian one and that the film industry must be constructive yet critical in certain aspects of the American war effort but always remain

⁵⁴ "The Fifth Freedom," *Variety* (*Variety Archive: 1905-2000*), November 05, 1941, 32-33, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1285787432?accountid=5683>. "The Fifth Freedom," *Variety* (*Variety Archive: 1905-2000*), November 19, 1941, 8, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1285779127?accountid=5683>.

supportive of the overall war effort.⁵⁵

In the spring of 1942, Mellett established the Office of Coordinator of Government Films with six divisions. To assist film creators, Mellett established an office in Hollywood under the leadership of Nelson Poynter. He was a journalist-turned-New Dealer who previously had served as general manager of *The St. Petersburg Times* in 1938. (He would later, in 1947, buy controlling stock in the newspaper from his family.). Despite his media experience, Poynter had no previous experience in the film industry.⁵⁶ *Variety* noted in the April 29, 1942 article entitled, “Mellett’s U.S. Film Setup” that Poynter’s role was to act as an intermediary for the federal government. Poynter's role included sharing policy and ideas the federal government would like to see in films with the film industry.⁵⁷

This groundwork led to an institutionalized effort on June 13, 1942, when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9182. It ordered the creation of a new federal agency called the Office of War Information (OWI). Roosevelt wanted “the American people and of (sic) all other peoples opposing the Axis aggressors to be truthfully informed about the common war effort.”⁵⁸ The Executive Order combined several federal agencies under the new federal office, including the Office of Facts and Figures, the Office of Government Reports, the Coordinator of Information, and the Division of

⁵⁵ “The Fifth Freedom,” *Variety* (*Variety* Archive: 1905-2000), Jan 07, 1942, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1285803782?accountid=5683>.

⁵⁶ Thomas Schatz 140, “Nelson Poynter, 74, Dies; Publisher of 2 Papers in St. Petersburg, Fla.,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, June 17, 1978), <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/06/17/archives/nelson-poynter-74-dies-publisher-of-2-papers-in-st-petersburg-fla.html>

⁵⁷ “War Activities: Mellett’s U. S. Film Setup.” 1942, *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Apr 29, 4. <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1285804414?accountid=5683>.

⁵⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information,” (The American Presidency Project. June 13, 1942), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-9182-establishing-the-office-war-information>.

Information of the Office for Emergency Management.⁵⁹ Perhaps the two most essential agencies established were the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) and the Bureau of Censorship (BOC). Both agencies worked to dispel government overreach concerns by establishing a model in which voluntary action was encouraged but not required from the film industry. President Roosevelt insisted on no overbearing censorship practices or agencies similar to President Wilson's CPI during WWI. With that in mind, the BMP served three functions while acting as a liaison between Hollywood and the federal government:

- First, it "advise[d] the motion picture industry upon government policy, particularly as regards of any phase of the war, and to enable motion picture producers quickly to obtain accurate and up-to-date information possessed by government agencies..."
- Second, it was "to secure the maximum effectiveness of the motion picture medium reaching more than 80,000,000 people weekly in promoting the national war effort." It executed this function through a three-pronged approach. First, focusing on advising filmmakers on films and topics that could undermine the war effort; second, advising film producers on "the best means of introducing affirmative portions of the war information program into motion pictures"; lastly, working with film producers on interpreting particular phases of the war effort through "Victory" shorts.
- Third, it was "To cooperate with the Overseas Branch, Motion Picture Bureau, and the Los Angeles Board of Review, Office of Censorship, on problems relating

⁵⁹ Koppes and Black, 62-3

to the export of motion pictures.”⁶⁰

The potential accusation of propaganda would be avoided because the films would not be produced or directly influenced by the federal government but by a film industry that would progress larger social and political goals. In the case of the war, the U.S. government aimed to portray the war in Europe as a peoples’ war in which fascism threatened to undermine the four pillars of democracy: Freedom of Speech, Religion, from Want, and from Fear. Throughout the war, the federal government aimed to drum up American public support for its war aims. By successfully doing so, though, one could hypothesize that the U.S. government and film industry produced a prosthetic memory or an inauthentic recollection of the United States in WWII for future generations to view within films.

*Movie Lot to Beachhead*⁶¹

Emeriti professors Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black wrote in their book, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, that, “Propaganda is a bit like pornography—hard to define, but most people think they will know it when they see it.” In other words, President Roosevelt needed to act carefully in his efforts to influence Hollywood films with his pro-war agenda or face a public backlash similar to that of President Wilson and the Creel Commission during WWI.⁶² However, early Hollywood film efforts proved unsatisfying for the OWI’s purposes of presenting the war seriously. Hollywood continued to produce films with the

⁶⁰ OWI Report, April 23, 1943, Office of War Information: Bureau of Motion Pictures’ Hollywood Office, Office of War Information Collection. National Archive II in College Park, Maryland.

⁶¹ Title of one of the earliest visual essays and written accounts of Hollywood during WWII. Written in 1945, the book examines how Hollywood changed its approach to filmmaking to serve the war effort.

⁶² Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, (New York City, NY: Free Press, 1987), 49-50.

escapist tones and whimsical narrative popular during the 1930s instead of encouraging American support for the war. Historians Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts noted in their book, *Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century America through Film*, "The movies, these officials believed, failed to accurately convey what the allies were fighting for, grossly exaggerated the extent of Nazi and Japanese espionage and sabotage, portrayed our allies in an offensive manner, and presented a false picture of the United States as a land of gangsters, labor strife, and racial conflict." According to the two authors, a 1942 report confirmed the concerns of the OWI. The report found that roughly two-thirds of the early films dealing with the war portrayed a disingenuous, often distorted view of the war through spy pictures, comedies, or musicals. The issues OWI had with Hollywood's presentation of the war led the agency to attempt to give the film industry stronger direction.

The OWI sought to shape the film industry's image of war by disseminating new recommendations in its "Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry."⁶³ Through the manual, the OWI and BMP encouraged Hollywood producers to dramatize the war's issues, while maintaining the artistic integrity they believed was only found in Hollywood productions. The goal was to present an alternative to the sort of blatant propaganda media that could become divisive and detrimental to both the war front and home front, as it had been with WWI and the Creel Committee. If the film industry continued producing quality feature films that subtly highlighted the issues of

⁶³Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945," (The Journal of American History 64, no. 1 (1977)), 87-105. doi:10.2307/1888275.

"Hollywood Spanked for Sloughing' Cause of Democracy in War Films," 1942, *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Jun 17, 1. <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1285808617?accountid=5683>. Mintz and Roberts, 20.

why the U.S. was at war, then Americans would be more likely to ingest it and let it develop into their memories. Perhaps Elmer Davis, head of the OWI,⁶⁴ said it best when describing the intended endgame for this new method of filmmaking: "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized." In other words, the film viewer would be most receptive to war information when it was conveyed through a medium of entertainment.⁶⁵

Early on, film producers were hesitant towards governmental consultation as they feared censorship would inevitably arise. In July 8, 1942 edition of *Variety*, the publication noted various members of the film industry previously saw the Office of Government Films (soon to be renamed Bureau of Motion Pictures) as the beginning of "an era of confusion and uncertainty." The article also noted that Mellett had previously tried to dispel fears in an interview with *Variety* by emphasizing that "the government won't tell anybody what to do." Poynter reassured film producers that the BMP had no censorship powers and only wanted to help the industry achieve its new, mutual goal of boosting support for the war effort. Poynter attempted to allay these concerns, telling them in one meeting: "We are here in no dictatorial spirit. Washington wants the assistance of the industry in the dissemination of information about the war, the enemy, our allies, the production front, the home front, the armed services, [and] the peace to follow the war." Mellett similarly also assured Hollywood that, "We are not going to tell you how to do things." He told them that the federal government's sole role in the motion

⁶⁴ Elmer Davis was a radio commentator, novelist, and journalist whose interventionist views before the U.S.'s entrance into WWII gave FDR confidence in appointing him head of the OWI.

⁶⁵ *Hollywood Goes to War*, pg. 59

picture business was providing guidance and resources to assist Hollywood in their presentation of why the United States fought abroad to their audiences.⁶⁶

Why We Fight: Democracy in Film

So why did the U.S. fight in WWII? To protect democracy at home and abroad, according to the motion picture industry and the federal government. Hollywood employed the Bureau of Motion Pictures' manual as the blueprint for allegorical depictions of a democratic society at war. For their audiences to understand why the U.S. fought, filmmakers produced a similar story of a small group of men valiantly defending or attacking a position under duress by the enemy. The men usually represent a microcosm of American society: the stoic Anglo leader, the American urbanite, the Southern boy, and various ethnic minorities from varying degrees of social and economic backgrounds. In theory, a democratic society like the United States treated its citizens as equals and selected representatives to advocate and administer public policy on its behalf. During WWII, Hollywood films portrayed that by showcasing a hodgepodge of men from various backgrounds as a single unit, working cohesively and bravely together for a common cause.

On the contrary, the opposite presentation befell Germany, Italy, and Japan, authoritarian states whose actions were interpreted as malicious and nefarious when considering democratic ideals. As such, the tried and true "good vs. evil" dynamic was easy to establish. This presentation was a main theme of many a war film of the day. Protagonists were selfless units, not selfish individuals, who overcame the evils brought forth by the antagonists. This storytelling method also became the formula of how to sell

⁶⁶ "Film-Gov't Tension Off," 1942, *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Jul 08, 1-1, 20.
<http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1285799558?accountid=5683>.

the war to the public in the OWI's eyes: a democratic society must protect freedom abroad from the dastardly acts of a fascist and militaristic government

Conclusion

Millions of Americans were affected by WWII, from the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor to the unconditional surrender of Japan aboard the *USS Missouri*. Service members wrote letters detailing the horrors of war from the front lines. At the same time, media coverage reported on the Allied cause's successes and failures, each creating unique memories for those involved in the war. For the United States, though, individual recollections would not serve the overall scope of why the United States fought in Europe and the Pacific. Instead, it would be an artificial memory influenced by the federal government and delivered to American audiences through Hollywood feature films. These motion pictures crafted a particular slant of the American effort, explicitly for those geographically distant from the battles yet mentally and socially invested in its outcome.

This chapter presents the backstory to President Roosevelt's political approach to influencing American support for U.S. intervention into WWII. President Wilson's aggressive approach toward galvanizing public support for WWI yielded a political backlash and a general rejection of "The Great War" for many Americans. A younger version of Roosevelt witnessed Wilson's failures firsthand and, later, develop a more nuanced approach in his public outreach. He previously recognized the power of mass media through his "Fireside Chats" and began promoting American intervention directly to the people. He then presented America's duty to protect "four essential freedoms," at home and abroad, in his 1941 State of the Union Address. The events at Pearl Harbor

forced American intervention into foreign conflict. Hollywood's willingness to support the American war effort led to an official relationship between the private industry and the federal government.

Roosevelt's pro-war rhetoric became the foundation for the Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures missions. In particular, the Bureau's task focused on engaging with Hollywood filmmakers to develop public support for the American war effort through motion pictures. The federal agency developed "The Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry" to provide pro-war themes filmmakers could incorporate into their films. With the gaze of hindsight, the manual can be perceived as an instructional guide on creating a prosthetic memory that would serve as the national narrative for the war. The collective memory of the war, through motion pictures, represented President Roosevelt's Four Freedoms vision, at home and abroad, with the film industry producing said memory for the American public to consume.

III. CHAPTER TWO

The following chapter examines the influential role of the federal government's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) in creating a public memory of World War II through Hollywood motion pictures. The BMP's approach included issuing "The Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry" to film studios and conducting script and film reviews by the BMP staff. With these script and film reviews the BMP actively advised filmmakers on how to use the manual to create an artificial memory of the war. The manual articulated six main themes the film industry should emphasize. Each served as a building block in structuring an artificial public memory of U.S. involvement in WWII.

This chapter analyses five of the six BMP manual themes through case studies of films that feature these themes. Three case studies demonstrate the federal government's and the manual's influence on shaping the memory of the war from the summer of 1942 until the disbanding of the BMP in the summer of 1943. The first film, *Mrs. Miniver*, showcased how American sentiment for the British people helped facilitate positive support for the war. The film showcased many of the manual's themes despite being developed before the manual became readily available to Hollywood studios. It is an early example of the motion picture industry taking cues from the Roosevelt Administration. The second and third films, *Casablanca* and *Bataan*, presented the power of social and political representation in crafting an artificial memory of the war. *Casablanca*'s development coincided with Nazi aggression across Europe. *Bataan* was selected as it best represents many of the war front films produced during the period. Both films were critically celebrated films influenced by the BMP. These films

showcased the influential role the BMP had in creating a public memory of the war through the lens of a motion picture. Each film presented many of the pro-war aspects that the manual promoted. Each film earned positive reviews from the federal government, film critics, and audiences, illustrating Hollywood's abilities to craft state-sponsored, pro-war rhetoric artistically into its feature films.

"The Framework of the Government Information Program"

"The Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry" provided the basic framework for presenting WWII to the American moviegoer. The opening paragraph of the manual justifies the existence of the Bureau of Motion Pictures with the statement: "There have been many requests from the motion picture industry for basic information on government aims and policies in the war effort. To meet that demand, the Office of War Information established an office in Hollywood. The purpose of this office is to assist the motion picture industry in its endeavor to inform the American people, via the screen, of the many problems attendant on the war program. Its set-up is purely advisory." In other words, the BMP's primary purpose was to provide guidance and a set of instructions for Hollywood studios for how their films should present to the general public the topics of the war abroad, the home front, and the American individual's role. Moreover, implementing these instructions was voluntary. Those of significant rank within the film industry received a copy of the manual, unbounded, to add updated materials as needed.⁶⁷

The manual expanded upon six specific themes from President Roosevelt's January 6, 1942 State of the Union address, and how best to present them in a film.

⁶⁷ "Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry," (Washington, D.C.: Office of War Information, 1942), Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA, [1].

They were:

- The Issues – Why we fight. What kind of peace will follow victory.
- The Enemy – Who we fight. The nature of our adversary.
- The United Nations and Peoples – With whom we are allied in fighting. Our brothers-in-arms.
- Work and Production – How each of us can fight. The war at home.
- The Home Front – What we must do. What we must give up to win the fight.
- The Fighting Forces – The job of the fighting man (sic) at the Front.⁶⁸

In addition to the themes, any film developed with the war in mind needed to answer the question, “Will this picture help win the war?” Historian Randy Roberts noted, “The manual was designed to move Hollywood toward its ideological position.” That position would be a democratic and liberal interventionist ideology championed by the Roosevelt Administration.⁶⁹

During the summer of 1942, the film industry began using the “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry.” The BMP created the manual to help filmmakers achieve the government's desired, pro-war outcomes. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black wrote about the OWI and BMP's work with Hollywood in, *What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945*. They noted that the BMP issued the manual to help filmmakers achieve the government's desired outcomes, which were two-fold. First, filmmakers should present the United States' war effort in a positive light and encourage public support. Secondly, to stress the

⁶⁸ Government Information Manual, [2].

⁶⁹ Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, *Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century America through Film*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 153.

importance of portraying the U.S. involvement in the war as a “people’s war.”

Furthermore, the manual insisted, “The enemy was fascism. The enemy was not the Axis leadership nor all the Axis-led peoples but fascist supporters anywhere, at home as well as abroad.” In other words, a fight between democratic societies, willed by the people, against fascist, authoritarian societies that control every aspect of their people.⁷⁰

“THE ISSUES – *Why we fight. What kind of peace will follow victory*”

The manual’s first theme concerned **presenting the country’s democratic values, in film, as a reason why the United States fought in WWII**. The federal government perceived foreign “militarism” as a threat to democracy at home and abroad. However, internal governmental polling suggested many Americans did not fully comprehend the threat “militarism” posed to their way of life. The administration felt motion pictures could be the best medium in “bringing to life the democratic idea” many Americans took for granted. According to the manual, to accomplish this, Hollywood first needed to present the United States as a politically independent, representative society in its motion pictures. Secondly, producers needed to emphasize U.S. involvement as a “peoples’ war” in defense of a global democracy based on Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms of democracy. The manual instructed: “The realization must be driven home that we cannot enjoy the Four Freedoms exclusively. They must be established on a world-wide basis, - yes, even in Germany, Italy, and Japan, - or they will always be in jeopardy in America.” This focus on the global world order intertwined with the manual’s third and final point about promoting the vitality of democracy: America was fighting for

⁷⁰ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945." (The Journal of American History 64, no. 1 (1977)): 87-105 [91], doi:10.2307/1888275.

a “New World,” safe from “militarism” “for a world community dedicated to the free flow of trade, ideas, and culture.”⁷¹

The introductory-like section concluded with five aspects of the war that the federal government encouraged the film industry to dramatize for their audiences. One aspect focused on presenting the war as a “people’s war” for Americans to unite behind. The federal government maintained the position that unity would best serve the nation’s interests. Officials understood that there could be groups of people still indifferent to the war. These groups’ lack of concern could undermine the war effort. Indifference to the war became a standard character trait and plot device in various films produced during the war, perhaps most notably in the 1943 film *Casablanca*. The examination of this film below showcases how the film producers crafted a memory of WWII through characters representing different components of the war.⁷²

“THE ENEMY – *Whom we Fight. The Nature of our Adversary*”

The second theme of the manual noted the vital role **motion pictures serve in educating the public on who the enemy was**. A motion picture’s effectiveness in conveying a memorable story typically depends on the protagonist and antagonist’s conflict. For filmmakers to create persuasive propaganda, they depicted engaging antagonists that audiences could link to the Axis Powers. The OWI stressed that films should recognize the enemy’s “philosophies, objectives, and tactics. Only through understanding the enemy shall we be able to recognize him in whatever guise he appears.”⁷³ In the Roosevelt Administration’s perspective, the enemy was “militarism”

⁷¹ Government Information Manual, [7].

⁷² Ibid, [5-11].

⁷³ Ibid, [12].

and its threat against democracy at home and abroad.

The manual noted that then-recent, undated public opinion polls showed that three out of ten Americans favored a negotiated peace treaty with the belligerents. The manual stressed the importance of educating the public about “militarism” and its inability to coexist with democratic societies. Motion pictures could be used as essential tools to educate the public on the Axis Powers' past transgressions and why they could not be trusted. The manual quoted a speech by Archibald MacLeish at the Associated Press Annual Luncheon, “Negotiation in this war is not possible in the sense in which negotiation was possible in other wars. Knowing what we do or what we should of previous negotiations with the Axis Powers... none of those who now oppose the Axis would dare to trust the Axis in a negotiated peace....” MacLeish referenced negotiations in Munich between the British and Nazi Germany and between Japanese delegates and Secretary of State Cordell Hull to explain why peace negotiations were no longer an option.⁷⁴

Early films in 1942 caricatured the enemy with stereotypes that portrayed them as inferior to Americans. The OWI deemed this tendency to distort the Japanese as a problem that could undermine the seriousness of the war effort. The agency preferred a

⁷⁴ Ibid, [12-20].

Also known as the Munich Pact, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy agree to the cessation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland to Germany to prevent an escalation of the war. Signed on September 29, 1938, it failed to appease Adolf Hitler as the war commenced the following year.

“Munich Pact September 29, 1938,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, (Yale Law School, 2008), <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/munich1.asp>.

Also known as the Hull Note, Hull issued a series of expectations to the Japanese delegation in Washington, D.C., including the withdrawal of Japanese forces from Indochina and eased tensions between the U.S. and Japan. Issued on November 26, 1941, the note was the final official communication between the two nations before the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

R.J.C. Butow, “How Roosevelt Attacked Japan at Pearl Harbor,” Prologue Magazine, (National Archives and Records Administration, 1996), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/fall/butow.html>.

more “accurate” portrayal of the enemy as a dangerous and formidable foe, as outlined in the manual. One of the earliest films to follow the agency’s suggestions was *Bataan*. The film successfully conveyed how the enemy represented a threat to the American military and democracy. Like *Casablanca*, the film also presented the United States as taking part in a “peoples’ war” to protect democracy. In successfully doing so, the film crafted a new memory of the war for the American public, based on “The story America will never forget.”⁷⁵

“THE UNITED NATIONS AND PEOPLES – *With whom we are allied in fighting.*

Our brothers-in-arms”

The third theme of the “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry” **focused on the importance of the United States’ wartime allies in defeating their mutual enemies.** The manual noted that 28 other nations united, economically and militarily, with the United States to defeat the Axis Powers during WWII. Additionally, each allied nation agreed not to sign a separate peace treaty with Germany, Italy, and Japan. The second and third sections listed the importance of understanding and respecting each united nation’s role in the war and working together as a united front against the Axis Powers’ evils. This sense of appreciation would illustrate to these united nations that they could continue working together after the war to establish a global democratic society based around the Four Freedoms. “The United Nations will have it within their power to establish ‘for all peoples’ and ‘for future generations’ a world in which there will be freedom of speech and freedom of religion, freedom from want and

⁷⁵ “The story America will never forget” was one of the taglines for the film. “Bataan,” IMDb, (IMDb.com, April 15, 1944), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035664/>.

freedom from fear."⁷⁶ Motion pictures could display these ideals through stories of allied nations and peoples fighting against the United States' enemies.⁷⁷

Mrs. Miniver, *Casablanca*, and *Bataan* all presented this theme **of an allied people resisting "militarism."** *Mrs. Miniver* did this through its portrayal of the British people's fight against the Nazis, at home and abroad. *Casablanca* did so through the perspective of an indecisive American who reevaluates his unwillingness to commit after being reminded of why he should fight. In *Bataan*, this was done through the actions of the Filipinos who fight alongside their American counterparts. A new presentation of the war effort would influence how Americans see their allies and their joint fight against fascism.

"WORK AND PRODUCTION – *The War at Home. How each of us can fight*"

The Fourth theme **concerned the domestic front of the war effort and how motion pictures can highlight this critical aspect of the war.** "We must dramatize the tremendous task of equipping ourselves and our Allies for war. Only if the people understand the magnitude of this job can we expect total effort to achieve total victory and total peace." The manual noted the importance of outproducing the Axis Powers in war materials. The section also stressed the important roles men and women serve as "soldiers in overalls" in producing, rationing, and innovating their labor for the war effort. The section noted time as the most precious and vital commodity at the home front's disposal. Time was necessary to produce more, and time was too necessary to be wasted by idle employees of war industries. The theme concluded with suggestions for presenting the theme in motion pictures. These suggestions include the strength of a

⁷⁶ Government Information Manual, [26].

⁷⁷ Ibid, [22-31].

producer democracy in supporting the war, a united labor and management force in support of the war cause, the connection the domestic laborer has with the soldier on the front lines, the importance of agriculture and those who labor in the field, and who the producer/laborer is. With the final suggestion, the manual stressed the individual's importance at home, supporting the war effort abroad. That person is not a cog within a militaristic society but an American serving a democratic society.⁷⁸

“THE HOME FRONT – *What we must do. What we must Give Up to Win the Fight*”

The fifth theme **stated that the fight abroad was a total war involving all Americans**. Here, suggestions for motion picture portrayals include what Americans could do to support the war effort. Examples included cooperation, rationing, donating, buying war bonds, and sacrificing to support the war effort. The manual concluded with a quote from President Roosevelt's radio address from April 28, 1942: "Here at home every one will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men, but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure during the war and after the war."⁷⁹ If motion pictures showcased a home front supporting the war, viewers would see their connection to the Allied cause's success. The United States was now engaged in total war, meaning all its citizens and residents, at home and abroad, were a part of the fight.⁸⁰

The film *Mrs. Miniver* strongly emphasized the theme concerning **the importance of support on the home front for all efforts against fascism**. Although based on a story centered on life in rural England during the war, it became a touchstone

⁷⁸ Unfortunately for this thesis, neither of the three case studies analyze this theme. Government Information Manual, [32-38]

⁷⁹ Ibid, [46]

⁸⁰ Ibid, [33-46].

for Americans exploring the relationship between the home front and the war. It was the perfect vehicle for the BPM to interject the roles women and men must serve at home. The film cultivated this sentiment by showcasing civilians of different classes sacrificing their luxuries to support the war. The film presented the British people in a democratic society, thus connecting American viewers, ideologically and socially, with their British allies. This presentation shone a positive light on the British as respectable allies and showed Americans that their duty was to support the war effort.

“THE FIGHTING FORCES – *The job of the fighting man at the front*”

The sixth and final theme in the manual **recognized the harsh realities of military life for American servicemen. It put the dangers of war in simple terms:** “War means death. It means suffering and sorrow.” OWI emphasized that it was Hollywood's duty to capture these realities in the film so that the public understood the dangers the men faced in their fight for liberty and a free, democratic society. Doing so would explain why the public was called upon to support the troops abroad and why rationing goods was necessary. Also, displaying the harsh realities of the war front could be deemed a measure of respect for servicemen in the film's attendance.⁸¹ Few films during WWII captured the essence of the men on the front lines face quite like *Bataan*. The film portrays the fighting as violent with graphic scenes of Americans and allies in combat against the Japanese antagonists, presenting an artificial memory presented the “realities” of war to the American viewer like no other medium could before.

Altogether, these six themes served as the federal government's official policy with presenting the American war effort in film. The Bureau disseminated the manual as

⁸¹ Ibid, [47-50]

a boundless version to allow for updated material to be included. The themes presented Hollywood filmmakers with opportunities to include pro-war rhetoric within their motion pictures without compromising the visual art form's artistic aspect.

Case Study: *Mrs. Miniver*

One of the first feature films to incorporate war information into its story was *Mrs. Miniver*. Although in development prior to the manual's creation, *Mrs. Miniver* proved to be an exceptional example of the relationship between Hollywood and the federal government. It used American sentiment for the British people to encourage American participation in the foreign conflict.

Mrs. Miniver emerged from wartime experiences to craft an artificial memory for Americans, at home, to understand their role in total war. That memory would focus on the indomitable spirit of the British people to support their men abroad. In theory, this memory would become relatable for Americans as their men began entering war fronts abroad. The film presented the sacrifices that an English village made to support the war, which Britain had entered in 1939. Despite the focus on a middle-class British family, American audiences sympathized with Mrs. Miniver as she saw her son join the RAF, her husband sail to Dunkirk, and her daughter-in-law dying in her arms, killed during the Blitz campaign. The rest of the village experience life under rationing restrictions and the constant threat of Luftwaffe bombings. Despite these arduous conditions, the village remains committed to the British cause.⁸²

The film was based on the writings of Joyce Maxtone Graham, who wrote under the pen name Janice Struther. Before the war, Graham considered herself an ordinary

⁸² Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2005), 99-100.

British woman. She enjoyed the status and luxuries of most middle-class women in England: marriage, children, a home, and ordinary recreation. From time to time, Graham and her husband would leave their children with a sitter and travel. Other times, she would talk with strangers in the park or observe locals' interactions at places of note. During the 1930s, she published (as Janice Struther) essays on her observations and experiences in *Punch*, a weekly satirical magazine. Her eloquent observations of everyday life made her popular with readers. In fact, in 1937, she received an invitation from Peter Fleming to write for the Court Page of *The Times*. The Special Correspondent asked that she write about "an ordinary sort of woman who leads an ordinary sort of life - rather like yourself." Thus, began the pre-war adventures of Mrs. Caroline Miniver, the first of a series of stories about an ordinary woman that was, in turn, based on an "ordinary" woman with an extraordinary gift to write.⁸³

Graham's stories would go on to capture both literary and film-going audiences. Her "everyday woman doing everyday things" character became so popular that her shorts' collection became a book, *Mrs. Miniver*, in October 1939, just months after Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany. Initially focused on everyday life, the essays took a darker turn as the war began to seep more into Mrs. Miniver's life on the home front. The book became immensely popular in the United States, leading to a lecture tour in 1940. Mrs. Miniver became popular with American readers engaged with her "ordinary" family's challenges during the war. Mrs. Miniver's character captivated an American audience, still technically neutral during the early phase of the war in Europe, helping them sympathize with the British cause. Indeed, both President Roosevelt and British

⁸³ Robert Maxtone Graham, "MRS. MINIVER," Mrs. Miniver, (The University of Pennsylvania), <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/struther/miniver/miniver.html>.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill loved the film. Roosevelt pushed producers to rush the film to movie theaters. Churchill seemed so thrilled by the film that he sent a telegram to MGM studio head Louis B. Mayer, stating: "Mrs. Miniver is propaganda worth 100 battleships." Nevertheless, had Mayer had it his way, perhaps *Mrs. Miniver* would have become a different film altogether.⁸⁴

Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studio began pre-production work on *Mrs. Miniver* in 1940, before the establishment of the OWI. The accomplished director William Wyler agreed to direct a script written by Arthur Wimperis, James Hilton, George Froeschel, and Claudine West that loosely used the source material. The film's plot begins right after Britain entered the war. One of the film's intentions was to showcase how different classes overcame social conflict and united in support of the British cause. This depiction of unity occurred in a subplot featuring a flower contest between an upper-class, well-respected member of the English village and a working-class man known by all. Another example is the love story subplot between two individuals from different classes.

Wyler began filming in November 1941, a month before Pearl Harbor. From the onset, Wyler and Mayer had differing ideas as to the direction of the film. Wyler believed in President Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and was ardently anti-Nazi. After all, he was from the Alsace-Lorraine region, which the Nazis had just reconquered in 1940. Many Americans, though, shared isolationist views, believing the conflict to be a strictly European matter. In a 1942 interview with Hedda Hopper, Wyler said, "People say we should be making escapist pictures today. I say 'Why? This is the [sic] hell of a time to

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Yellin, 99-100.

Tim Parker, (Prairie Schooner 14, no. 4 (1940)), 297-98. www.jstor.org/stable/40623179.

escape from reality! We're (sic) in an all-out war—a people's war—it's the time to face it. Let's make propaganda pictures, (sic) but make them good."⁸⁵ Wyler began tinkering with the script to drive home the message of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. In his eyes, Nazi Germany was a threat to democracy. For MGM head Mayer, though, any sort of overt depictions of the Nazi Party's cruelty abroad may threaten his films' ability to open in European markets. However, the events of Pearl Harbor altered the views of Americans and Hollywood producers alike.⁸⁶

The opening credits of *Mrs. Miniver* set up life before the war. The film gave the American viewer a reference point for the rest of the picture. The opening wording used sentimental language to funnel the viewer toward an initial emotional viewpoint in stating: "This story of an average English middle-class family begins with the summer of 1939; when the sun shone down on a happy, careless people, who worked and played, reared their children and tended their gardens in that happy, easy-going England that was so soon to be fighting desperately for her way of life and for life itself." Presenting the characters in this light makes them instantly relatable to film audiences. Their "happy, careless people, who worked and played" seems to play off the attitudes of American life. It is also interesting to note the presentation of "an average English middle-class family."⁸⁷ They have a sizeable home in Belham, a fictional village outside London, with access to the Thames River and live-in house servants. These luxuries are highly unlikely for middle-class folks to have, yet the film's presentation of Mrs. Miniver as an

⁸⁵ William Wyler to Hedda Hopper, August 2, 1942, Produced Film: *Mrs. Miniver*, Wyler Collection.

⁸⁶ Gabriel Miller, "War Films: *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), *Memphis Belle* (1944), *Thunderbolt* (1945)," *In William Wyler: The Life and Films of Hollywood's Most Celebrated Director*, [209-38], (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 209-212.

⁸⁷ *Mrs. Miniver*, Directed by William Wyler, Performed by Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon, (United States: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1942), Film.

“everyday woman” connects her with the audience. The Minivers were not a “typical” middle-class family; they were more affluent than typical middle-class Americans. However, at home, Americans could relate themselves to the family through the dynamic of a loving wife, a supportive husband, and children and create an emotional connection with them.⁸⁸

The film rapidly progresses from sunny days to the dark realities of the country at war, providing audiences with the opportunity to sympathize with Mrs. Miniver as she



Figure 1: Mrs. Miniver, the main protagonist of the film, is front and center. In this image, viewers can see her family receiving the news of the upcoming war with Germany and the importance of uniting behind Britain's cause.

confronted these difficulties. Revealingly, the initial scene shows the townsfolk gathered for Sunday service. The vicar, or parish priest, asks the collection of the lower, middle, and upper-class attendees to sit. He uses the

backdrop of war with Germany to deliver a poignant call for action, in which the villagers must now rise up and perform their duty for their country. He states: “We in this village have not failed in the past. Our forefathers, for a thousand years, have fought for the freedom that we now enjoy. And that we must now defend again. With God’s help, and their example, we cannot, and shall not fail.” The use of “we” in the vicar’s speech indicates that those not on the war lines were, nevertheless, a part of the war. He essentially frames the fight as a “peoples’ war.” This speech valorizes the English spirit of defiance against belligerents who threaten their way of life. While America could not

⁸⁸ Miller, 213-4.

own such a long past, it could claim to have the same sort of exalted place in the world. The history of the United States contains many stories of ordinary men and women rising up in defense of their home, whether during the revolutionary days up to and through the westward expansion era.⁸⁹

The film proceeds to show how Mrs. Miniver's life has turned upside down because of the war, especially family life. Of course, this focus on the family would have a strong appeal in America, too. First, her son volunteers for the Royal Air Force (RAF), then her husband, Clem, joins the night watch and subsequently sails to Dunkirk to help the British escape from France. Clem's voyage to aid the Dunkirk evacuation creates a connection for the audience between the real-life "Miracle at Dunkirk" with the fictionalized portrayal in the film. Clem's efforts showcase two key elements the federal government and Hollywood hoped American audiences would understand about the war. One is the will of the British people to rise up and serve their country. The other was the importance of the noncombatants, at home, contributing to the war, as was displayed through Clem and other persons.⁹⁰

Total war meant that all citizens should serve in whatever capacity possible, even in situations in which the individual unexpectedly must serve. While Clem sails to Dunkirk, Mrs. Miniver has a run-in with a wounded German pilot of the Luftwaffe. The wounded pilot forces his way into her home and demands food. He eventually passes out, temporarily, allowing Mrs. Miniver to take his gun and call the police. In a pivotal scene, he reawakens and menacingly states, "We will come. We will bomb your cities, like Barcelona, Warsaw, Narvik, Rotterdam. Rotterdam we destroy (sic) in two hours...

⁸⁹ *Mrs. Miniver*, Film.

⁹⁰ *Mrs. Miniver*, Film.

Thirty thousand in two hours. And we will do the same thing here!” And then in German, “Long live the Reich!” Afterward, Mrs. Miniver slaps the Luftwaffe pilot just as the



Figure 2: Mrs. Miniver discovers an injured Luftwaffe pilot near her home. The pilot describes the "impending" destruction of democratic societies at the hands of Nazi Germany. The scene aims to educate American viewers as to why the United States fights in Europe.

authorities arrive and arrest him. Despite his hostile manner, Mrs. Miniver informs the authorities that he is wounded and needs medical care. Her actions present her (and to some extent the British people) as compassionate and a symbol of a peaceful, democratic

society’s home front, in direct contrast to the German belligerent whose militaristic attitudes threatens everything she (and democracy) stands for.⁹¹

The film’s climax presents the film's main message to Americans concerning their entrance to the global conflict. Mrs. Miniver’s home is partially destroyed, her daughter-in-law killed by the German Blitz, and the town is in shambles. She attends service with the rest of the village. The Vicar acknowledges the destruction of the town and the pain the villagers feel for losing loved ones. He asks his congregation why people near and dear to the village died, despite not serving the war as soldiers on the front. The Vicar then proceeds to answer his question with the central message of the film. Patriotic in speak, he noted the village's strength are representative of the national will. The Vicar calls the war a peoples’ war in which freedom-loving people must do their part to support their country’s total war efforts.

⁹¹ *Mrs. Miniver*, Film.



Figure 3: The village church's vicar gives a speech intent on educating American moviegoers as to what kind of war the United States fights in. It is a "peoples' war" against fascism.

It is a war of the people, of all the people, and it must be fought not only on the battlefield, but in the cities and in the villages, in the factories and on the farms, in the home, and in the heart of every man, woman, and child who loves freedom! Well, we have buried our dead, but we shall not forget them. Instead they will inspire us with an unbreakable determination to free ourselves and those who come after us from the tyranny and terror that threaten to strike us down. This is the people's war! It is our war! We are the fighters! Fight it then! Fight it with all that is in us, and may God defend the right!⁹²

Freedom from tyranny meant that all parties, those who fought on the front lines and those living at home, must stand together to defeat all threats to liberty and democracy. His message is not just for his congregation but also for those in the audience that freedom was not free; sacrificing now would ensure a better future for democracy and freedom.

So powerful were the messages of the film that Nazi Germany's Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels remarked after seeing it, "There is not a single angry word spoken against Germany; nevertheless, the anti-German tendency is perfectly accomplished." An OWI film branch report also noted the effectiveness of the propaganda in the film. The report noted how the Minivers' portrayal during the war created emotional connections between them and the audience. "We suffer with Mrs. Miniver her (sic) anxiety about her son, who is a flyer, and about her husband, a member of the gallant civilian army whose inadequate little pleasure boats perform the miracle at

⁹² *Mrs. Miniver*, Film.

Dunkirk." The report noted the effective use of emotion to convey the film's message: this war is a peoples' war and must come together to support the fight against fascism.⁹³ Here, again, the British people's portrayal served as examples of how Americans, at home, may act in support of the war. *Mrs. Miniver*'s release represents the working relationship between Hollywood and the federal government during the BMP's initial stages. Here, the federal government's pro-war rhetoric, through the artistic lens of Hollywood, translated well through cinemas.

More Hollywood productions would follow in *Mrs. Miniver*'s lead in using a foreign setting and people to highlight war issues and the need for American intervention. In particular, *Casablanca*, which we turn to next, used the experiences and memories of those witnessing the Nazi aggression sweeping across Europe to tell a tale that represents, perhaps, the pinnacle of Hollywood and the federal government's influence on the memory of WWII.

Case Study: *Casablanca* and Memory

"I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you'll understand that." -Rick Blaine in *Casablanca*

Casablanca is perhaps the most renowned film of the 1940s, and as such, serves as an excellent case study for examining memory. Furthermore, as this quote from the film points to, it is an excellent example of hidden propaganda in World War II films. Rick's dialogue was powerful; essentially, he spoke to the audience in attendance, asking

⁹³ Fiona MacDonald, "Mrs. Miniver: The Film That Goebbels Feared," BBC Culture, (BBC, February 9, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150209-the-film-that-goebbels-feared>.
Featured Review: *Mrs. Miniver*, August 2, 1942, Box 3522, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland.

them to set aside their personal issues to support the American war effort abroad. Scores of films released during WWII exemplified the voluntary influence the OWI and BMP had on Hollywood productions. Even today, *Casablanca* is often remembered as the quintessential film of the period. Its mainstream appeal to a broad audience, hidden propaganda messages, and continued star power through the decades have influenced their audiences' collective thoughts and, in time, their collective memories.

An important reason for examining *Casablanca* is that it offers an excellent example of another important theme of the BMP manual: the film **focused on an allied people resisting “militarism.”** However, the film presented its story from the perspective of an indecisive American who reevaluates his unwillingness to commit after being reminded of why he should fight. This new presentation of the war effort would influence how Americans related to foreign events. American isolationism would be personified by one American's actions, whose growth throughout the film would symbolize the American people's own.

Another contributing factor to the film's power to shape memory is its connection to real-life events. In the summer of 1938, writer Murray Burnett and his wife were on holiday in Nazi-occupied Vienna, Austria. They supported their Jewish relatives in smuggling money out of the country before journeying to a small town in South France. There, the couple frequented a nightclub filled with a hodgepodge of locals, Nazis, and refugees overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Burnett began making notes of his various observations and later drafted an outline for an anti-Nazi play. He returned to the US and

subsequently finished the play with co-writer Joan Allison, now titled *Everybody Comes to Rick's*.⁹⁴

The duo tried to sell the play to Broadway producers but received no significant interest. The pair decided to try their luck in Hollywood and sent the play to Warner Brothers. In a stroke of convenience, the script review occurred on December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor. Warner Bros. elected to have the script reworked into a feature film by some individuals. Casey Robinson worked out the romantic elements, Julius and Phillip Epstein worked on structure and dialogue, and Howard Koch developed the political aspects. Filming began in May of 1942, despite an unfinished script. This decision proved to be advantageous for the production as the film was shot in sequence, allowing the writers' time to finish the script and ensured the film would serve two distinct goals. Casablanca set out to make money and "... dramatically show the battle between good and evil that had so recently engulfed the world. In short, the film mixed propaganda with entertainment, patriotism with laughter and romance, and became a document for America at a particular time."⁹⁵ The end result produced a film that built off real-world events and the emotional connections created by said events to influence and create a memory for the general public.

How does the film use memory, though? Two theories of memory help us understand the profound effect films could have in shaping memory. First, Maurice Halbwachs renowned work formed the basis for what sociologists today refer to as "collective memory." Halbwachs argued that our past features certain memories that are easily accessible and remembered by others, in particular, those who share a social

⁹⁴ Mintz and Roberts, 134-135

⁹⁵ Mintz and Roberts, 134

location or identity. Individuals within a social group with similar memories create a collective memory. A unique, individual form of memory is created through commemoration when a social group member remembers outside their social group.⁹⁶ Secondly, the scholar Allison Landsberg uses the term “prosthetic memory” to reference the idea of taking the memories experienced by a person or group and creating a “public” version for others to experience through mainstream media. Accessing others’ collective memory occurs by triggering emotions. *Casablanca* created a prosthetic memory of collective memory for propagandist, economic and political benefits.⁹⁷ The time that writer Murray Burnett spent in Austria, helping relatives through financial difficulties created by the Nazis gave him access to the collective memory of oppressed Europeans. Traveling to South France gave him additional access to other marginalized groups’ collective memories, which he began formulating into a script. Upon returning to the United States, Murray worked with playwright Joan Allison to develop his memories into a prosthetic memory and subsequently sold to a film studio.⁹⁸

Turning now to an analysis of the film helps us understand how it shaped and used memory for political reasons. Director Michael Curtiz's emphasis on a character-driven story and the film's use of striking yet straightforward visuals influenced movie viewers' minds through propaganda. A love story created a captivating narrative that appeals to the public's emotions while masking the film's inherent propaganda. The film was set before Pearl Harbor, using various characters and scenes as representations of the

⁹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, Jean Duvignaud, and J. Michael. Alexandr, *La Mémoire Collective*, (Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

⁹⁷ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁹⁸ Mintz and Roberts, 134-135

real-world events occurring abroad. One of the earliest examples of the film's subtle, yet effective use of propaganda is evident in the various shots of the film's main protagonists and patrons of the city. Throughout the picture, shadows cover multiple characters, an intentional effect to illustrate their imprisonment under the present Nazi rule. Many of the characters seen in the film are expatriates in Casablanca to escape fascism by securing a flight for the United States. Artistry meets propaganda at its finest as the idea of flying to the U.S. represented liberty from oppression.⁹⁹

Other examples of propaganda include the presentation of the five main characters. Rick Blaine represented two sides of America: isolationism first, and then, later, a champion of democracy over totalitarian oppression. Rick is stoic, cynical, and



Figure 4: Rick Blaine, the main protagonist of Casablanca. In this image, viewers can see a shadow cast over his face to highlight his imprisonment in Casablanca.

indifferent to Europe's struggles, much like the U.S. was following WWI. As the film unfolds, the audience learns about Rick's past as a freedom fighter against fascists in Spain. This information establishes Rick as a once-defender of democracy, much like the US

was in WWI. Throughout the film, Rick showed his hidden compassion for marginalized groups by helping various people through Nazi oppression, much like the United States did through their "cash and carry" and lend-lease programs. Rick's makeshift cynicism of the world crumbles with the return of a previously lost love, Ilsa Lund. By the end, his

⁹⁹ *Casablanca*, Directed by Michael Curtiz, Performed by Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Paul Henreid, (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1942, Film.

feelings evolve into a willingness to fight and stand up against the oppressors of democracy.¹⁰⁰

Ilsa represented the purity and grandeur of democracy, something Rick once believed in. She was the love interest and driving force behind Rick's political sentiments before fate aligned her with another man the audience later meets in the film. The director was careful in presenting her character as any visual interpretation of adultery would invalidate her as a symbol of democracy.

She is presented as faithful and pure, reaffirming to the audience that she, much like the fight to

protect democracy in Europe was worth having. In the film's climax, Rick must decide between his happiness or sacrificing it to fight for the happiness of others. In the end, he encourages her to remain with Victor as his inspiration. This scene presented as an allegorical reference to America, sacrificing their comforts away from conflict and take up arms to curtail Nazi aggression. Although the two both feel as though their choice is unjust to one another, Rick notes their loss is minor compared to the more significant issue of war. "We'll always have Paris." Rick quips to Ilsa, much like the United States will always have its democratic values at home.¹⁰¹



Figure 5: Ilsa Lund, supporting protagonist and former love interest of Rick. Her visual presentation presented the personification of democracy in a favorable light

¹⁰⁰ *Casablanca*, Film.

¹⁰¹ *Casablanca*, Film.

Victor Laszlo represented the resistance against Nazi oppression in Europe. The



Figure 6: Victor Laszlo, supporting protagonist and leader of the resistance movement in Casablanca. Once again, shadows visually-show his imprisonment in Casablanca.

film informs the audience of his past exploits against the Nazis, much like newsreels informed the general public of various groups fighting against fascism. When he makes his appearance on screen, he is very articulate and committed to his ideals. His demeanor and action

throughout the film inspire courage

and hope. His relationship with Ilsa can be analyzed as an allegory of the relationship between Europe and freedom, currently under duress by fascism. One scene that showcases this revolves around Victor leading the patrons in singing the French National Anthem, *La Marseillaise*, drowning out the Nazis' who are singing tunes aloud. The band is hesitant at first but is given the green light by Rick. Victor believes in the struggle for freedom and is willing to die for the cause "You might as well question why we breathe. If we stop breathing, we will die. If we stop fighting our enemies, the world will die," he proudly conveys to Rick after the dueling anthem scene. The director is seemingly creating a picture of what may occur when oppressed groups and the United States unite against the Nazis: resistance and victory. In the film's climax, Rick asked Ilsa to accompany Victor in his escape from Casablanca. Her continued support fueled his desire to continue his cause, much like the thoughts of freedom fueled Britain and other nations

to continue resisting Nazi occupation.¹⁰²

Captain Louis Renault, Casablanca's prefect of the police, represented the Europeans' indifference, mainly the French, had towards the Nazi rule. Early in the film, Renault states his allegiance goes "wherever the wind blows." The director seems to establish this cynicism early to demonstrate how the various groups under the Nazi sphere of influence had no allegiances to their oppressors. Despite this, they are unable to muster the strength to rise against their oppressors. Through Renault's actions, the audience believes that he is waiting for the right opportunity to make his move. Renault realizes an opportunity has arisen at the film's climax after Rick shoots Strasser, the film's main antagonist. Rather than arrest Rick, though, he joins Rick and suggests they travel to join a Free French resistance group. The film's ending could be perceived as an allegory to Operation Torch.



Figure 7: Captain Louis Renault, a tertiary character in Casablanca. Throughout the film, Renault's ever-changing attitude shows the audience that those subjugated by the Nazis were not loyal to them.

Both the film and Operation Torch took place in North Africa and closed with American and French forces subsequently uniting to oppose Nazi oppression. The film's final moments show Rick and Captain Renault walking away from Casablanca to join French freedom fighters. After the Americans and British defeated Nazi-led troops,

¹⁰² *Casablanca*, Film.

various French resistance groups began to rise against Vichy French rule and slowly reestablish democracy in North Africa and later in France.¹⁰³

Finally, the antagonist Major Heinrich Strasser is portrayed as the personification of fascism. He is cold, calculating, and determined to quell all resistance against his authority. Visually presented to the audience through his stern dialogue with others, the menacing presentation of his posture, and his general lack of respect for Casablanca's inhabitants. He is offended when the predominately-French patrons join Victor in the



Figure 8: Major Heinrich Strasser, the main antagonist in Casablanca. His facial demeanor and body language are intentional to showcase the ruthlessness of the Nazis.

singing of *La Marseillaise*, so he shuts down the club. The idea was for the audience to associate these traits as antagonistic against the democratic values of respecting the will of the people. At the film's climax, Strasser tries to prevent Ilsa and Victor's escape, but Rick intervenes, shooting him. Renault covers for Rick before they make their escape towards a Free French resistance group. One

last piece of propaganda for the audience: if America joins the fight, together, the Allied forces will defeat Nazi oppression.¹⁰⁴

The climax of the film coincidentally aligns with the United States' war effort abroad. As if written by Hollywood screenwriters, Operation Torch had commenced on Wednesday, November 8, 1942. American and British soldiers poured into Nazi-occupied North Africa in the hopes of establishing a staging area for a future invasion of

¹⁰³ *Casablanca*, Film.

¹⁰⁴ *Casablanca*, Film.

Europe. The defenders faced a hodgepodge of emotions in resisting the Allied invasion. Some were local, professional soldiers whose loyalty depended on whoever commanded Vichy France, the Nazi-controlled puppet state of the region. Others, though, joined the Allied forces in hopes of liberation from Nazi rule. Vichy French officers felt their strings pulled between honorably defending France and their desire to cut ties with their puppet master in Germany. Nazi reinforcements from the eastern region of North Africa arrived, engulfing the area in chaos and confusion. However, by November 16, the strings were entirely cut from the puppet master, forcing him to retreat and reinforce his control over France and Tunisia. In the aftermath, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt met in Casablanca to discuss the next phase of their war plans.

Coincidentally, the nationwide release of *Casablanca* occurred the day before the conclusion of the conference in January. This premiere guaranteed financial success and gave the film a near-instant mythic status among the American public's memory. A second American front opened with the *Casablanca* premiere with the American foothold in the east now supported by a second one in the movie-going public's memories. Historian Randy Roberts noted the North African conference's timing and *Casablanca* release as "the first direct American blow against the Nazis, and it thrilled Americans."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ "Remembering Operation Torch: Allied Forces Land in North Africa during World War II," (American Battle Monuments Commission | USA.GOV, November 8, 2017), <https://www.abmc.gov/news-events/news/remembering-operation-torch-allied-forces-land-north-africa-during-world-war-ii>. "The Casablanca Conference, 1943," Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/casablanca>. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, 4th ed. (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993).

"As Time Goes By": the memory of *Casablanca*¹⁰⁶

The film successfully conveyed a pro-war message and effectively adhered to the OWI's suggestions in crafting a film of artistic quality while masking its propaganda. An October 1942 BMP Feature Review report noted that "From the standpoint of the war information program, *Casablanca* is a very good picture about the enemy, those whose lives the enemy has wrecked and those underground agents who fight him unrelentingly on his ground." Authored by Nelson Poynter and three other BMP staff members, the report lists seven points to support their assertion. They highlighted the presentation of Victor Laszlo and the underground resistance movement as genuine. The film's portrayal of chaos, directly caused by Casablanca's Nazi occupation, depicted fascism as antagonistic towards refugees seeking asylum to democratically friendlier nations such as the United States. Another highlighted point is the half-hearted support of the French police in Casablanca, particularly from Captain Renault. All these factors informed viewers of the resistance to Nazi oppression and encouraged Americans to sympathize with Europeans, most of whom did not support the Nazi regime. Additionally, the report noted how the film presents the United States as a haven for refugees and a defender of freedom and democracy. Most important, though, was the presentation of personal sacrifice in defeating fascism. "In short, *Casablanca* presents the BMP's slant on the United States, its enemy, and its allies as well as underscoring the reasons America is in the war."¹⁰⁷

According to the BMP manual, failing to understand the enemy could lead to the

¹⁰⁶ "As Time Goes By" is a 1931 song written by Herman Hupfeld and prominently featured in *Casablanca*.

¹⁰⁷ Mintz and Roberts, 139

The BMP film review can be found on Mintz and Roberts, 142-3.

Axis Powers' perceived end goal: world domination. The OWI stressed the importance of motion pictures portraying this reality to audiences to reiterate why peace was non-negotiated. According to the OWI, the Axis Powers aimed to rid the world of individuality, a core principle of democracy. OWI highlighted how the belligerent nations carried out their goals. In particular, they attempted to divide an opposing nation's people along social, economic, racial, and religious lines through propaganda, a form of psychological warfare, and sabotage. The belligerents employed such tactics to confuse their opponents and beat other nations into submission.

Understanding the enemy and encouraging Americans to remain united against foreign aggression became one of the propaganda aspects promoted in the film *Bataan*. The film presents a unique angle of the American war effort in that it takes the memory of an American loss and transforms it into a “last stand” narrative. The Hollywood presentation of the events at Bataan represents another example of the film industry and the federal government influencing the war’s public memory through the artistic flair of motion pictures.

Case Study: *Bataan*, the Enemy, and the Peoples’ War

The battle of Bataan was one of the first significant American military efforts of the war. On December 8, 1941, The United States had declared war on Japan. However, the country was ill-prepared for the Japanese air strikes launched on U.S. and Filipino bases in the Philippines the same day. Two days later, the Japanese bombardment began on the American Asiatic Fleet's main base in Manila Bay, the Cavite Naval Yard. An amphibious invasion on Manila Bay forced American and Filipino defenses back as they fought desperately to buy time for nearby Manila's evacuation. General Douglass

McArthur's forces retreated to the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay and the Bataan Peninsula. Some 6,000 American and 45,000 Filipino soldiers fought off an overwhelming Japanese force for almost five months. Both positions fell in April and May of 1942, however.

The fall of Bataan became a "last stand" narrative that evoked memories similar to other historical events such as the Alamo and the Battle of Little Bighorn, which by the 1940s remained important markers in American national memory. The Alamo featured the story of a small group of Anglo and Tejano revolutionaries falling to an overwhelming force led by a dictator. "Remember the Alamo" and "Crockett's Last Stand" had become rallying cries and inspirational slogans to avenge the fallen and never to forget their sacrifice. In the decades since the battle, the Alamo's memory became a well-known account of people making the ultimate sacrifice for a cause. The "last stand" narrative popped up again in 1876 with "Custer's Last Stand" at the Battle of Little Bighorn. These accounts served the interests of an Anglo-centric society who valued men's sacrifices for the American ideals of freedom and liberty against a sinister foe. The moniker entered the American public's memory as an expression to remember those who make defiant "last stands" for freedom and democracy.¹⁰⁸

In April 1943, MGM Studios indirectly sought to capitalize on Bataan's memory through the release of the film *Bataan*. The following case study will examine how the OWI and MGM Studios sought to create a public memory of the battle through the story of a small, diversified group willing to sacrifice their lives for the democratic values of freedom and liberty against a formidable foe. Like the story of the Alamo, it featured a

¹⁰⁸ Richard R. Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003).

hodgepodge of volunteers willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for freedom with a similar-in-vein tagline of, “The story America will never forget!”¹⁰⁹

Bataan began its inception under the working title *Bataan Patrol*. The beginnings of the script-writing process are not known, but a June 26 letter by actor William H. Wright to Nelson Poynter sheds some light on the film's early developments. The letter represented a follow up to a prior conversation between the two men concerning the script's development.¹¹⁰ A few of the questions mentioned in the letter included what roles African Americans played, Filipinos' contributions in the battle, the various military branches serving in the Pacific, transcripts of military radio reports, and the battle tactic the Japanese employed during the battle.¹¹¹

It is unclear what Poynter's response was; documentation is unavailable. However, one can infer that the BMP did their best to assist with the letter's requests based on a declassified script review from October 2, 1942. The BMP seemed pleased with the initial script draft of *Bataan Patrol*. A three-person group read the piece, with one tasked with writing a review. The written synopsis of the film's plot described a group of thirteen volunteers who must defend a bridge in the Bataan Peninsula from an advancing Japanese force from reaching General Douglas MacArthur before he reformed the Army. Throughout, the script describes the Japanese as “fighting fiercely” against the American and Filipino defensive position overlooking a bridge. The Japanese antagonists successfully kill all but one of the defenders in the initial script. The reviewer heaped

¹⁰⁹ “Bataan,” IMDb, (IMDb.com), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035664/>.

¹¹⁰ It is unclear what Wright's role was during the early developments of the script. However, his letter featured an MGM Studios letterhead. It seems safe to presume that he reached out on behalf of MGM.

¹¹¹ Letter from Wright to Nelson Poynter, Bataan, June 26, 1942, Box 3511, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1.

praise on the film's portrayal of the Japanese antagonists: "There has been to (sic) great a tendency to underestimate Japan – but this story brings home the full impact of the enemy's cruelty, enormous strength, efficiency, and persistence. Our people need to realize exactly what they face if they are to gear their full energies to total war."¹¹² However, the report noted the lack of presenting Japanese fascism to an unfamiliar American audience. It seems safe to assume the production team took these comments with open ears as the following April, the completed film, now titled *Bataan*, received praise in the BMP's film analysis.



Figure 9: In Bataan, the enemy attacks the Americans from the shadows for most of the film. This presentation informs audiences that the Japanese are formidable opponents that should be respected and not underestimated.

During the April review, a two-person BMP team viewed the film, with one writing a review. The reviewer noted in the synopsis the violent and ruthless manner of the Japanese antagonists. Watching the film, one can understand why the reviewer described the Japanese antagonist as "a cruel

and ruthless foe who will resort to any sort of treachery to gain their ends." The Japanese attack from the shadows throughout the film. The intended effect of this presentation showed the Japanese as ruthless and cunning. Examples include the opening scene featuring a Japanese air bombing of retreating American and Filipino service members, Filipino civilians, and nurses. Later, snipers are seen and heard picking off the volunteers

¹¹² Bataan Script Review, *Bataan*, October 2, 1942, Box 3511, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1.

one by one. After every fallen comrade, Sergeant Bill Dane, the lead protagonist, acknowledges the difficulty of battling such a formidable opponent. Other examples include the torturing of the Filipino tertiary characters aiding the American soldiers and the sneaky, ruthless killing of others. The Japanese antagonists do not visually appear in the film until approximately the seventy-six-minute mark (or the two-thirds mark of the film's one hundred- and fourteen-minute run time). There, the Japanese use tree branches and leaves as camouflage to sneak up on the defenders. A firefight ensues in which the Japanese are held back but not before the film showcases their maneuverability and ability to fight.¹¹³

Last Stand at *Bataan*

The film achieved high marks from the BMP, prior to release, for its presentation of the enemy as vicious and intelligent. Additionally, the film's grizzly presentation of Bataan's events seems to align with the sixth and final theme of the manual recognized the harsh realities of military life for American servicemen. *Bataan* featured a popular American ideal of sacrificing oneself for a greater ideal. Thirteen men defiantly made their "last stand" in defense of American Exceptionalism, a belief that the United States was unique among other nations because of their democratic society. Like public memory of Custer at Little Bighorn or the defenders of the Alamo, the ending of *Bataan* featured defiant Americans dying to protect liberty in one great "last stand." Sergeant Dane eloquently stated this idea near the end of the film: "Maybe it don't seem to do an awful lot of good, a few men getting killed holding on to some place you never heard of, probably never will... but we figured the men who died here may have done more than

¹¹³ Bataan Film Review, *Bataan*, October 2, 1942, Box 3511, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1.

we'll ever know to save this whole world... It don't matter where a man dies as long as he dies for freedom." That message deliberately implied to the American public why the U.S. fought abroad. The American ideals of freedom and democracy were at risk of falling to undemocratic "militarism." It was America's duty to protect it.



Figure 10: Bataan features the "Last Stand" myth from American history to glorify American servicemen's actions abroad. The ending encourages Americans to support the fighting men.

The ending of the film offered one final message for the American viewer. At the film's climax, only three of the initial thirteen volunteers remain. Eventually, a Japanese soldier, "playing possum," shot one American and stabbed another in the back. Now alone, the closing scene

focused on the last American defender, Sergeant Dane, firing away at a seemingly endless stream of Japanese soldiers before fading away to a title card praising the sacrifice of American servicemen in Bataan. In the opinion of the film's producers and the federal government, the men's sacrifice at Bataan (now framed as the island) made it possible for the eventual American victory in the Pacific. It is the final memory crafted for American audiences in that American interaction in the war will lead to victory.

Bataan also successfully conveyed the "people's war" theme through the various minority characters serving alongside white soldiers. The Anglos face the same harsh realities of the battle as the minority characters, including two Filipino soldiers, a Mexican American national guardsman, an African American demolitions expert, a Jewish American corporal, and a Polish American engineer. Moreover, the group also

represented different military and social groups, including catholic national guardsmen, a conscientious objector turned medic, a musician from the navy, and a preacher-in-training now serving as a demolition expert. Despite their different backgrounds, each man has a moment to display their heroism before their imminent deaths. These character backgrounds fulfilled vital aspects of the first and sixth themes. To correctly display a peoples' war, Bataan showed various racial groups in the heat of the fight. It also displays of different servicemen presented an additional layer to the "peoples' war" dynamic. A sailor defending the bridge alongside an army air force lieutenant, medic, and guardsman. These intentional designs created a public memory of the war in which different sectors of the American people united to defend democracy against "militarism."

Conclusion

Above all else, these three films successfully presented propaganda information and created a commodified, prosthetic memory that appealed to the general audiences through dramatic storytelling. Allison Landsberg argues that a prosthetic memory allows different social groups to access marginalized groups' memories and sympathize with their plight. Benedict Anderson built on that premise by noting the creation of "imagined communities" or larger social groups with access to the memory.¹¹⁴ Tactfully filmed, *Casablanca* presented the oppressive nature of "militarism" over refugees from democratic societies. In doing so, the film brought this community to American audiences, encouraging viewers to empathize and support their country's entry into WWII. In *Bataan*, the "imagined community" presented the United States as a multi-

¹¹⁴ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, England: Verso, 2006).

cultural and social group that come together in support of democratic values to fight against “militarism.” This presentation encourages viewers to remember the war as a people’s war. Finally, *Mrs. Miniver* brought an English community to American audiences and presented them as relatable and sympathetic. In doing so, Americans saw a version of themselves resisting “militarism” abroad and were encouraged to remember their role in a total war.

The subliminal propaganda developed through multiple writers transforming an original, authentic memory into a marketable, inauthentic, commodified version for the public. This version appealed to American film audiences through its use of emotional and political elements. Viewers left movie theaters with a memory of a people's war between “militarism’s” aggression and the resistance from democratic societies. These three films are examples of a concerted effort to produce and manipulate public memory to encourage Americans to support the United States' involvement abroad. In the case of *Mrs. Miniver*, through American sentiment for the British people. In *Casablanca*, through the evolution of Rick Blaine, the personification of the American people in Rick Blaine, whose evolution represents the American people’s evolving views on the war. Finally, in *Bataan*’s of a motley crew of servicemen who represent the federal government’s expected unity of all Americans in the fight to protect democratic values, at home and abroad.

IV. CHAPTER THREE

In his chapter, “John Wayne Goes to War,” film historian Randy Roberts shares an anecdote concerning Cecil B. DeMille, a celebrated director, and producer of the silent film era. He continued finding considerable success with the introduction of sound films. The Associated Motion Pictures Advertisers held a luncheon in March 1942, at which, DeMille gave an address to the audience concerning the war effort, stating, “The job of motion pictures is to help bring home a full realization of the crisis and the deadly peril that lurks in internal squabbles. Ours is the task of holding high and ever visible the values of that everyone is fighting for. I don’t mean flag waving but giving the embattled world sharp glimpses of the way of life that we’ve got to hang on to in spite of everything.” Roberts suggested the quote demonstrated DeMille's belief that the civilians at home, working on films, had a duty just as crucial as those fighting along the war fronts. DeMille believed only a united American society, in support of the war, could achieve victory.¹¹⁵

This chapter analyzes the success of the Bureau of Motion Pictures in influencing Hollywood productions to present pro-war rhetoric that shaped WWII's public memory. The film industry and the federal government understood the power motion pictures presented in portraying the American war effort. The Bureau of Motion Pictures provided war information to film studios. In turn, these studios looked to their filmmakers to seamlessly sow propaganda into visual narratives that blanketed with pro-war rhetoric. Filmmakers were so successful with their motion pictures that many

¹¹⁵ Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, “John Wayne Goes to War.” Essay, *In Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century America through Film*, 4th ed., (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 152.
“Cecil B. DeMille,” IMDb, (IMDb.com), https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001124/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm.

Americans of the 1940s and beyond do not realize that their memories were “white-washed,” inauthentic, prosthetic accounts created by Hollywood and the federal government.

This chapter analyzes the box office and critical reception of the three films featured in chapter two’s case studies: *Mrs. Miniver*, *Casablanca*, and *Bataan*. The film industry was and still is a private industry dependent on profitability to survive. **The case studies of financial success show that these films succeeded in reaching a broad audience through their profitability.** In addition, the chapter examines each film’s critical receptions provides further evidence that these films succeeded in promoting the federal government’s pro-war message without compromising Hollywood films’ artistic expression. The positive reception of the three films received from both film industry members and the federal government highlights the effectiveness of each film’s promotion of WWII. This positive reception underscores two assumptions: Hollywood’s recognition of war information as a means of artistic expression and the federal government’s recognition of Hollywood as an official caretaker of WWII memory.

This chapter will also highlight the political shifts in 1943-44 that prematurely ended the BMP and the continuation of its work through the Bureau of Censorship. The federal agency’s lawful ability to censor media prior to foreign distribution forced filmmakers to include government-sponsored war information in their films or risk losing money from foreign markets. This observation aims to underscore how the Bureau succeeded in influencing war-related films throughout U.S. participation in WWII. The Bureau’s demise did not end its impact on American society. Rather, though, the Bureau’s legacy continues as a presence in the American public’s memory.

Measuring Success

President Roosevelt understood the power that mass media had with the American public. He previously used the radio format to shape how Americans could interpret the war in Europe. Now with the U.S. involved, he aimed to shape Americans' understanding of the war through feature films. The Bureau of Motion Pictures not only influenced Hollywood filmmaking, but it also tracked the industry's work in countless documents, which are now housed at the National Archives. These documents document the work of the Bureau and its success.

The BMP articulated the federal government's official view on Hollywood films, which was described in the BMP's Annual Report released in September 1943. The government document indicated "the 'editorial influence' of motion pictures as a means of influencing the public mind."¹¹⁶ Hollywood producers had previously avoided using popular films as vehicles to promote an agenda overtly. However, with WWII raging on two fronts, the BMP began actively encouraging Hollywood feature films to aid the American war effort. Hollywood produced films primarily for entertainment purposes with plots and themes that served the federal government's interests of the war abroad. The Annual Report in September 1943 stated that "To do this it was necessary, first, to determine what elements of the war information program could best be exploited by motion pictures and second, to persuade motion picture producers that the introduction of such editorial values would not detract from the box office attraction of the product."¹¹⁷ In other words, the Bureau encouraged Hollywood to produce feature films that could

¹¹⁶ "Annual Report, Hollywood Office: Bureau of Motion Pictures," Office of War Information: Bureau of Motion Pictures' Hollywood Office, September 1943, Box 3510, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 2.

seamlessly present pro-war propaganda to audiences without alienating them from supporting the war effort.

The BMP tracked the numbers of films coming out of Hollywood and how well they fit its agenda. In this way, the staff provided a way to show the extent of its influence. A memorandum dated October 8, 1943—previously classified—sheds light on how the BMP measured its reach up to that point. The report seemingly inferred that the BMP's continuing involvement with the filmmaking, in a consulting capacity, produced an overall stronger presentation of the war to the American public than before its involvement. This information could be measured in terms of both numbers of films on war and how well they incorporated recommended themes. In the quarter before the report's release (June 15-September 15), 545 film projects were in some form of production. Of that number, 264 films dealt with the war in some capacity. An additional 124 films were awaiting release, of which 60 related to the war. These numbers, though, do not present the whole picture.¹¹⁸

With the United States locked in total war, the film industry, much like the rest of the country, had to manage production limitations imposed by the War Production Board. Restrictions on raw film material forced film productions to conserve the film stock needed for filming. In 1940, Hollywood studios released 673 films. However, Hollywood only released 427 films in 1943, the same year as the BMP report. These numbers suggest that despite its "essential" status, the film industry could not produce films at the same volume as before. Film producers had to be more particular in what they decided to

¹¹⁸ "Result of our Recent Inventory of Hollywood Motion Picture Features," Office of War Information: Bureau of Motion Pictures' Hollywood Office, October 8, 1943, Box 3510, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1.

film, indirectly leading to a more significant influence from the OWI as the federal agency had control over the foreign distribution of films through the Office of Censorship.¹¹⁹

Another vital piece of data tracked in the BMP report concerned the type of motion pictures produced during the period. Films were, in general, less melodramatic, and comedic and more serious in subject and tone. A further break down of war-related films, either in pre-, current, or postproduction, fell into categories related to the themes expressed in the government manual: 107 films concerned the fighting forces of the war, 77 films involved the united nations who fought alongside the United States, 57 films concerned the issues of the war, 60 featured the American home or production front, and 45 addressed the belligerents of the war. These numbers show an increase in films pertaining to the United Nations, issues concerning the war, and the American home/production fronts. There was a slight decrease in films about the enemy; however, the report noted that the films' overall quality improved by undertaking less caricature in favor of serious portrayals. These were improvements from Hollywood studios in the eyes of the federal agency.¹²⁰

How, then, does the quantitative data on this primary source support the thesis's central argument? In short, the document established that the federal government understood the significance Hollywood had with the general public, thus deeming it an essential war industry. The Bureau also had an appreciation for Hollywood's ability to mask pro-war rhetoric by producing captivating stories. Finally, the document established

¹¹⁹ Jowett, 310.

¹²⁰ "Result of our Recent Inventory of Hollywood Motion Picture Features," Office of War Information: Bureau of Motion Pictures' Hollywood Office, October 8, 1943, Box 3510, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1-6.

how, effectively, Hollywood filmmakers used the manual's themes in films in the federal government's official opinion.

Reception of War Films

The BMP may well have had a considerable effect on the critical and financial reception of Hollywood productions. Hollywood served its duty as an essential industry for the war effort, but the industry needed financial revenue to support itself. Just as important in Hollywood, though, Hollywood film critics and members of the film industry recognized films with pro-war rhetoric as a respectable visual art form from the film industry members. As previously written, film studios took the script and film review reports seriously. They did their best to artistically incorporate the pro-war narratives, thereby not undermining a film's artistic integrity or profitability. It seems to have paid dividends, too, based on the success of the highlighted films. *Mrs. Miniver* finished 1942 as the top-grossing film at the box office. The film premiered on June 4, 1942, to critical praise and eventual box office success. *Variety* noted that the film presented Mrs. Miniver's family as warm, sympathetic, and relatable. They become the film audiences' extended family, in the eyes of the reviewer. More importantly, though, "the film, in its quiet yet actionful (sic) way, is, probably entirely unintentionally, one of the strongest pieces of propaganda against complacency to come out of the war." Throughout the film, the villagers faced the consequences of their nation at war. Nevertheless, the villagers did whatever they could to show solidarity with their men on the front lines.¹²¹ That is the kind of message the filmmakers hoped Americans would

¹²¹ Fiona Macdonald, "Culture - Mrs. Miniver: The Film That Goebbels Feared," BBC Culture, (BBC, February 9, 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150209-the-film-that-goebbels-feared>.

adapt their lives behind: sacrifice from all Americans to preserve freedom and democracy abroad.

Critics' positive reviews of *Mrs. Miniver* demonstrate further the effectiveness of the film's pro-war messaging. For example, *The New York Times* praised the film for portraying the consequences war has on civilians. "This is a film of modern warfare in which civilians become the front-line fighters and the ingrained courage of the people becomes the nation's most vital strength." The review noted how the film seamlessly introduced the impending war to the townsfolk and their gradual integration into war service. Whether through volunteering to serve or involuntarily at home, the film's main characters showcased their commitment to the British cause. The review highlighted the film's powerful final message, in which the town, much like the soldiers on the frontlines fought on their own "war front" in service of Britain. That image, in particular, served as an underlying message to American viewers. They, too, must rise up and sacrifice for their country, now a part of a total war that requires total support from its home front.¹²²

Financial and critical successes also point to the overall power the three aforementioned films had in society. *Mrs. Miniver* became the highest-grossing film of 1942, generating approximately six million dollars by the end of the year. The film earned twelve Academy Awards nominations at the 1943 award ceremony. The film won six awards, including Best Picture, Directing, Screenplay, Cinematography, Actress, and Supporting Actress. The box office results and subsequent award wins cemented *Mrs. Miniver* as an exemplary propaganda film that expertly left its mark on audiences. In

¹²² Bosley Crowther, "Excellent Picture of England at War." *The New York Times*. (*The New York Times*, June 5, 1942), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/packages/html/movies/bestpictures/miniver-re.html>.

particular, the film succeeded in informing Americans that Great Britain was an essential ally for the United States and that Americans must understand that their success abroad is dependent on the full support of the home front. The film also presented the English people's willingness to sacrifice their comforts for their country's efforts in mainland Europe, a commitment the federal government and Hollywood hoped to spur through motion pictures.

Casablanca had similar success. It became the second-highest-grossing Warner Bros film in 1943. The film captivated general audiences and critics with its easy-to-follow narrative, memorable characters and dialogue, and visually iconic moments. Entertainment publication *Variety* reviewed the film, noting: "Casablanca will take the b.o.'s (box office) of America just as swiftly and certainly as the AEF took North Africa." The reviewer noted the timing of the film's release to capitalize on the North African campaign. *Variety* praised the film's love story as appealing to women and noted the "adventure" aspects as appealing to men. This combination allows the films to reach a broad audience.¹²³ *The New York Times* praised the film's "incisive trick of draping a tender love story within the folds of a tight topical theme" and Rick's portrayal as the personification of resistance against Nazi Germany.¹²⁴ The above critical review followed a general theme of most reviews from the period — a celebration of the film's superb dramatization of real-life events that the viewer could understand. Viewers understood the Nazis as a threat to democracy as the film portrayed them as arrogant and evil. A

¹²³ "Casablanca." *Variety* Movie Reviews, no. 3 (*Variety*, December 2, 1942): 1. <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/libproxy.txstate.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f3h&AN=25363682&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹²⁴ Bosley Crowther, "'Casablanca,' With Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, at Hollywood -- 'White Cargo' and 'Ravaged Earth' Open," (*The New York Times*, November 27, 1942), <https://www.nytimes.com/1942/11/27/archives/casablanca-with-humphrey-bogart-and-ingrid-bergman-at-hollywood.html>.

viewer might also have noted the willingness of the repressed to resist Nazi rule if given an opportunity. Finally, the viewer saw how the issues plaguing Europe are far greater than their own. The end result? The American audience understood “why we fight” and supported the war effort.

The film's mixture of propaganda and storytelling paid off critically amongst its peers. In 1944, the film was nominated for eight Academy Awards, winning three, including "Best Picture."¹²⁵ *Casablanca* became a box office success. According to a report in the January of 1943 edition of *Variety*, the film was the seventh highest-grossing film of the year, earning \$3,700,000 at the box office.¹²⁶

Like our other two films, *Bataan* finished among the top ten highest-grossing MGM films in 1943. The film was well-received both critically and financially. A review from *The New York Times* praised the gritty realism of the fight scenes, noting how they were a step in the right direction from previous war films that often went more melodramatic in their presentation of the war. Some of the actors received praise for their work, including Kenneth Spencer, for his work as the African American Wesley Epps. The review concluded that despite some technical issues and melodramatic moments, "it (*Bataan*) still gives a shocking" conception of the defense of that bloody point of land. Furthermore, it does not insult the honor of dead soldiers, which is something to say for a Hollywood film these days. Another review from *Variety* heaped praise on the sense of realism displayed in film and how it depicted the dangers for women whose husbands, sons, and “sweethearts” are on duty. The writer noted that “There's no broad sweep of

¹²⁵ "The 16th Academy Awards | 1944," Oscars.org, 2015, <https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1944>.

¹²⁶ "Top Grossers of the Season," *Variety* (January 1944), <https://archive.org/stream/variety153-1944-01#page/n51/mode/2up>.

battle displayed, outside of the concentrated Jap (sic) attacks toward the end. But (sic) there's strong underlying current of the bravery of American soldiers for maximum audience appeal, especially in these times when news of victories from various battlefronts are coming through regularly." This display of bravery on film exactly portrayed what the studio and OWI wanted, and the film's multi-racial cast served to promote the fight as a people's war.¹²⁷

Bataan's suspension of racial stereotyping is explicit, further suggesting its importance for promoting a peoples' war. Private Wesley Epps displayed tendencies typically uncharacteristic of African Americans in film. He eloquently interacted with the motley crew of defenders, who, in turn, treated him with respect. This characterization of an African American went against the black stereotypes Hollywood practiced through the prior decades. It was intentional by design as the film producers did not tell the writer that one of the characters would be African American. The end result was a strong character that represented what African Americans were fighting for: a democratic society that respected the individuals who made up society and who fought against the foreign, authoritarian machine.

All three films represent the generally positive receptions from critics and audiences. In fact, half of the films nominated for Best Picture in 1943 and 1944 had WWII-related plots. These films presented the home front and war front for audiences to experience. Whether dramatic or comedic, these films kept audiences updated with issues

¹²⁷ Crowther, Bosley. "'Bataan,' Film of Heroic Defense of Peninsula, Starring Robert Taylor, Robert Walker and Thomas Mitchell, at Capitol." *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, June 4, 1943. <https://www.nytimes.com/1943/06/04/archives/bataan-film-of-heroic-defense-of-peninsula-starring-robert-taylor.html>.

Walt, "Film Reviews: Bataan," *Variety* (*Variety* Archive: 1905-2000, May 26, 1943), 8. <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/1401240596?accountid=5683>.

concerning the war while entertaining audiences who sought an escape from the same war. Most importantly, though, they represented a film business sanctifying and validating the war propaganda underneath their artistic visions in motion pictures.¹²⁸

The federal government also played a role in sanctifying films at the Academy Awards. President Roosevelt opened the 13th Academy Awards in 1941 with a radio address. Less than ten months before Pearl Harbor, FDR proclaimed the importance of movie theaters broadcasting newsreels concerning the foreign conflict abroad. He believed the film industry reflected the values of American society abroad. FDR stated, "We've seen it reflect our civilization throughout the rest of the world. The aims and the aspirations and the ideals of a free people, and of freedom itself." He also believed this to be why certain governments (perhaps implying Nazi Germany in particular) were banning Hollywood films. He believed the ban was to ensure the people abroad would not know "that in our democracy, officers of the government are the servants—and never the masters—of the people." This statement alone seems to have sown the seeds for a "good vs. evil" dynamic both on the war front and in film.

Later in the radio address, the President stated, "I want to place the chief emphasis on the service that you [i.e., Hollywood filmmakers] can render in promoting solidarity among all the peoples of the Americas." FDR believed films could promote democracy as a form of government that protects all its people's fundamental rights, at home and abroad. Again, this statement sowed the seeds for the war's public memory, based on the

¹²⁸ "1943 Academy Awards," IMDb. (IMDb.com), https://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000003/1943/1?ref_=ttawd_ev_1.
"1944 Academy Awards," IMDb. (IMDb.com), https://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000003/1944/1/?ref_=ev_eh.

idea of protecting freedoms for all.¹²⁹

Before the 15th Academy Awards (held in 1943), President Roosevelt wrote a letter to the Academy President Walter Wanger. Actor Donald Crisp read the letter to the attendees of the ceremony. In it, FDR commended the film industry's work in service of America's war effort.

At no time in the history of motion pictures have these awards possessed so much significance. Achievement in motion picture today means much more than merely having attained the heights in public entertainment. In total war, motion pictures, like all other human endeavor, have an important part to play in the struggle for freedom and the survival of democracy. Those who achieve highly in motion pictures at this time have contributed greatly toward that end.

Roosevelt believed in the voluntary cooperation between the government's war effort and the motion picture industry. Motion pictures became an effective "war instrument," he believed, to continue throughout the war. His remarks imply what the entirety of this thesis argues: motion pictures crafted a public memory of the war that celebrated the American cause as just over the "evils" of militarism. The motion picture industry voluntarily complied with government suggestions to promote a pro-war narrative in their films. Moreover, both Hollywood and FDR's administration certified motion pictures as official accounts of the war effort for that and every passing generation of American filmgoers.¹³⁰

Lowell Mellett seemed to reciprocate FDR's words in his address to the Academy the same night. He admitted to being a critic of Hollywood films but stressed the friendship between his agency and the film industry. Mellett then noted the unique

¹²⁹ Freed, Benjamin R. "Listen: President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Address to 1941 Academy Awards." DCist. WAMU 88.5 - American University Radio, October 28, 2018. <https://dcist.com/story/13/02/26/fdr-oscar-address/>.

¹³⁰ The letter can be found at the Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA. "A Letter from FDR," 90 Stories From 90 Years, (Oscar.go.com), <https://oscar.go.com/photos/90-stories/a-letter-from-fdr/a38059ec3ba26a3c1aaefe499e1a4693e31efdb1898ec05f9199d946d2e547e2>.

relationship between film and the war effort and the patriotism displayed by filmmakers, admitting that the government's role in offering assistance to the film industry may create a perception of government interference in film. Mellett dismissed this perception and stated that the U.S. Government would not take over the motion picture business. Their short films were strictly informative of their war effort. The art of creating drama and emotion belonged to Hollywood, and the government would assist those who voluntarily sought it. He believed WWII-related motion pictures could properly elicit emotions on screen, so long as the war's proper contextualization was provided. He believed the federal government served that role, respectfully, toward the film industry. He believed this is what separated U.S. society from Nazi Germany, one founded on the principles of democracy and respecting the wishes and actions of its citizens, and the other, controlling the narrative and forcing its citizens to serve their government. "This government is engaged in a war to save and perpetuate democracy, not in a war to destroy it. So, the government is not going into the motion picture business. The government believes the motion picture business is in the right hands." Mellett assumed the film industry would serve the country well in producing films without government coercion and used his time at the awards ceremony to celebrate the industry's voluntary efforts to support the war cause. It seemed the faith Mellett's had in the motion picture industry was validated at the box office too.¹³¹

Looking at the widespread success of BMP-influenced films can be used to assess the effectiveness these films had on memory. Many, but not all, the top-grossing films for movie studios featured a WWII-influenced plot. The January 26, 1943 edition of *Variety*

¹³¹ Mellett Speech to the Academy, March 04, 1943, Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA.

featured a front-page story entitled, "War brings Biggest Boom." The article noted that "War conditions brought the biggest boom to the picture theatre boxoffice (sic) in 1942, which will result in 101 pictures released during the calendar year grossing over \$1,000,000 each, to a total of \$182,500,000..." The January 5, 1944 edition of *Variety* also noted that 1943 box office had 95 films cross the \$1,000,000 threshold for a combined total of \$211,500,000. Looking at the titles, one could see that a significant number of them dealt with topics related to the recent war. These films would make additional revenues in overseas markets but required permission from the Censorship Office before distribution. The BMP had some influence through the OWI Foreign Office stationed in Los Angeles, forcing movie studios to comply with the BMP's suggestion to receive foreign distribution permissions.¹³²

The amount of money made during this period suggests Americans sought escapism through films. Moreover, the BMP and OWI sought to exploit this dependence on motion pictures for entertainment. Ironically, the films the audiences escaped to were often war-related ones. Perhaps the films became more palatable because the visual stories portrayed obscured the propaganda-like themes promoted by the federal government. High box office receipts and critical success shows that the American moviegoers' memories of the war were influenced through captivating Hollywood productions. There is no discernable evidence to support this claim, per se, but the research presented allows for this speculation to be made. Additionally, one does not

¹³² Arthur Ungar, "101 Pix Gross in Millions," Internet Archive, (*Variety*, January 6, 1943), <https://archive.org/details/variety149-1943-01/page/n1/mode/2up>, 1 and 52.
Arthur Ungar, "Record Film Rentals in '43," Internet Archive, (*Variety*, January 5, 1944), <https://archive.org/details/variety153-1944-01>, 1 and 54.

need to research deeply to understand how these films reflected the federal government's pro-war propaganda.

In hindsight, Lowell Mellett's assumptions about Hollywood at the 15th Academy Awards Ceremony seem justified. As reviewed in this section, motion pictures influenced by the BMP enjoyed considerable success at both the box office and within the film industry's critical eye. These successes support the thesis's main argument in that the film industry and the federal government successfully produced an artificial memory of WWII through motion pictures. *Mrs. Miniver*, *Casablanca*, and *Bataan's* financial and critical successes provide the necessary information to support this argument. However, despite the BMP's success, the agency also created significant issues and controversies that culminated with the federal agency's end.

Institutional Issues

The chain of command between motion picture studios and the federal government was problematic. Lowell Mellett's BMP served as a connection between the film industry and the federal government. He established a Hollywood branch in 1942 under the leadership of Nelson Poynter. However, now there were two agencies with overlapping responsibilities. This setup led to some confusion from filmmakers as to whom to seek for guidance.

Compounding the confusion over who was in control of war information was the complicated process of obtaining government clearances for films depicting war issues. The BMP asserted that it should be the only contact that movie studios should have for war information, despite the agency's limitations in providing war information outside its sphere of influence, such as the U.S. military. The agency merely had advisory powers

and could not force other agencies, like a U.S. military branch, to comply with any directive issued by the BMP. James Myers noted in his dissertation, *The Bureau of Motion Pictures: Its Influence on Film Content during World War II and the Reasons for Its Failure*, that “Moviemakers not only had to work with the BMP but also had to obtain clearance from the War, Navy, and State Departments, Office of Censorship¹³³, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, depending on the pictures' subject matter.”¹³⁴ The U.S. military required any film based on a specific military branch to receive prior approval from the specific military branch portrayed in the film. Moreover, the Office of Censorship (a separate federal agency) had overlapping authority to review scripts, along with the BMP, to ensure they contained no information that could aid the enemy.

Further complications arose because other agencies were involved with the foreign distribution of films. As previously mentioned, President Roosevelt's Executive Order in June 1942 established the OWI. The agency established the BMP and the Overseas Branch of the BMP in Hollywood. The previously existing Office of Censorship (OOC) remained independent of the OWI to establish a separation between propaganda and censorship. The OOC also reviewed American-made films for foreign distribution.¹³⁵ This institutional setup is important to note as the Overseas Branch indirectly gained the power of censorship through the OOC.

¹³³ The Office of Censorship was an independent agency under the executive branch. Byron Price, formerly the Executive News Editor of the Associated Press, served as Director of Censorship. “Executive Order 8985 Establishing the Office of Censorship,” Executive Order 8985 Establishing the Office of Censorship, The American Presidency Project, (University of California, Santa Barbara, December 19, 1941), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-8985-establishing-the-office-censorship>.

¹³⁴ James M. Myers, Dissertation, “The Bureau of Motion Pictures: Its Influence on Film Content during World War II and the Reasons for Its Failure,” 1998, 140.

¹³⁵ Koppes and Black, 58-9.

Another point of contention concerned the presentation of the war in motion pictures. In 1942, many Hollywood films did not meet the expectations of the OWI—or those of critics. Hollywood had produced an abundance of musicals, comedies, mysteries, and action films that caricatured the United States and used the war as a backdrop to the plot. Koppes and Black noted a quote from the *New York Times* article that questioned why the government would allow “Hollywood to put across, day in and day out, the most outrageous caricature of the American character?” The OWI needed the properly war explained and justified through the artistic flair of Hollywood and subsequently produced “The Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry” guided filmmakers in making motion pictures that could help with the war effort.¹³⁶

With the manual established, the Bureau's latest question became: how to “encourage” Hollywood studios to use the manual and BMP suggestions? The federal agency lacked the power of censorship so it could not force Hollywood studios to use government war information. But another agency could in the Los Angeles Board of Review, the Office of Censorship's local branch.¹³⁷ Nelson Poynter and Lowell Mellett realized that the most effective way to encourage Hollywood productions to adhere to their suggestions was to establish a presence within the L.A. Board of Review. The hope was that if the Office of Censorship agreed to bar the exportation of films that did not meet the BMP's expectations, Hollywood productions would take the BMP's advice more seriously. For many films, the ability to generate revenue overseas made or broke the profitability of the project. In November 1942, Ulrich Bell, of the Overseas Branch, was

¹³⁶ Ibid, 104-5

¹³⁷ Koppes and Black, 105

tasked with working with the Board of Review to support the BMP's work. He tried to establish himself early on, but the November 12, 1942 speech Mellett gave to the National Board of Review complicated matters.

Controversy and Control

The Controversies that emerged between the BMP and Hollywood seem to suggest that the relationship could not have lasted long. For starters, there was always a sense of uneasiness from film executives toward the federal government. Again, these feelings might have come from the government overreach of the Wilson Administration. Censorship was a real fear among the film industry, a fear President Roosevelt was aware of. Establishing the OWI as an advisory agency for Hollywood seemed like a step in the right direction towards respecting the private industry. However, the Roosevelt Administration had its fair share of perceived overreach into the film industry.

Concerns about government overreach permeated the industry, as illustrated in the debate over double-features. On November 12, 1942, Lowell Mellett spoke at the 19th annual National Board of Review of Motion Pictures conference in New York. During his speech, Mellett attacked the movie theater practice of showing double feature films. He felt that showing two full-length films, back-to-back, wasted American audiences' time by distracting them from preparing for the realities of war in favor of fantasy. John C. Loeser wrote in his November 18, 1942, to piece for *Variety* that, "He (Mellett) advocated developing a part of the motion picture theatre (sic) program to factual films that would give the people 'the feel of the war and their own relation to it.'"¹³⁸ Loeser

¹³⁸ John C. Loeser, "Pictures: Considerable Speculation Whether Mellett's Jive on Duals Constitutes Shape of Things that are to Come," *Variety* (*Variety Archive*: 1905-2000, Nov 18 1942), 7, 20, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/1285820615?accountid=5683>.

quotes Mellett's reasoning as to why the double feature should be eliminated: "The habit of sitting three or four or more hours with one's mind afloat in a fictional world hardly equips the American population of the serious job of dealing with real life."¹³⁹ Mellett believed factual films running before the feature presentation would educate audiences about the seriousness of the war and the enemy.

Hollywood studios, however, believed the double-feature format was crucial in developing new stars. The now-defunct *Motion Picture Herald* wrote a piece in defense of the practice, stating that Hollywood and the film industry had continued to perform their patriotic duty in support of the war effort. Additionally, audiences visited movie theaters to watch films for escapism and entertainment. Thus, ending the double feature in favor of more war information would hinder the movie theater's overall experience for attendees.¹⁴⁰

Mellett called for an end to the practice but also said the BMP would take no action against it. Ironically, these seemingly innocuous comments in *Variety* may have turned out to plant fears about tighter federal control in the minds of filmmakers and presenters. They wondered if the government might force movie companies to comply through pressure, such as limiting film stock for production companies to film their films. Again, Mellett, the BMP, nor the OWI had made such a threat. However, previous government overreach attempts listed in *Variety*'s "The Fifth Freedom" November 1942 article may have influenced how film producers felt regardless. Some filmmakers feared censorship, and Mellett's comments did little to quell their fears of government

¹³⁹ Koppes and Black, 107-8.
Loeser, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Koppes and Black, 108.

oversight.¹⁴¹

Another noteworthy example of perceived government overreach occurred in the form of a December 9, 1942 letter written by Lowell Mellett to the executives across the film industry. In the letter, he requested that the motion picture industry submit finished scripts and synopses of future productions to Hollywood's BMP office. Mellett believed this practice would streamline communications between the federal government and Hollywood. "This will enable us to make suggestions as to the war content of motion pictures at a stage when it is easy and inexpensive to make any changes which might be recommended."¹⁴² He also asked for studios to submit any requests for U.S. military input through the OWI as the federal agency would reach out to the military branch the film portrayed.¹⁴³

The contents of Mellett's request became public through the media. *Variety's* December 23, 1942 cover story featured the headline, "Censors Sharpen Axes."¹⁴⁴ The situation came off as censorship in the eyes of Hollywood. The affair led to OWI Chief Elmer Davis issuing a statement in which he underlined the mission of the BMP as one that was purely advisory and that film productions would not be required to follow their advice. He backed Mellett but assured Hollywood that no form of censorship would take place. Tensions simmered, but, unfortunately, Mellett would create another stir within the industry soon after.¹⁴⁵

Another issue concerned the political leanings of Hollywood executives and the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴² Mellett to Various Studios (letter), Office of War Information: Bureau of Motion Pictures' Hollywood Office, December 9, 1942, Box 1443, (Office of War Information Collection).

¹⁴³ Koppes and Black, 108-9

¹⁴⁴ "CENSORS SHARPEN AXES." *Variety* (*Variety* Archive: 1905-2000, Dec 23, 1942) 1, 18, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/1285822801?accountid=5683>.

¹⁴⁵ Koppes and Black, 109

OWI/BMP. Many of the more influential leaders in the industry were conservative-leaning. While they supported Roosevelt's entry into the war, they did not share his ideological beliefs. Mellett and Davis were New Deal Democrats who supported Roosevelt's Four Freedoms address. So, film industry executives felt the government was overstepping its boundaries when the previously mentioned issues came about.¹⁴⁶

By the end of 1942, the Office of Censorship had strengthened its guidelines on what films could depict. This update is noteworthy for it allowed the BMP to use the agency to "influence" Hollywood productions to incorporate BMP feedback within motion pictures. The Office of Censorship issued a new code on December 11, 1942, that prohibited "labor, class, or other disturbances since 1917 which might be distorted into enemy propaganda" from being shown in films that studios intended to distribute overseas. The worry from the censorship board was that any negative portrayal of American life might be used as propaganda by one of the belligerents.¹⁴⁷ The updated code came as a result of the Censorship Bureau's New York Board of Review issuing new rules that aimed to eliminate "unsavory aspects of civilian life—gangsters, slums hopeless poverty, Okies, etc., and in particular violations of American Wartime restrictions, such as rationing, gasoline and rubber rules, etc." from newsreels.¹⁴⁸ The OWI pushed for these rules to extend to motion pictures, which the Office of Censorship did in December. Not following these guidelines could prevent a film from receiving permission to be exported to foreign markets. These foreign markets helped movie studios increase the profitability of their films. It was in their best interest to incorporate

¹⁴⁶ Koppes and Black, 111-2

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 126.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 125.

BMP notes or risk not receiving an export license from the Office of Censorship. Thus, the censorship office had the means to strongarm filmmakers into compliance; even if it did not take strong action, the threat to profits was there.

Subsequently, Bell and Poynter were at odds with how their agency should work with Hollywood. Poynter believed the BMP should provide script and film review suggestions but not require Hollywood productions to act on them—even though the industry did not always perceive his views this way. He believed in volunteerism and that Hollywood would do its patriotic duty for the war effort. However, Bell believed the government needed to be more assertive with film producers and force studios to comply with government input on films. He aimed to use the updated Office of Censorship code of December 1942 to force studios to correct films he, personally, disapproved of.¹⁴⁹ He also wanted to deny export licenses to films that did not heed government demands. However, neither Bell nor Poynter had the authority to deny exporting licenses to film studios as that power resided with the Hollywood OOC.

The issues between the two culminated in the summer of 1943. A resurgent conservative movement attacked "liberal-leaning" domestic programs while President Roosevelt remained focused on the foreign conflict. Hollywood conservatives voiced their frustrations with a federal agency focused on the artistic side of the filmmaking while neglecting the film industry's business side.¹⁵⁰ Elmer Davis found himself on the defense with conservatives in both Hollywood and Congress, who questioned the OWI's role. Hollywood producers publicly stated their support for a relationship between the government and their industry through press releases but did not include Davis or Lowell

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 131-35

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 136-7.

Mellett in their statements. Hollywood wanted to produce pro-war rhetoric without a federal agency trying to dictate how they should incorporate it. Historian Garth Jewett put it simply in his book for the American Film Institute, *Film: The Democratic Art*, in that, “The film industry had asked for an opportunity to make an ‘unimpaired’ contribution to the war effort.”¹⁵¹ That is, to do their “patriotic duty” without intervention from the federal government. In the summer 1943, Congress slash the \$7,000,000 budget of the OWI down to \$2,750,000 and the BMP budget of \$1,500,000 down to \$50,000. Davis felt the money would go to waste as the BMP could not operate effectively. Davis shuttered the agency in July 1943, and Mellett resigned.¹⁵²

With the BMP’s unceremonious end, Ulrich Bell could expand his influence over the Office of Censorship. With the BMP gone, he was free of the ideological constraints and could pressure Hollywood productions through foreign license distribution. The BMP’s film and script review staff moved over to his Overseas Branch agency to continue their work. Bell increased his influence with the censorship board in Hollywood, which forced filmmakers to follow the Overseas Branch's suggestions or risk not acquiring an export license of their films.¹⁵³

The federal government continued to review films for overseas distribution, and it seems likely that filmmakers kept governmental “suggestions” close at hand. For example, the BMP Annual Report from September 1943 noted that films relating to the

¹⁵¹ Garth S. Jewett, *Film: The Democratic Art*, (Boston, MA: Focal Press, 1976), 309.

¹⁵² Birgit Streich, "Propaganda Business: The Roosevelt Administration and Hollywood," (Humboldt Journal of Social Relations 16, no. 1 (1990)), 43-65, www.jstor.org/stable/24003022.
Jewett, 309.

¹⁵³ Koppes and Black, 139

war effort in a positive way would be eligible for overseas distribution.¹⁵⁴ No doubt, motion picture makers found it prudent to follow the government manual's suggestions when producing films related to the war. Other contemporary governmental reports detail the numbers of Hollywood films and their potential contributions to the war effort. One such report, from the Los Angeles Overseas Branch states,

The Overseas Branch of the Office of War Information is engaged in selecting motion pictures for distribution in countries liberated by the armies of the United Nations. The selections are made from films that are most valuable to the government's purpose of psychological warfare. These selections included pictures with exceptional entertainment value for movie-starved audiences of the liberated countries, with particular attention given to the projection of the American way of life.¹⁵⁵

Based on this official, previously classified document, it seems safe to infer that these films were influenced by the BMP to create a public memory of the war that favored the American cause.

Conclusion

World War II ended in Europe on May 2, 1945, and in the Pacific on September 2, 1945. Hollywood had served its country well in producing various motion pictures that promoted government-sponsored, pro-war rhetoric through the influence of the Office of War Information's Bureau of Motion Pictures. In total, the OWI "reviewed 1,652 scripts before President Harry S. Truman abolished the agency on August 31, 1945."¹⁵⁶ This chapter argued the Bureau of Motion Pictures had real success in influencing Hollywood

¹⁵⁴ "The BMP Annual Report," Office of War Information: Bureau of Motion Pictures' Hollywood Office, September 1943, Box 3510, (Office of War Information Collection), National Archive II in College Park, Maryland.

¹⁵⁵ "Report to the Motion Picture Industry of Recent OWI Inventory of Hollywood Motion Picture Features," Office of War Information: Los Angeles Overseas Bureau. June 15, 1944, Box 3510. Office of War Information Collection, National Archive II in College Park, Maryland, 1.

¹⁵⁶ President Franklin D. Roosevelt died before the conclusion of WWII. Vice President Truman became President on April 12, 1945.

Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1987), 324

to include pro-war rhetoric into its motion pictures. The Bureau's success was reflected on the box office and critical success of the three films studied: *Mrs. Miniver*, *Casablanca*, and *Bataan*. Each film represented the influence of the BMP influence during a significant period of its existence, mid-1942 to mid-1943. The financial successes indicate that American audience accepted, with their money, the stories each film told. The critical successes represent each film's recognition as works of art by the private film industry.

This chapter also noted the bureaucratic issues operating behind the scenes of both Hollywood and the federal government, ultimately leading to the demise of the Bureau. This end, though, did not prevent the federal government from achieving its objective. Through the power of the Office of Censorship, pro-war rhetoric continued in Hollywood feature films. This practice continued because film industry executives realized that not including government-sponsored war information in their films could hamper a film's ability to receive an export license for foreign distribution. In the end, dollars had as much influence on motion pictures as did the federal government. Nevertheless, this very industry had enormous influence over the American public and used this opportunity to create a government-sponsored, artificial memory of WWII through the lens of Hollywood storytelling.

V. CONCLUSION

President Franklin D. Roosevelt believed in the necessity of a united American society during total war. He felt the motion picture industry could serve the country by providing motion pictures that favorably depicted the American war effort. Roberts quoted President Roosevelt's December 18, 1941 appointment letter to Lowell Mellett, soon-to-be head of the Office of Government Reports, in that: "The American motion picture is one of our most effective media in informing and entertaining our citizens. The motion picture must remain free in so far as national security will permit."¹⁵⁷ Roberts underlines how both Hollywood and the federal government acknowledged the importance the motion picture medium may have with the American public. As previously noted, Roosevelt believed the motion picture industry was essential to boosting morale on the home front and promoting the issues as to why the United States fought. However, he believed regulating the industry would negatively affect how the American public would see feature films. With the power of hindsight, one may surmise that the federal government's approach in sharing pro-war rhetoric to a film industry volunteering to use it in its films influenced how the American public remembers WWII. This approach developed from WWI's memories. An over-the-top propaganda push turned the public against President Wilson's crusade to unite Americans behind his war to protect liberal democracy. President Roosevelt facilitated what is now known as a "good war" narrative in which Americans united in support of a peoples' war against fascism. Through the lens of a video camera, Americans believed the United States

¹⁵⁷ *The Code of Federal Regulations of the United States of America Having General Applicability and Legal Effect in Force June 1, 1938: Book 1.* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939). Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts, *Hollywood's America Twentieth-Century America through Film*, (Chichester, Great Britain: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 152.

fought in defense of the ideal form of a democratic society, in which all could enjoy the liberties and freedoms without societal or political abuse.

The Office of War Information served both the federal government and Hollywood filmmakers' interests in promoting pro-war rhetoric that shaped movie audiences' memories. WWII dominated American society, and the federal government sought to present their side of Americans' engagement. Hollywood volunteered to promote the government's message and subsequently worked together to produce a "good war narrative" in which the United States fought for a peoples' war in support of democratic ideologies at home and abroad. Government-sponsored themes based on the concept of America fighting a "peoples' war" to preserve democratic values that championed equality influenced how American society remembers the "good war."

This thesis builds from various theories concerning memory. Maurice Halbwachs promoted the concept of collective memory. He believed our remembrance of the past consists of memories easily accessible and remembered by others and memories that individuals can only access and recall through triggered emotions. A collective memory depends on individuals within a social group remembering events, people, and places. Alison Landsberg crafted the theory of prosthetic memory. She argues that these forms of memories are artificial and crafted for a specific purpose. In the thesis's case, that purpose revolves around promoting the Roosevelt Administration's pro-war rhetoric through motion pictures. Film studios volunteered their services to the federal government, allowing for disseminating propaganda through Hollywood-style storytelling. Motion pictures allow audiences to access these new, shared memories quickly, in some way, streamlining Halbwachs' notion of collective memory for the masses. Finally, Benedict

Anderson expanded on Landsberg's work in arguing that mass media allows outside groups to experience a collective memory through "imagined communities," created by a media's interpretation of memory. During WWII, Hollywood filmmakers crafted films with pro-war rhetoric that facilitated the establishment of "imagined communities" for Americans to "experience" the federal government-sponsored side of the global conflict. Doing so led to American audiences supporting the American war effort.

This thesis aims to build off various social-historical accounts of Hollywood's relationship with the federal government during WWII. Garth Jowett's *Film: The Democratic Art* and *Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century America Through Films* (edited by Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts) offers a macro-level observation of the film industry's history. Each contains dedicated sections to the film industry's efforts to support U.S. intervention into WWII. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black's *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* provided a deep dive into the relationship between Hollywood and Roosevelt's administration during the war. Uneasy at times, Koppes and Black note how the relationship led to producing a more nuanced form of propaganda that audiences retained as memories of the war effort. Finally, John Bodnar's *The "Good War"* and *American Memory* analyzes how the war's official memory may clash with personal memories from those who served. Chapter five's "Split Screen" provided the foundation for this thesis' assertions of the impact memory had on crafting an artificial memory of the war through motion pictures.

This thesis aims to showcase how the federal government and Hollywood collaborated to create a new WWII memory through motion pictures. To support this

claim, the first chapter focused on the Wilson Administration's failures in their initial efforts to sway public opinion for the American entrance into WWI. Their failures and subsequent congressional hearings concerning why the United States joined the European affair influenced Roosevelt's approach to promoting pro-war rhetoric to the American moviegoer. He established two federal agencies, the Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures, to facilitate a relationship with Hollywood film executives and filmmakers. Based on "volunteerism," film studios would reach out to either federal agency in developing pro-war sentiment into their films.

Chapter two introduced "The Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry," which established six pro-war themes the Bureau of Motion Pictures encouraged film studios to incorporate. The themes included: *The Issues: Why We Fight*, *The Enemy: Whom Why Fight*, *The United Nations and Peoples: With Whom We Are Allied in Fighting*, *Work and Production: The War at Home*, *The Home Front: What We Must Do*, and *The Fighting Forces: The Job of the Fighting Man at the Front*. After a breakdown of each theme, chapter two concluded with three case studies concerning three films, *Mrs. Miniver*, *Casablanca*, and *Bataan*, that incorporated various themes pushed by the manual. These films were chosen as they best represented the manual's views, and the release dates line up with the establishment of the Bureau, the height of the Bureau, and the end of the Bureau. Most importantly, though, **these three films represent how the relationship between Hollywood and the federal government influenced public memory of the war through motion pictures.**

Chapter three provides a general, macro view of the Bureau's reach and influence throughout hundreds of Hollywood productions. The chapter then elaborates further on

the success of the three films analyzed in the previous chapter. *Mrs. Miniver* represents Hollywood's early efforts in using American sentiment, toward Britain, in support of the Roosevelt Administration's mobilization for war. Modern-day Hollywood trade publication *Entertainment Weekly* quoted renowned film Historian Mark Harris about the film's legacy in a 75 years later retrospective. "Mrs. Miniver is a very nice, mild, domestic comedy that is interrupted and then disrupted and undermined by terror, and war, and tragedy. That's why it's so effective."¹⁵⁸ The film presented a British village as a representation of ordinary, middle-class society whose "way of life" connects with American audiences emotionally. The film then presents Nazi German aggression toward British society, upending the British homeland's peaceful lives. The film executes this perception through the aggressive tone of a downed German Luftwaffe pilot toward the title character and, later, a Luftwaffe bombing of the village. In doing so, in cinemas, American viewers connected German aggression and "militarism" as a threat toward their way of life.

Casablanca remains one of the film industry's most excellent films and continues to resonate with audiences today. The story, characters, scenes, and dialogue continue to resonant with each generation of film appreciators. The film represents the fruitful relationship between Hollywood and the federal government as well. Success hinged on the concept of creating a prosthetic memory for the public to consume. A memory-based on Nazi oppression against the shared democratic values abroad. "Its manifestation of

¹⁵⁸ Mark Harris is the writer of the book, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War*. The books delve into five directors' pro-war work during WWII, including William Wyler (director of *Mrs. Miniver*).

Anthony Breznican, "Oscar Flashback: Why 1942's 'Mrs. Miniver' Remains a Resistance Icon," *EW.com*, (Meredith Corporation, March 4, 2018), <https://ew.com/oscars/2018/03/04/oscar-flashback-mrs-miniver-won-big-75-years-ago-and-its-message-of-resistance-endures/>.

life's difficult choices and the sacrifice of doing what is right," noted Kathy Merlock Jackson in *Journal in Popular Film & Television*.¹⁵⁹ In the film's climax, Rick decides to sacrifice his personal wishes to be with Ilsa for the greater good and join the French resistance movement against the Nazis. He tells a saddened Ilsa, "Where I'm going, you can't follow. What I've got to do, you can't be any part of, Ilsa. I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you'll understand that."¹⁶⁰ This monologue was a final message to the viewers in movie theaters. Rick asked audiences to understand the need to put aside their personal feelings to support American interventionism. A message created from an inauthentic memory but portrayed as if experienced by those repressed abroad. The film succeeded in propagandizing the public into accepting this memory as valid — one based on the necessity to sell a war to an American audience and galvanize their support for the United States' role as protectors of democracy.

Finally, *Bataan* was also successful in presenting the threat of militarism abroad. Instead of Nazi Germany, though, the Empire of Japan represented that threat. The film also showcased the United States fighting a "peoples' war" by "the people." Different social and ethnic groups, working together in defense of the American cause. This presentation of a unified American society hid the realities of the United States' history during WWII. African Americans in the South experienced "separate but equal" laws that were anything but equal. Women subjugated as "second-class" citizens to men.

¹⁵⁹ K. M. Jackson (2000), *Playing it Again and Again: Casablanca's impact on American mass media and popular culture*, *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, 27(4), 33-41, retrieved from <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/199411972?accountid=5683>

¹⁶⁰ *Casablanca*, Directed by Michael Curtiz, Performed by Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Paul Henreid, (United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1942), Film.

Hispanics, along the American Southwest, faced marginalized pay and deportation. Japanese Americans saw their lives uprooted and planted within internment camps. Historian Ronald T. Takaki goes into greater depth about the American home front's dueling memories during WWII in his book, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*.¹⁶¹ However, these are not the memories conveyed in the film, but rather, in a classroom. Nevertheless, for many Americans, the inauthentic memory presented in *Bataan* was enough to remember WWII as a "good war."

Chapter three concludes with the Bureau's premature end and how its work continued through the Office of Censorship. By the end of 1943, films that did not meet censorship standards (which were influenced by the Office of War Information's Hollywood Foreign Office) would not be granted an export license. Without one, Hollywood films studios could not export their films to foreign markets, thereby compromising its films' profitability. Film studios acquiesced to censorship expectations, thereby producing films with favorable depictions of U.S. involvement in WWII.

This thesis assumes that Hollywood and the federal government collaborated to create an artificial public memory of WWII through motion pictures. However, additional research can help expand upon the claims made in this thesis. An expansion of motion picture case studies may solidify the claims made in this thesis. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of films produced after the war and if they continue the practices encouraged by the federal government. Finally, an analysis of the various social issues portrayed in WWII motion pictures to discover if they affected American society. Social issues may include race relations, gender roles, and labor issues occurring during the war

¹⁶¹ Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, (Boston, MA: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Co., 2001).

period. A detailed analysis of motion pictures' influence on public memory may lead to a better understanding of why American remembrance of WWII sometimes differs from the period's historical record.

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