

A NEW “MARSHALL” PLAN: TERRORISM, GLOBALIZATION, BLOCKBUSTERS, AND *AIR FORCE ONE*

PATRICIA VENTURA, SPELMAN COLLEGE

In 1994, Hollywood reached a milestone: global box office revenues topped the domestic take for the first time. Certainly much of this success is due to the worldwide popularity of blockbusters—and the success of the studios’ advertising of their most mass-market product (Balio; Klady).¹ In this paper, we will use this most global of film forms to help us understand the nation, nationalism, and the place of the United States in the contemporary globalization era that began in the 1990s at the end of the Cold War. I argue that these films present, as much as they help to initiate, a post-national US nationalism that is very much focused on the US as a world police force. That is, these films are part of a larger process that reframes US cultural nationalism for a global audience and a global regime in which the pinnacle of sovereignty is no longer the nation-state.² Fredrick Buell sees the development of postnational nationalism as an ambiguous narrative that seems to “blend conservative nationalist and radical-postnational positions together into a new kind of nationalism for a global era” (553). As he argues, “This new identity is one that is, much more transparently than ever before, produced with global forces and a global audience in mind; it is much less a narrative of [national] self-identity and much more transparently the fruit

¹I would like to thank Joseba Gabilondo for pointing out this research to me and helping me to develop some key points in this essay by letting me sit in on his “Globalization and Cinema” graduate course at the University of Florida.

²The nation-state obviously remains powerful, but it shares that power in new ways with many other sovereign entities such as the World Trade Organization, the European Union, and the International Monetary Fund, to name but a few.

of wise positioning for successful integration” (554).

Investigating globalized post-nationalism in Hollywood film, we see its absolute conspicuousness, especially in gargantuan-grossing films of 1994 and later including *Forrest Gump* (1994’s top-grossing film), *Independence Day* (1996’s top box-office movie); *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* (two of 1998’s biggest); and the film we will use as a case study in this paper—a film that foreshadows the US reaction to terrorist attack—*Air Force One* (among 1997’s top-grossing films, as well as one of the top-100 domestic and top-150 world-wide grossing films of all time). In examining blockbuster films in general and *Air Force One* in particular, we will cover territory that ranges the landscapes of the 1990s globalization regime, commonly known as the New World Order; and this investigation is limited mostly to films of the 1990s, for those years shaped the course of American post-nationalism for the foreseeable future. We’ll see how these films actually accrue meaning as we look at them out of their time—moving backward to the Reagan-Bush I years and forward to the Bush II era. Exploring these sites enables us to contextualize (post-)nationalism and militarism in the film and in the post-Cold War globalization era. And though it was made before the attacks of September 11, 2001, *Air Force One* as we will see, frames those events while it provides a context through which to examine the Bush administration’s response to and exploitation of 9-11.

With these foci in mind, this paper will address questions such as, what can Hollywood teach us about national feeling? Why do US-centered film themes sell domestically and abroad and what exactly are “US-centered themes” anyway? I begin addressing such questions by discussing the blockbuster as a genre and arguing that in the 1990s many of the most-popular blockbusters served as allegories for the political and cultural formations of the New World Order. The paper next moves into a discussion of those political and cultural formations that the films allegorize and what kinds of responses Hollywood “instructs” us to take; here, I theorize and historicize the nation in the current formation. The discussion then moves into an analysis of *Air Force One*, a blockbuster that articulates a post-national nationalist vision through its depiction of a US response to terrorist attack. Finally, I end with a discussion of globalization-era Hollywood’s relationship to Washington, finding that despite the opposition between an ostensibly amoral “Hollywood” media establishment looking only to promote its liberal agenda and an ostensibly family-focused political establishment advocating a mythical middle American desire for decency, Hollywood and Washington

in fact work faithfully together to promote a global vision of American neo-liberal economic and political dominance.

Hollywood High Concept

Here a *blockbuster* refers to a style of filmmaking involving hefty special-effects budgets, sweeping promotional campaigns, consecutive release on thousands of screens, and worldwide distribution. For our purposes, the term does not refer to the actual box office success of a film. Thus, 1995's *Waterworld*, the most expensive film ever made to that time, qualifies as a blockbuster even though it has become a metonym for over-budget film disasters. (For the record, it did recoup its costs after international release.)³ Because of its immense marketing and distribution scale, I argue that the Hollywood blockbuster is the privileged film genre of globalization.

A corollary of this premise is that Hollywood is the center of global cinema as measured in worldwide fiscal terms of box office, sales, production expense, and distribution. Indeed, Hollywood has held this position at least since the end of the World War I (Wagnleitner), but the blockbuster form is quite obviously very different from classic Hollywood's product. One aspect that remains the same, however, is the US government's economic interest in opening the world's markets for US motion pictures. After all, with entertainment as one of the few US-based industries consistently running a trade surplus, the US government must take seriously the export issues surrounding global media such as film. Thus, the struggle to bring American movies into increasingly more corners of the world has been one that Hollywood and Washington openly wage together. Today, their joint efforts center on attempts to promote and enforce protections of intellectual property; in the Cold War-era they involved removing barriers to distribution of American pictures, an effort seen by policy makers and movie moguls as one of the best strategies for fighting the cultural Cold War. Indeed, even distribution and promotion costs of Hollywood films in Europe were covered by Marshall Plan funds. Arguably the global center of image production

³Thomas Elsaesser quotes Tino Balio's "If you're a big corporation you can *never not* make money with movies." Comparing contemporary Hollywood's "integration/synergy model" with a pinball machine, Elsaesser explains, "The principle behind it would be something like this: you launch with great force the little steel ball, shoot it to the top, and then you watch it bounce off the different contacts, pass through the different gates, and whenever it touches a contact, your winning figures go up" (18). The contact points are the world-wide cinema screens, video stores and arcades, bookstores, CD/DVD sales points, the Internet, and every cross-marketing possibility.

and distribution, or what Reinhold Wagnleitner calls “the greatest information agency of the twentieth century,” Hollywood and the US government both saw motion pictures as playing a unique roll in promoting what is euphemistically called the American way, but which finally boils down to promoting consumerism. It is this incomparable skill with image creation and promotion that has been key to Hollywood’s centrality in propaganda and policy.

The claims of centrality I make here are not measured in terms of any claims to “quality.”⁴ A discussion of quality would take us well beyond the scope of this work, especially when we focus on blockbusters and the claims of many critics that these movies trade “quality” for simplified characters and narratives or that the films are mostly preoccupied with creating opportunities for tie-ins and spin-offs (see Maltby’s discussion of critical reading practices). And any discussion of these kinds of marketing or what we might call structural concerns in filmmaking would ultimately have to consider the presence of the worldwide diversity of film-production models. For example, state-sponsored cinemas are generally very different from Hollywood’s product. Many of these alternatives, tied to national governments and their desire to protect what is commonly referred to as national cultural heritage, are created as direct responses to the dominance of Hollywood, and by extension that of the USA as a whole. Whether in an era of globalization this goal is anachronistic or vital and encouraging (or perhaps both), it is certain that film remains a central cultural form today both because of its importance in national cultures and in spite of them. Indeed, the numerous protectionist exemptions of films from international and regional free-trade agreements speak to film’s unique importance in and for national cultures (Forbes 260-1).

For their part, blockbuster movies tackle a variety of themes, but to narratively justify the intensity of action they offer—not to mention the need to present easily translatable themes to worldwide audiences—their narratives generally center on broad themes. Thus, blockbusters feature travel between far-flung lands, encounters with alien others, and battles against entities of tremendous

⁴Because of the tremendous expense involved in making and marketing high concept, film theorists for some time have predicted that the blockbuster focus would be ending; see Schatz in *Film Cultures Reader*. That the genre continues to drive major studio production speaks to both the tremendous profit potential and the manageability of the risk. It is this final aspect that was perhaps most surprising to film scholars. Where the risks were tremendous even at the beginning of the ’90s, by decade’s end the growth of international ancillary markets like video and pay TV, not to mention the growing “verticalization” of media industries, has continued to lessen the risk of loss.

power including nature and the celestial sphere. Such large motifs are most easily represented in narratives assuming grand, often global, implications. And yet despite an ostensible “human race” or global focus, many of the films centrally involve the US. Considering that it is not extraordinary for a Hollywood film to make as much as 90 percent of its profits overseas (Maltby 36), it is certainly noteworthy that conflicts involving US national issues would play throughout the world. This popularity then leads us to question the place of non-Hollywood cinema (think of France, which has a rich tradition of setting itself up as the anti-US) in relation to contemporary globalization, a question to which we will return at the end of the paper. Indeed, it sets up the framework in which blockbusters can be read as allegories for the political and cultural formations of the New World Order and forums for confronting post-nationalism, terrorism, and the changing role of the US.

The Nation and the New World Order

To help theorize the place of the nation in the post-Cold War globalization era, I turn to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, perhaps the fullest accounting of sovereignty, the nation, and political subjectivity in the globalization era. Hardt and Negri theorize the emergence of the nation, that most modern of sovereign formations, as just one in a long series of attempts to rein in the multitude of the world's people. Empire, the post-national sovereign formation, emerged as another. But Empire also endangers the nation's position of sovereignty, and it has left the institutions that shore up the nation—the school, the family, the factory, the apparatuses of civil society itself—in a state of crisis.⁵ To summarize their model: with the end of the Cold War, and the end of a threat from actually existing sovereign alternatives to neo-liberal regimes, those forces of the old capitalist regime re-formed into Empire, a sovereignty that erodes divisions and borders that closed-off markets. Thus, the geo-political divisions that certainly remain between nation-states have disintegrated such that they do not account for the processes of production, accumulation, and social life that have rendered even the old first-, second-, and third-world divisions outdated. “Through the decentralization of production and the consolidation of the world market, the international divisions and flows of labor and capital have fractured

⁵Or it is better to say that Empire developed as a resolution to the same problems that endanger the national institutions; that is, the 1960s' global resistance to the old disciplinary, imperialist regime.

and multiplied so that it is no longer possible to demarcate large geographical zones as center and periphery” (335).

Of course, we cannot ignore the privileged position of the United States. In Hardt and Negri’s analysis, *Empire*’s power structure takes on a pyramidal shape with the US in the position it held since World War II: at the top. From there it assumed a pivotal role in shaping globalization. At the large base of the pyramid structure stand the heroes of *Empire*’s narrative, the multitude—those who are oppressed by neo-liberal capitalism. In between, a great variety of sovereign formations operate; that is, other nation-states, supranational policy groups, corporations, NGOs, multi- and transnational corporations, etc. The effect of all these forces is to take juridico-economic power away from the nation-state causing a shift in its sovereign position. Nevertheless, the result of the new arrangement has not been a simple decline of the nation state; it has led in fact to the “full realization of the relationship between the state and capital” (236). In other words, the political has no autonomy from the economic. They intermix without mediation in a direct confrontation between the multitude and capital. Out of this dangerous mixture, *Empire* emerges. As such, it must work to maintain its position; thus, “it deploys a powerful police function against the new barbarians and the rebellious slaves who threaten its order” (20).

The old barbarians in the pre-*Empire*, Cold War configuration, the socialist states of Eastern Europe have largely been neutralized.⁶ This is not to deny the immense power still existing in Eastern Europe in the form of nuclear weaponry, but it is to say that the Eastern countries no longer challenge liberal capitalist democracies by offering an actually existing socialist alternative. Yet despite the seeming acquiescence to the capitalist world, through the 1990s and up to the September 11 attacks, many of the nations of Eastern Europe continued to occupy the role of barbarians at the gate. Why?

The West had assumed that a desire for market capitalism and democracy was just waiting in Eastern Europe as if cryogenically frozen, until the end of communism. But what arose in many nations after the Berlin Wall’s fall was sheer ethnic terror, sprouting quickly as if it had been germinating beneath the Cold War surface. Slavoj Žižek posits several reasons for this outgrowth. Developed in part in reaction to the totalitarian control these countries endured

⁶The position and international role of Cuba obviously bears study, but it does not really change the analysis here.

during the Cold War, ethnic identification provides a scapegoat for the past oppression. Of course, ethnic nationalism does not fit in Empire's post-national formation, but Žižek argues that this ethnic attachment, which sprang up in reaction to totalitarianism, grew into its menacingly prominent position because it acted as "a kind of 'shock absorber' against the sudden exposure to the capitalist openness and imbalance" (210). After all, capitalism by its nature must produce excess. This excess that generates profits keeps the system in a state of imbalance in which conditions always change and relations can always become antagonistic. According to Žižek, the nationalist solution to this imbalance is to blame some ethnic Other. "What one demands is the establishment of a stable and clearly defined social body which will restrain capitalism's destructive potential by cutting off the 'excessive' element; and since this social body is experienced as that of a nation, the cause of any imbalance 'spontaneously' assumes the form of a 'national enemy'" (211). Thus, the Kosovar in '90s Yugoslavia, like the Jew in Nazi Germany (or today in the former East Germany), becomes the target.

Michael Mann constructs a different though reconcilable explanation of the ethnic violence; he points to the global diffusion of the ideal of 'rule by the people' in an environment where 'the people' is prone to be defined in ethnic or religious terms" (62). He argues that when ethnic/religious difference combines with economic failure brought on by the growing economic dominance of the industrial countries, ethnic cleansing can emerge as "the dark side of the democratization process" (62).

Regardless of explanation, it is certain that hopes originally ran high for the bright future of Eastern Europe; indeed, the changeover to liberal democracy was a process the West watched in utter fascination. In 1993, Žižek theorized this interest as a kind of mirroring effect:

It is as if democracy, which in the West shows more and more signs of decay and crisis and is lost in bureaucratic routine and publicity-style campaigns, is being rediscovered in Eastern Europe in all freshness and novelty....The real object of fascination for the West is thus the gaze, namely the supposedly naïve gaze by means of which Eastern Europe stares back at the West, fascinated by its democracy. (200)

The emergence of ethnic violence broke "the narcissistic spell of the West's complacent recognition of its own values in the East: Eastern Europe is returning to the West the 'repressed' truth of its democratic desire" (Žižek 208). But in the case of both the genocidal Eastern nationalist and the bemused Western liberal, the motivation for each one's reaction to the events of the post-Cold War years

is similar. Žizek claims that each looks to the other for what is missing in itself; quoting Hegel he concludes, “it only comes to be through being left behind” (203).

From this perspective, Žizek can look back to the 1980s and early ‘90s and explain the US obsession with accounts of MIAs left behind in Vietnam. Films such as the blockbuster *Rambo II* and the lesser-budgeted *Missing in Action* films or the ubiquitous POW-MIA flags and bumper stickers convey this MIA obsession which at its heart really expresses that missing part of America itself: “the essence of its potency.” “And because this loss became the ultimate cause of America’s decline and impotence in the post-Vietnam Carter years, recapitulating this stolen, forgotten part became an element of the Reaganesque reaffirmation of a strong America” (205).

The Persian Gulf War: Vanquishing the Ghost of Vietnam

It is from this perspective that we can say that the project of the Reagan-Bush years was, in significant measure, to make the US feel like its old 1950s self again—a project that culminated in the birth of Empire and the NWO. This effort culminated in the Persian Gulf War, an event which among its other goals was to vanquish the ghost of Vietnam—though in a real way every US armed intervention between Vietnam and 9-11 has been in some part a restaging of that war, an attempt to regain a sense of national military arrogance and feeling of entitlement. In the Gulf War, part of the strategy to rescue Vietnam was to recreate WWII. The War reunited the WWII allies (even adding old enemies to the alliance). They were to stop Saddam Hussein, a new enemy whom the White House represented as the embodiment of evil, thereby casting him in the role of the Führer in George Bush’s revival of WWII. That Saddam bore no real resemblance militarily to Hitler didn’t matter; the Reagan-Bush impetus was to heal old sores and lay the groundwork for the next era; exorcising the ghost of Vietnam by making the Gulf War seem noble was part of that mission. For part of the failing of the so-called Vietnam Conflict was that it wasn’t World War II, and it would never be seen as a great and noble war. Vietnam was a generational turning point and a cultural divide. Recovering WWII in a post-Vietnam conflict ostensibly bridged that divide by allowing the US to make a claim that it could not make in the ‘60s: that the US always fights for what’s right. And of course, World War II was a singular event because it brought the US to the apex of economic, cultural, and military superiority. In the American political imagi-

nary this superiority confirmed a sense of moral superiority as well, a sense that if the US embarks on a program, then it must be the best choice. Vietnam compromised that moral superiority along with the certainty of military superiority. The Persian Gulf War was an attempt to regain both. Inasmuch as the war was a resounding defeat of Saddam's forces, at least the military aspect of the Gulf War was a success.

Of course, “Vietnam” was more than a war; it was an actual site of and a metonym for the worldwide resistance to imperialist, modern, disciplinary society. These various resistance efforts led to a crisis in international capitalism as the citizens of wealthy nations rejected the discipline of the post-war factory system while the world's poor rejected the colonial and post-colonial arrangements that kept them in a state of servility. It was then “Vietnam,” in the broadest, metonymic sense of that term that helped unleash the energy eventually leading to the creation of Empire at the end of the Cold War. Just as the US played the most important role in developing the post-WWII economic-military system, the US also played the most important role in developing the post-Cold War economic-military system that is, for Hardt and Negri, Empire.

Yet despite the Persian Gulf War's seemingly successful replay of WWII, the sense of moral certainty would not be the same. Partly, there remained a nagging doubt in the American collective psyche; some call it the Vietnam Syndrome, but whatever label it wears, it is the anxiety that Vietnam was not something that happened to “us”; it is something “we” did to “them.” It is the sense that America is not uniquely moral. The Persian Gulf War tried to recover that lost sense in the American imaginary, and perhaps for a brief period in the early '90s it did. But with Saddam maintaining a secure grip on power through the '90s and the US's Iraqi policy appearing to be more obsessive than rational as the decade progressed, perhaps it was not a coincidence that the Gulf War appeared as a reassuring theme replayed in 1996's highest box office film *Independence Day*.⁷

In this light, it is not a coincidence that Saddam plays a reassuring enemy in the post-9-11 years. At a time of American vulnerability, beating up on Saddam—either physically or lexically—offers a sense of superiority. Because Saddam did not simply play villain in both Bushes' presidential narrative, but actually did happen to be a vicious dictator, the PR aim was to make the US

⁷The Gulf War emerges in the film as a time of certainty when Americans knew they were the good guys and the Iraqi opposition wore the black hats. See Wegner's discussion of the film.

look like the hero by extension.⁸ But in the last years of the twentieth century we saw—I would argue not coincidentally—a rebirth of interest in WWII which unconsciously reinforced the message that the US is the good guy. Consider Steven Spielberg's schmaltzy *Saving Private Ryan*, followed just a few years later by Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* extravaganza; a heavily promoted movement to fund a WWII memorial to be built right in the middle of that historical center of protest, the mall in Washington DC; and the most fawning tribute, Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*. WWII even arises metaphorically in *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. This film, the top-box office draw of 1999 presents a racist restaging of WWII with treacherous Asian-looking aliens; defenseless people of Queen Amidala's territory whose capital looks much like Venice, Italy; an evil Führer-like Emperor who apparently is manipulating the Queen; British-accented white knights of an older regime; and an adventurous American-accented boy who stumbles into the climactic battle after it has started and wins it. (Where the dim-witted, dread-locked, Jamaican-accented, Jar Jar Binks fits in is certainly debatable; since the WWII years were among Classic Hollywood's last, we might say he recaptures that era's racist stereotype of the silly black man who provides comic relief through his ineptitude and fear.)

What these tributes gloss over is the fact that it was this "greatest generation" that led the US into the war in Vietnam in which its children were forced to fight, and it was the greatest generation that posed the greatest threat to the world by enabling the proliferation of nuclear arsenals and supporting imperialist actions in both overt and covert operations before and after Vietnam, operations which armed Saddam Hussein and trained Osama bin Laden. Nevertheless, what these WWII-generation tributes highlight is the sense of American exceptionalism, a sense that got its greatest post-Gulf War boost with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In this light, it should strike us as no coincidence that the 9-11 attacks were frequently compared to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, a comparison that ideologically reinforces the role of the US as innocent victim—if such reinforcement was even needed in the popular consciousness. But, of course, the

⁸None of this commentary means to ignore some of the *realpolitik* reasons for war in Iraq, namely US oil company control of crude in light of an increasingly unstable regime in Saudi Arabia. Let us add here a more ideologically driven reason: the desire to create a test case for neo-liberalism as they did in Eastern Europe in the wake of the Cold War. But this new version of shock therapy time would not face the same "impediments" of an entrenched power structure grabbing the formerly state-run industries or pesky citizens demanding some of the safety nets of the social welfare state.

differences between the events are key. Japan was a nation. Al Qaeda is obviously not; its identity is very much supranational. And though al Qaeda's attack on the Pentagon may have resembled Japan's attack in that it was directed at a central and potentially crippling US military target, the planes crashing into the World Trade Center targeted much more than the United States. Given that the WTC attacks were the most fatal, the most dramatic, and represented unfinished business for al Qaeda terrorists (recalling the 1993 attempt connected to Omar Abdel-Rahman to take down the WTC), we have to see those attacks as particularly meaningful and emblematic. When the planes struck the towers, they were attacking more than the US; they attacked US-led neo-liberal capitalism itself. Which leads to the central question: what are the parameters of the relationship between US-led neo-liberal capitalism and the US state?

I have already suggested an answer to this question in citing Hardt and Negri's assertion earlier that today the interconnection between the state and capital is fully realized. In this light, it is worthwhile to examine theorist Joseba Gabilondo's analysis of the events of September 11. For him, publishing his analysis in 2002, the attacks on the WTC led to the articulation of a unique North American, neo-liberal hegemony. And for a brief historical moment after the attacks, it was certainly true, as he claims that “bin Laden has become the condition of possibility that holds the global capitalist system together to the point that as a result of his action, ‘we all now have become global capitalists.’ We are now ‘subjects’ of the new global symbolic order managed by North American politics” (61). In other words, the attack on the Twin Towers opened up a new chapter of the neo-liberal hegemony of the US. Gabilondo argues that 9-11 initiated the US into a “New History” (69).

Seeing the US in this way certainly helps end the Fukuyama-inspired End-of-History rhetoric. And more importantly, it also challenges that brand of postmodern discourse arguing that we live in an ahistorical time as people incapable of historical consciousness. With this return to historical awareness, Gabilondo argues that the US has interpellated the non-Muslim-fundamentalist world. Within the Muslim fundamentalist sphere, Osama bin Laden assumed the interpellating position. And whereas in a national era, political formations tend to follow the parameters of nation states—even when attempting to be non-national—the global regimes of North American capitalism and Muslim fundamentalism operate beyond the old borders. Gabilondo proposes a postnational subalternity as a universal political position against global capitalist hegemony.

But articulating this became a bigger challenge post-9-11 since dominant rhetoric too often positions opposition as “a way of siding with bin Laden against ‘The World’ since, at this point, any political antagonism is regulated by global capitalism through the referent/empty signifier of ‘The World’” (Gabilondo 62). Thus, since September 11, some of “The World’s” powers, especially Russia, India, Pakistan, and of course the US, have used the label “Islamic fundamentalism” to justify quelling domestic or neighborhood challenges to their hegemony. For instance, as Michael Mann points out, in Chechnya this tactic has turned what is actually a secular separatist movement into an Islamist one (58).

This strategic labeling takes an interesting twist when we return to the case of Saddam Hussein and the imagined evolution of old enemies Iran and Iraq into supposed allies in an “Axis of Evil” that places them, oddly, with North Korea in some kind of terror clique. This kind of bizarre triangulation only remotely makes sense within the US’s post-9-11 ideological framework. In this ideology, Saddam Hussein, who was the enemy of both the US and bin Laden during the Gulf War and who has been the enemy of Iran ever since he tried to invade it in the 1980s, becomes one of the symbols of an Arab unity, which is all the stranger because it includes Iran—a largely Persian rather than Arab country. None of this history seemed to matter, as Saddam was positioned, and positioned himself, as another line in the sand between the US hegemony and an Arab oppositionality.

In *Air Force One* Saddam rears his unpopular head, this time to challenge the US’s military blockade of Iraq. In response, the President directs a few barbs at Saddam and then orders an aircraft carrier group into the region. The scene, placed in the beginning of the film to foreground the President’s decisiveness and authority, lasts all of three minutes, but it is a central strategy for establishing the film’s President as presidential. It reinforces the role of North American/global ideology constructed for/by the US. That is the position of world cop, a title which legitimates the US’s exercise of violence, which in turn re-authorizes its role as world cop, which in turn reauthorizes its use of violence. Many ’90s Hollywood blockbusters took for granted that US role, but *Air Force One* foregrounds it making it a central narrative point and one we will examine here.

“A State of Permanent Exception and Police Action”

Harrison Ford, the most successful actor in Hollywood history in terms of his films’ box office, stars as firm but caring President of the United States

James Marshall who must save the passengers of Air Force One—especially his family—from hijackers who have commandeered the presidential plane. The hijackers, described as “Russian ultra nationalists,” capture the first family and the President’s staff (they had hoped to take the President, but he seems to have escaped from the plane). They aim to force the US government to obtain the release of General Radek, the ruler of Kazakhstan who was abducted and turned over to the Russian government by US special forces deployed by President Marshall. What the hijackers do not know is that the President actually remains on the plane and aided by his military training—he was a decorated Vietnam war vet—kills the hijackers one by one until he secures the airplane, ends the threat from the nationalist forces in Russia, and makes Eastern Europe safe for liberal-capitalist democracy.

The enemies here are nationalists who oppose the forces of globalization. They are somehow involved in communist and genocidal ethnic cleansing, though the details remain sketchy. But creating General Radek as an amalgam of genocidal Yugoslav Slobodan Milosovic and post-Soviet Russian Communist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy enables the film to promote the ideal that a liberal democratic world united under the leadership of a beneficent and interventionist United States is a much better place to live.

The logic underlying the narrative is given in the President’s emotional opening speech at a Russian celebration honoring him for his action against Radek:

Radek’s regime murdered over 200,000 men, women, and children, and we watched it on TV. We let it happen. People were being slaughtered for over a year. We issued economic sanctions and hid behind the rhetoric of diplomacy. How dare we? The dead remember. Real peace is not just the absence of conflict; it is the presence of justice. Tonight, I come to you with a pledge to change America’s policy. Never again will I allow our political self-interest to deter us from doing what we know to be morally right. Atrocity and terror are not political weapons. And to those who will use them, your day is over. We will never negotiate. We will no longer tolerate, and we will no longer be afraid. It’s your turn to be afraid.

Here the President outlines his political philosophy: self-interest is positioned as a binary opposite of morality, a traditional moral stance. However, whereas in previous eras the hegemonic understanding of nationalism saw it as a (moral) sign of fellow-feeling and unselfish concern, the New World Order’s hegemonic understanding of nationalism sees it as a kind of (immoral) self-interest. It represents an unwillingness to cooperate in the global plan. In order for

globalization's logic to work, we must begin to believe at some level that strict adherence to national sovereignty will lead to violence and privation—at least outside the US. Hence the President's promise to militarily overturn any regime that uses terror to further its national interest. And here on film we see what has actually become a chief justification for military intervention—human rights.

Empire has made the violation of state sovereignty under the banner of humanitarianism a standard practice. Today, such military and moral interventions are commonplace and frequently led by the US, with or without allied support, under the banner of superior ethical human principles. Hardt and Negri explain that “a permanent state of emergency and exception justified by the appeal to essential values of justice” stand behind these interventions (18). Certainly, sheer power backs the right of police, but the US and company use universal values to legitimate the police function.⁹

In committing the US to the role of global judge, jury, and executioner *Air Force One's* President Marshall represents contemporary US foreign policy, whose guiding principles are often enough “what we know to be morally right.” Who “we” is and what constitutes “moral rightness” are questions the powerful answer for both themselves and the world. Because of this rhetoric of “morality,” compromise and negotiation, the usual channels of politics, are increasingly seen as suspect and morally incoherent.

The death of the film's National Security Advisor, Jack Dougherty, provides a case study of this new moral regime. We first meet him when the President is delivering his bold speech; Dougherty asks the Chief of Staff why President Marshall is speaking off the cuff instead of sticking to the prescribed speech and the prescribed game plan. Later he scolds Marshall for this “Be Afraid” speech (as the film terms it); Dougherty worries that the US's allies will not appreciate the President's unilateral promise of invasion. In his last on-screen appearance Dougherty dies as the first hostage shot by the hijackers; he had offered himself as a mediator and received a bullet for his trouble. As chief hijacker Egor Korshunov (Gary Oldman) explains to the White House as they are bargaining for the hostages' release, “He was a very good negotiator. He bought you another half hour.” Of course, losing Dougherty is not such a great tragedy. He is presented as a creep from the beginning, and his final speech in which he denigrates

⁹In a world of lawyers without borders, Belgium has outpaced all by passing a universal jurisdiction law allowing Belgian courts to prosecute crimes against humanity even if they were not committed in Belgium, on Belgians, or by Belgians.

the vice-president, played sympathetically by Glenn Close, does not endear him to anyone. Indeed, as the voice of political caution he also acts as a wet blanket on the President’s bold if autocratic initiative. But most damningly, he is the product of mentality in which the US considers its allies in its decisions.

It is worth noting that George W. Bush’s first-term national security advisor, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, is herself a Soviet scholar by training and so her appointment struck many observers as odd: in the post-Cold War era, appointing a Soviet expert seemed a quaint and antiquated notion. Yet perhaps her appointment signals Russia’s new importance—not as an enemy but as an object lesson. Embrace neo-liberalism and you are left to run your affairs most anyway you like. Thus, the choice of Russia in *Air Force One*, I would argue, is not a coincidence. It is the old communist block, the former “barbarians at the gate,” who test the world’s will to fully embrace the global regime, but it is also there that the regime so glaringly showed its weakness. For the so-called shock therapy of rapidly opening up and privatizing state-owned industries in Russia led to mafia-style violence and oligarchy.

The irony of the current regime is that Empire’s new economic/political arrangements have decreased the importance of the nation while they have also freed the US to redefine its “national interests” and act militarily in broad ways that it was not always free to during the Cold War. The paradox here is that in a post-national time, the United States emerges as a uniquely powerful national force. And the connection between the film’s Washington establishment and the actual establishment reveals that Washington’s interests are Hollywood’s: make the world safe for contemporary neo-liberal capitalism. Hence, we have a new “Marshall Plan” for the time of Empire.

In this light it is worth considering George W. Bush’s address to Congress on 20 September 2001. “Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom—the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time—now depends on us. Our nation—this generation—will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future.” What was to emerge from this kind of rhetoric was the new foreign/military policy strategy, the so-called Bush Doctrine, which justifies preemptive action against perceived threats to the US while pushing for opposition to and even overturning of governments that do not employ the rhetoric of freedom and liberty in their domestic policy.

Certainly, the US carried into the contemporary globalization era a military advantage from its Cold War days that enabled such tough talk. It is the only

Cold War superpower left. But Hardt and Negri point to a more significant advantage the US enjoys in executing its foreign policies. They cite Thomas Jefferson to support their claim that the US Constitution is the one best suited for Empire: “the US Constitutional project is constructed on the model of rearticulating an open space and reinventing incessantly diverse and singular relations in networks across the unbounded terrain” (182). In other words, the US’s Westward expansion modeled capitalism’s later global expansion. This rule is not imperialistic; imperialism takes land to close it off from rival powers as much as to exploit it and its people. Empire takes the land, opens it, and becomes part of it so that the significance of the differences between geographic areas begins to disappear.

Certainly, the call of “manifest destiny” was manifested in blood and horror; today’s globalized version of it is also. But Empire, following the US model, does not follow the old divide-and-conquer mode of imperialism. “More often than not, Empire does not create division but rather recognizes existing or potential differences, celebrates them, and manages them within a general economy of command” (Hardt and Negri 201). Thus, national and ethnic attachments that lead to exclusion and internecine war do not easily fit into globalization’s celebration of difference.

Nevertheless, Empire’s new sovereignty arrangements have not been able to take the place of national feeling. Nationalism continues to define a people, even as nations themselves, at some level, remain indefinable. As Renata Salecl explains, “The nation is an element in us that is ‘more than ourselves.’” It is part of the fantasy structure that “gives consistency to what we call ‘reality,’” and thereby “conceals the ultimate inconsistency of society” (15). In short, it attempts to fill the emptiness of that social reality.

But in *Air Force One*, as in the ruling ideology of globalization, nationalism to any nation other than the US or its surrogates is presented as increasingly anachronistic. Instead, the film offers US-led interventionism as compensation for the growing ideological illegitimacy of nationalism. Thus, as Russian President Petrov introduces US President Marshall, the Russian describes his American counterpart as “my friend” and claims that the raid on Radek’s headquarters was conducted by US and Russian forces though we see no evidence of Russian involvement at all. After Marshall’s motorcade speeds from the ceremony honoring him toward the Moscow airport and the awaiting Air Force One, police hold back screaming throngs of flag-waving Russian fans of the President. This

display of adulation urges us to see him as a new kind of “national” hero, one who protects other nations’ interests for the betterment of the global community, a kind of (post)nationalism that keeps with the dominant ideology of the New World Order.

Unlike the classic Hollywood theme of the reluctant leader who takes up the sheriff’s badge or gun after spending much of the film avoiding it (consider the likes of *Destry Rides Again* and its remake *Destry, Tin Star*, and *Key Largo*), President Marshall (arguably the personification of the US) willingly sports the global sheriff’s badge. The film entices its audience with a seductive and popularly satisfying vision of a resolute US guided by a firm, even inflexible commander-in-chief.¹⁰ The popularity of the image of such a strong leader may well premise a fundamental skepticism about the chances of contemporary democracy to successfully operate in the expected channels of negotiation, compromise, and struggle; that is, of politics. Certainly, the President’s opening speech reflects that skepticism as he promises never to negotiate and never to compromise when the stakes involve what he sees as intolerable infractions—even if it is not exactly in the national interest to do so. Such a promise certainly renders self-interest a binary opposite of morality (as mentioned above), but it also positions negotiation as a kind of antithesis of morality as well. Given this kind of attachment to such undemocratic, non-liberal rule, we may well conclude that the fantasy of the strong leader reflects some subterranean desire. The strong leader may, as Žizek posits, come to power with the promise of regulating the excess that stands at the core of capitalism. In the case of the US, this desire places the audience in a conflicted position, for the promise of a strong US leader taps into a desire to control capitalism’s excess (as discussed earlier in this paper), but the US is the embodiment of that excess. The President as the personification of the US is put in the highly untenable position as both the problem and the cure. The answer that neo-liberal globalization’s (and the film’s) logic provides is to position US nationalism as global post-nationalism.

Globalization’s “winners,” those people who benefit from the status quo, do not have to sacrifice much in sacrificing what nationalism offers—that “element

¹⁰This trope of the benevolent dictator appears in other films as well. *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933) offers perhaps the oddest example of the theme. But unlike the steadfast leader of this earlier film who was in fact the handmaid of God himself, President Marshall compromises all his single-minded idealism to save his daughter. For an interesting discussion of Hollywood’s depictions of presidents in the 1990s, see Thomas Doherty’s “Movie Star Presidents.”

in us that is more than ourselves.” This is especially true for two groups. Most obvious are the wealthy in the industrial countries who have benefited from their position at the top of the neo-liberal power structure and globalized economic regime—even as that economic regime has moved much of its production outside their particular homelands. The less obvious beneficiaries cannot really be considered globalization’s winners except that they have taken advantage of globalization’s opportunities for cross-border communication and action. These are neo-liberalism’s dissenters throughout the world, ranging from the progressive organizations working in interests of the multitude to the reactionary religious groups working to promote uncompromising fundamentalist agendas, who have used globalization’s technological advances to unite across old boundaries.

Recall Salecl’s argument—“It is precisely the homeland that fills out the empty place of the nation in the symbolic structure of society. The homeland is the fantasy structure, the scenario, through which society perceives itself as a homogeneous entity.” If she is correct, then with a loosening economic or cultural tie to the homeland, many find a decreasing need to achieve self-definition through the nation. But for globalization’s “losers” and their sympathizers both in the US and throughout the world, the new post-national arrangement may well require a real sacrifice of belief and identity structures. For these people the film offers another compensation—the family. Thus, we see that President Marshall sacrifices everything in his power—his new policy, US foreign policy in general, even, potentially, the lives of hundreds of thousands of Russians, in order to save his wife and daughter. The family here is the source of fullness, the other element in us that is “more than ourselves,” that is positioned against the larger and presumably illegitimate solidarity of political-economic struggle represented by the hijackers. Indeed, from his first speech, the President consistently moves beyond class or national loyalty offering solidarity either in the nuclear family or in all humanity. What is worth noting here is that the nation has traditionally been figured in terms of the family (see McClintock). Founding fathers formed the law of the country which has since 9-11 been referred to increasingly as “the homeland.” Even the term “first family” to represent the US President’s spouse and children reinforces the familial figuration. To now position the family against the national cause signals an important ideological shift.

For their part, the hijackers, as represented by Korshunov, use the familial language to express desires invalidated by globalization’s logic—that is for a sov-

foreign and socialist *national* homeland: “When Mother Russia becomes one great nation again, when the capitalists are dragged from the Kremlin and shot in the street, when our enemies run and hide in fear at the mention of our name and America begs our forgiveness, on that great day of deliverance, you will know what I want.” The hijackers voice their desires in the familiar (in the sense of “familial” and in the sense of “common”) language; they want to restore “Mother Russia.” But couched in hyperbolic and excessively violent language, their traditionally sympathetic message for national unity becomes lost in the violence of anti-capitalist bloodlust. But when we consider these desires in light of the current Russian political milieu (IMF-influenced economic policy, privatization without protections for consumers and pensioners, entrenchment of organized crime, elimination of protections for free speech and media, increasingly consolidated power in the hands of a strong leader) many in the Western audience might well sympathize with the objections to Russian status quo. However, with the hijackers serving as the film’s only representation of resistance to the severity of life in post-Soviet Russia, objections to globalized liberal capitalism appear fanatical, not to mention hopelessly old-fashioned. And the film gives nationalism, perhaps the most threatening roadblock to globalization, equally harsh treatment. Introducing the ethnic cleansing element to Radek’s regime compromises the sympathy the audience may have with the hijackers’ nationalist sentiment and by unconscious extension with nationalism itself. For the film metaphorically connects nationalism to genocide so that Empire emerges as the most humane and sensible form of sovereignty. And because the film offers only two alternatives—either the hijackers’ nationalism or the President’s militaristic globalization—the audience is asked to believe those are the only two alternatives.

Given the film’s tremendous success domestically and abroad, may we assume people throughout the world enjoy watching the workings of Empire, under the guidance of the US, as personified by its strong leader, President Marshall? Or can we dare assume that their appeal comes from just seeing people like the Russian nationalist terrorists who not only express outlawed desires but who act on these desires by capturing the US ship of state in the figure of Air Force One. Indeed, the film indulges their forbidden perspectives by offering Korshunov the film’s most acutely trenchant lines. Thus, after he kills Deputy Press Secretary Melanie Mitchell and the First Lady admonishes him for shoot-

ing an unarmed woman, he retorts: “You who murdered 100,000 Iraqis to save a nickel on a gallon of gas are going to lecture me about the rules of war? Don’t!”

In such brief flashes, the film indulges the rebels’ new form of rule, which is really the fulfillment of the old dream to unite the nation and to fight for it idealistically (along the line of Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death!”). That this form of rule is represented as evil and terrorist, especially with the portrayal of the hijackers’ brutal murder of Melanie Mitchell, takes away most but perhaps not all the luster of this alternative regime—one that gives play to deeply held impulses for attachment to a cause, for commitment so deep-seated that one willingly risks and takes life for it.

But neo-liberal globalization requires an attitude as flexible as its production schemes. Indeed, according to Žižek, what emerges is a fear of “‘excessive’ identification”: “[T]he enemy is the ‘fanatic’ who ‘over identifies’ instead of maintaining a proper distance toward the dispersed plurality of subject-positions” (216). Today, it seems as if

Good qua unyielding ethical attitude, the readiness to risk all rather than compromise one’s sense of justice, and of Evil qua opportunist giving way under the pressure of circumstances, is inverted and thus attains its hidden truth. Today, ‘fanaticism,’ any readiness to put everything at stake, is as such suspicious, which is why a proper ethical attitude survives only in the guise of ‘radical Evil.’ (Žižek 219)

It is in this light that the resistance of particular industries or governments to free trade, the unwillingness of some states to give up public ownership of industries or utilities, and the protection of national culture industries becomes figured as dangerous and fanatical by neo-liberal ideology. It is also in this light that we can return to the question of state-sponsored film and nationalist protection of film industries. From the perspective of New World Order ideology, France is to cultural free trade as the film’s Russian terrorists are to globalization: both are represented as excessive and reactionary; most importantly, both are figured as anti-American, which in the ideology means they are damaging to all—including the countries such protectionism aims to—well—protect.

Of course, President Marshall’s “Be Afraid” speech could itself constitute an instance of fanatical doggedness. After all, if the US will never negotiate, it is itself embarking upon a policy of excessive identification. Thus, when the terrorists force the President to choose between compromise and the death of his daughter, he gives into all the terrorists’ demands and picks his daughter’s life. To stick to his own policy would be fanatical. And as the hijacker Korshunov

says, sacrificing his family for his beliefs “would be such bad politics.” Indeed, these hijackers demonstrate repeatedly that it is they who will not negotiate, they who will not be afraid. The film thus indulges its audience’s un-Empirical desire for principle and then undermines it. The hijackers are left to serve as the repository for these excessive feelings. Thus, the film transfers to these nationalists what nationalism transfers to the ethnic other: excess.

Hollywood and History

Outside the scope of the diegesis and in-between nationalism and globalization are the victims of the Russians’ violence and the President’s effort to save his family. These victims are not as lucky as the first family and especially the first daughter, Alice. In fact, few people in the world are. After all, the President is willing to negotiate for her life—even if it means risking the lives of hundreds of thousands of others who may die in a Russian power struggle and utterly compromising his own uncompromising promise never to negotiate with terrorists. Sweet-faced, innocent, and blossoming into adolescence, Alice Marshall may well be the most important character in the film when read allegorically. For the activity of nation building has traditionally utilized the figure of “Woman” as a trope for the nation. Indeed, the editors of *Between Women and Nation* posit the relationship between “Woman” and nation in Foucauldian terms as a site of biopower negating the historical and contingent qualities of both women and nations (see Alarcon, et al). If we see the President as a personification of the US and captain of the ship of state (even to the point where he actually pilots Air Force One), then we can make the case that Alice as his only inheritor and as a woman (especially as a young one) may also be a figure for the US, or better, for the American people. From this perspective, then, we can see all the sacrifices made on her behalf as particularly meaningful. Indeed, it is a grim reminder of the tremendous advantages Americans as a whole enjoy over much of the world’s people. Given that the Russian President, Petrov, agrees to release Radek for Alice (at the US President’s request, of course), we see the sacrifices the weak of the world are required to make in the interests of the powerful. From this allegorical perspective, the extent to which the Marshalls try to protect their daughter by not allowing her to visit the refugee camps teeming with escapees of Radek’s rein of genocide is meaningful. Like many Americans, Alice’s exposure to the world is limited—even though the fate of that world meshes directly with her own. And when she is confronted with another perspective besides the

pro-American, she retreats to the shelter of comfortable ideologies. Thus, when she asks the hijacker, Korshunov, why he killed Jack Dougherty, he explains his values to her:

Korshunov: [I kill] because I believe. And when I shoot this man, I know in that instant how deep was my belief. That I would turn my back on God Himself for Mother Russia. My doubts, my fears, my own private morality. It dissolve [sic] in this moment for this love. You know, your father, he has also killed. Is he a bad man?

Alice: That's not true.

Korshunov: Why? Because he does it in a tuxedo with a telephone call and a smart bomb?

Alice: You are a monster. And my father is a great man. You're nothing like my father.

Little Alice cannot answer his argument; she can only retreat into platitudes. But considering the special place she enjoys in the first family, it is not in her best interest to question status quo. In the end, her survival depends on everyone's valuing her life over the lives of all Russians whose lives may be ended or turned upside down by Radek's release. And for the President to remain a New World Order hero, he has to place more value on her life as well. He cannot be true to the very policy that made him seem so heroic in the first place.

Thus we see the logic of neo-liberal globalization played out. The reasoning behind President Marshall's "Be Afraid" speech justifies breaches of national sovereignty under the banner of human rights. However, in the end, we find that the human rights of some are violated for those of others to be upheld. But whose rights are violable and what determines who will be saved and who will be sacrificed? The film tells us the answer. The further away one is from the US—personified in the film by the President—the more expendable one becomes. For the very valuable, the US willingly uses its considerable influence. But to be worth the effort requires either a lot of luck or a lot of struggle. Thus, in the film's final action sequence—the fight to get off Air Force One before it crashes into the sea—we see the film and Empire's ideological priorities. Alice leaves the plane first; as the President's daughter and the embodiment of the American people, she enjoys a special position that she just happened to be born into. The Chief of Staff is allowed to leave because he took a bullet for the President. But in the end when time runs out and only one more person may get off Air Force One, that is when the tough decision needs to be made because people who played by the rules and made the right sacrifices for the President nevertheless will have to go down with the ship if their leader is to survive.

In the end, the President just barely makes it off the plane himself, and when he abandons the crashing Air Force One, the rescue plane changes its call sign; it declares itself the new Air Force One. This change functions like the proclamation upon the death of a monarch: “The King is dead. Long live the King.” Changing the rescue plane’s name signifies the perpetuation of power: what used to be the ship of state may be at the bottom of the ocean, but the power that ship represented remains securely in the air for it is adaptable to all conditions.

Today, post-9-11 this film about a hijacked plane takes new significance. Of course, the stereotype of the terrorist today is the Islamic fundamentalist. So in selecting Russian nationalists, the film got the object of its audiences’ fear of terrorism completely wrong. But from the global ideological perspective, in fact, the film got it exactly right. Bin Laden may be the so-called big other of North American hegemony (which includes Hollywood)—just as the US is the sworn enemy of al Qaeda—but from a meta-perspective, nationalism is the “big other” of both US dominated globalization *and* al Qaeda. Both structurally require a supranational context to operate.

Aligning Hollywood (through US hegemony) with Islamic fundamentalism makes for an ironic twist for many reasons, not least of which is Hollywood’s participation in the war effort, including a November 11, 2001 meeting that Bush’s top political advisor Karl Rove held with high-level Hollywood executives. Rove offered several points that the White House would like stressed in films and TV shows such as, the then-emerging war targeted terrorism and evil, not Islam; Americans should heed the call to national service and support the troops; and the war is a global undertaking. The collaboration between government and cultural producers conjured up images of Hollywood propaganda films of WWII, but Rove reassured his audience that instead of propaganda, the Bush administration only wants the narrative of the war effort to be told with “accuracy and honesty.”

Entertainment Weekly covered the event proclaiming “Hollywood Marches Toward a New Patriotism.” In another article, the magazine asked Hollywood’s elite to weigh in on the effects of September 11, 2001 on the industry. Randall Wallace, the writer and director of *We Were Soldiers*, stated: “Immediately afterwards a lot of people were scared. But that time has passed. I don’t think there’ll be a long-drawn-out period of mourning in movies. Americans will be Americans.”

What does this mean: “Americans will be Americans”? Does it mean that Americans are resilient people who will rebound from the terrorist strikes? Or does it mean that Americans suffer from such cultural amnesia that the shock of the events will soon be or already are forgotten? What then is the relationship between the cinematic image and historical consciousness?

Bill Nichols argues that historical consciousness requires the spectator’s recognition of the double status of moving images that are present referring to events that are past. He argues, “This formulation involves viewing the present moment of a film as we relate to past moments such that our present becomes past, or prologue, to a common future which through this very process we may bring into being.” So what has been brought into being by watching terrorist violence?

Watching violence as it happens creates a unique kind of trauma both in viewers qua individuals and in the collective US consciousness; certainly 9-11 is an example of that. According to Gabilondo, the effect of watching the attacks in the global media has turned the North American individual into “the subject of history,” for the 9-11 coverage made the North American subject the object of interpellation by the media. The North American individual is the subject of interpellation by being subjected to representation as a helpless victim of global violence in the instantaneous and global media. But this interpellation by media is not new. For the cinematic representation of what we can call national violence (like the hijacking of the President and his staff) had already begun the work of creating the North American ideological subject of globalization. Ultimately, I am arguing that the violence of September 11, 2001 was not an unprecedented event. I would argue that blockbuster films of the 1990s began the work of creating the American as the ideological subject of globalization and most importantly the arbiter of who is entitled to exercise what I am calling national violence in a post-national world.

If we take seriously this suggestion, then we may reconsider the common reaction to the footage of the crashes into and the collapse of the twin towers: “It seemed like a movie.” On a basic level, that reaction expresses a feeling of unreality. But on another level perhaps that “it’s-like-a-movie reaction” demonstrates that the North-American subject has felt the eyes of the world for some-time, has some familiarity with being the object of violence and the interpellated subject of the media—even if both come in the form of blockbuster film. In

short, Hollywood has prepared the way for the American subject's entry into history.

From another perspective, perhaps the victimization that Hollywood films depicted in the 1990s, the first decade of the contemporary globalization era, found its opposition in Hollywood-Washington political-economic practice. Consider Thomas Elsaesser's observation that "the only other kind of product that costs as much—and on the scale of basic human necessities is as frivolous as a [blockbuster]—is an assault helicopter..." (17). This comparison suggests a key point; for Elsaesser this is a statement of US economic priorities and excesses, but for us, the comparison gets at another conclusion: blockbusters are part of the US national defense. To borrow a phrase from The X-Files, that drolly-conspiratorial commentator on US culture, we are dealing with the "military-industrial-entertainment complex."

Finally, it's important to note here that the events of 9-11 not only brought death and destruction to the US but also let the US be a superpower again by its bringing death and destruction to others. This is not exactly to say that the US was less than a superpower before. But being selected to receive such horror and then later being the executor of post-9-11 retaliation, re-certified its superpower status. In this light, we can consider *Air Force One's* conclusion. As the sun rises over the ocean in the film's final shot, we are told visually that the US will maintain its hold on power.

WORKS CITED

- Air Force One*. Dir. Wolfgang Peterson. Perf. Harrison Ford, Gary Oldman, Glenn Close, and Wendy Crewson. Columbia, 1997.
- Alarcon, Norma, Caren Kaplan, and Mino Moallem. "Introduction: Between Women and Nation." *Between Women and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*. Alarcon, Kaplan, and Moallem Eds. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.
- Balio, Tino. "'A Major Presence in All of the World Markets': The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s" *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Steve Neale and Murray Smith. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Buell, Frederick. "Nationalist Postnationalism: Globalist Discourse in Contemporary American Culture." *American Quarterly* 50.3 (1998): 548-591.
- Bush, George W. "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People." <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>> Retrieved April 2005.
- Doherty, Thomas. "Movie Star Presidents." *The End of Cinema As We Know*

- It: American Film in the Nineties*. Ed. Jon Lewis. New York: New York UP, 2001. 150-158.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. "The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes." *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*. Ed. Jon Lewis. New York: New York UP, 2001. 11-22.
- Forbes, Jill. "Popular Culture and Cultural Politics." *French Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. Eds. Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Gabilondo, Joseba. "Postnationalism, Fundamentalism, and the Global Real: Historicizing Terror/ism and the new North American/Global Ideology." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 3.1 (2002): 57-86.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Klady, Leonard. "Earth to H'Wood; You Win." *Variety*. 13-19 February, 1995.
- Maltby, Richard "'Nobody knows Everything': Post-classical Historiographies and Consolidated Entertainment." *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Mann, Michael. "Globalization and September 11." *New Left Review* 12 (2001): 51-72.
- McClintock, Anne. "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism." *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Eds. Anne McClintock et. al. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.
- Nichols, Bill. *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.
- Salecl, Renata. *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Schatz, Thomas. "The New Hollywood." *The Film Cultures Reader*. Ed. Graeme Turner. New York: Routledge 2002.
- Wagnleitner, Reinhold. "American Cultural Diplomacy, the Cinema and the Cold war in Central Europe." <<http://www.cas.umn.edu/wp924.htm>> Retrieved April 2005.
- Wegner, Philip E. "A Night-mare on the Brain of the Living: Messianic Historicity, Alienations, and Independence Day." *Rethinking Marxism*. Volume 12.1 (Spring 2000).
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.