American War Cinema and Media since Vietnam

Previous Publications by the Authors

Dr. Patricia Keeton

"Latin American Video Archives (LAVA)" in *The Worldwide Moving Image Sourcebook* (1997–98)

The LAVA Project: Using Third World Video in College Classroom (1992), Contributing writer and consultant

Dr. Peter Scheckner

The Way We Work: Contemporary Writings from the American Workplace (2008), edited with Mary C. Boyes

"The Chartist Movement" in the *Encyclopedia of Literature and Politics*: *Censorship, Revolution, and Writing* (Vol. I: A–G), edited by M. Keith Booker (2005)

An Anthology of Chartist Literature (1989)

Class, Politics, and the Individual: A Study of the Major Works of D. H. Lawrence (1985)

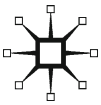
American War Cinema and Media since Vietnam

Politics, Ideology, and Class

By

Patricia Keeton and
Peter Scheckner

palgrave
macmillan



AMERICAN WAR CINEMA AND MEDIA SINCE VIETNAM
Copyright © Patricia Keeton and Peter Scheckner, 2013.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-27788-6

All rights reserved.

First published in 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-44743-5 ISBN 978-1-137-27789-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137277893

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Keeton, Patricia, 1946–
American war cinema and media since Vietnam: politics, ideology, and class / by Patricia Keeton and Peter Scheckner.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. War films—United States—History and criticism. 2. Politics in motion pictures. 3. Social classes in motion pictures. I. Scheckner, Peter, 1943– II. Title.

PN1995.9.W3K44 2013
791.43'658—dc23 2013006677

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: September 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Preface vii

Part I Evolution of American War Cinema and Media since Vietnam

Introduction 3

1 The Worker as Warrior: Social Class and Political Betrayal in Literature from Homer to Heller 21

2 Resurrecting the Good War 33

3 Culture Wars and War: Gender, Race, and Class 61

4 The Role of Media: From the Manufacture of Consent to the Manufacture of Dissent 83

Part II Representations of Workers as Warriors in Contemporary War Cinema and Media

5 Class and Politics: Contemporary American War Films and First-Person Shooter Video War Games 105

6 Ideological Negotiation in the Combat War Film 119

7 The Returning Veteran and the Home Front Melodrama 141

8 Where Is the Ruling Class? Iraq and Afghanistan War Films 161

9 Alternative Media and Representations of War 181

Part III Appendices

Master List of Films 201

Chronology by Year: Historical Events and Relevant Films and Media 205

Bibliography 231

Index 247

Preface

By the end of the first decade of the present century the US military had embedded itself deeply into the culture of this country, particularly in war films, on television, and in the increasingly popular First-Person Shooter (FPS) war video games. A de facto alliance had evolved with four intersecting and mutually profitable components: Hollywood, the Pentagon, war video games, and the private gun industry. Each was giving business to and ideological support to the other.

No other cinematic genre more sharply illustrates the contradictions of American society—notions about social class, politics, and socioeconomic ideology—as does the war film. These issues have been an essential fabric of the cinematic representation of war since World War I, though often suppressed or undercut in various ways. For example, the unprecedented successful movie *Avatar* (2009, James Cameron) combines all these contradictions, but the movie is set on a moon in the twenty-second century in another star system. In short, it could talk freely about economic exploitation and imperial conquest, safely removed from planet earth.

When the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan turned out as badly as they did, documentary as well as some feature films and other media openly recognized the relationship of war to the "system," explicitly as well as implicitly identifying the existence of a ruling class. Making "good war" movies became nearly impossible. Conversely, given the huge profits made by private contractors in the two wars, the emergence of new war video games, their commercial ties to Hollywood, their vital role as recruiters for the Pentagon, and, by the inevitable branding of military-style weapons that takes place in war video games, their connection to the domestic private arms industry, any war could be "good."

American War Cinema and Media since Vietnam: Politics, Ideology, and Class examines feature films, documentaries, TV dramas and series, and video games released since Vietnam, especially during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, to consider how these media negotiate the complexities of war, class, and a military-political mission largely gone bad. Since literature has been connecting issues of class and war beginning with Homer's *Iliad* in the eighth century BCE, attention is given to a sampling of the

most enduring of these works for what they can illuminate about cinematic treatments of war.

This study balances cinematic analysis of specific films and subgenres with a historical retrospective of the cultural, political, and industrial factors shaping the evolution and impact of war cinema and media since Vietnam, and explains why these latest wars have generated unprecedented numbers of feature films and documentaries, television drama and documentary films and series, and video games as well as news reporting.

Part I, Evolution of American War Cinema and Media since Vietnam, puts the development of war cinema and media into an historical context. The Introduction explores and defines the issues of social class, political motivations, and ideology that have been manifest in war cinema and media since Vietnam. Even more than the cinema of war, literature has wrestled with notions of social class. This attention to the class nature of war begins in chapter 1 with the *Iliad* and continues with plays by Shakespeare and novels by Jack London, Henri Barbusse, and Dalton Trumbo. Chapter 2 looks at the ways in which the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence in the 1990s of an assertive American imperial policy affected film and media. Chapters 3 and 4 trace the ways in which developments in culture, politics, economics, and the changing mode of media production, including new media technologies, have influenced the representations of war and the genre's mediation of politics, ideology, and social class.

Part II, Representations of Workers as Warriors in Contemporary War Cinema and Media, turns to an examination of specific examples of representations of war in American cinema and media since Vietnam. Chapter 5 examines how issues of the social class of soldiers are revealed in contemporary war films and media, including First-Person Shooter video war games. Chapters 6 and 7 look at the changes in the combat film and in the returning veteran and homefront film, respectively. Chapter 8 examines films and media that begin to represent class contradictions that postmodern cultural critics had once dismissed for good, while chapter 9 examines alternative films that break the taboos to produce representations of war in which workers recognize their class interest, discover that the mission is not theirs to fight, and do something about it.

Part III, Appendices, includes a master list of films, most released since 1973, listed alphabetically by title with release dates. A chronology by year lists key historical events and relevant films and media, categorized by type (fiction films, feature-length documentaries, television drama/series, and television documentaries).

We wish to thank our student researcher, Kelsey Higgins, for her assistance on the appendices, index, and other tasks supporting this project, and student researcher, Emily Brawer, for her help with the index. Thanks also to Matt Giuliari, another Ramapo student, for creating our book cover design.

We have three daughters who, luckily, have been spared anything having to do with war, unlike too many young people today. They are not particularly drawn to the cinema and media of war. Nevertheless, as the poet William Wordsworth wrote, "The Child is father of the Man." Our children inspire us, and in ways subtle and obvious, help to re-create us and inspire us to create. So it was in our case. Lauren, Lucia, and Tessa—each in her own way—is imaginative in art and in theater. We thank you.