



LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Why We Fight: Subdued propaganda in movies in the age of 9/11

How can we understand and explain the consequences of the U.S. Armed Forces support for the creation of Hollywood movies?

Maxwell Overend

Abstract:

This paper explores how American culture has been shaped by the U.S. Military through the lens of Hollywood movies to make viewers more accepting and eager to enlist. There is a variety of material in the text, ranging from internal Department of Defense documents, surveys of servicemembers, academic writing, articles, and Freedom of Information Act requests. While much has been written on the relationship between entertainment and military, there has been less focus on the reasoning behind this relationship and the political theories that can be applied to this association. The theories of Gramsci, Hall, and Lukes will be synthesized and applied onto the American media-cultural landscape of the post-9/11 era. Because of a lack of previous writing on this specific topic, this essay uses inductive reasoning to reach its conclusion. This being that the economic structures created by the U.S. military enforce the *2nd face of power* upon Hollywood to *encode* messaging into broad entertainment which thereby constructs *consent* among the public, creating *cultural hegemony*.

Key Words: Hollywood, DOD, Propaganda, Culture, Movies

Word Count: 9364

Abbreviations:**DOD – Department of Defense****OWI – Office of Wartime Information****FOIA – Freedom of Information Act request****GWoT – Global War on Terror****Explanation of terms:**

Throughout this essay, when referring to the American Military, the DOD, The Department of Defense, the military, the army, the Armed Forces, Armed Services, and the Pentagon will be used interchangeably. Hollywood will be used to represent all American made movies, even though some are not produced specifically in the geographic location of Hollywood (Britannica 2023). These movies are nevertheless overwhelmingly likely to have ties in some way to Hollywood, either through production companies, film studios etc. Movie studios, studio heads, producers, and directors will all refer to those making decisions about the direction of the movie as well as the budgeting and planning for the movie. The different uses of these terms are to broaden the language used and to make the text flow better with fewer repetitions.

Blockbusters refer to big budget movies that achieve large success and reach wide audiences, therefore making large amounts of money. (The Britannica Dictionary, 2023) These movies often are action movies and are therefore suitable candidates for DOD aid in coproduction.

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1. Introduction

As former entertainment liaison for the Department of Defense, DOD, Phil Strub notes "The relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon has been described as a mutual exploitation. We're after military portrayal, and they're after our equipment" (Weisman, 2014). Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the 1990s, American movie producers and directors increasingly came under pressure by movie studio executives to receive military assistance when creating movies, as it significantly lowered production costs while still having broad blockbuster appeal. What this signified was also a larger willingness to adapt scripts after Pentagon demands (Lange, 2018). These increased requests in assistance have increased military influence on the creation of culture that movies play a large part in, especially in the United States.

The DOD has three broad points when analyzing if a movie is worth supporting. These three criteria are:

- ” (1) Presents a reasonably realistic depiction of the Military Services and the DOD, including Service members, civilian personnel, events, missions, assets, and policies;
- (2) Is informational and considered likely to contribute to public understanding of the Military Services and the DOD; or
- (3) May benefit Military Service recruiting and retention programs “ (DOD, 2015)

What these criteria clearly indicate is that the DOD draws a clear connection between positive portrayal in movies and increased recruitment, as well as increased public awareness of military machinations. This lays the ground for further research into the topic as the DOD themselves in internal documents acknowledge potential positive benefits, such as increased recruitment, that can come from co-producing movies.

The subdepartment responsible for delegating support for films within the U.S. Military is the DOD Production Assistance for Movies and Television. The subdepartment is used to assist movie creation by among other things lending equipment at lower costs. However, there is no such thing as a free lunch and the DOD requests something in return, namely an overview of the scriptwriting process regarding the portrayal of the U.S. military. The DOD would not want to give out equipment to help with the creation of a movie portraying the military in a negative light. Therefore, there are project officers who oversee

scripts to make sure military personnel and military life in general is portrayed accurately and attractively. (DOD, 2015)

What in turn is created by these parameters are economic structures whereby movie studios are heavily disincentivized to produce movies with critical portrayals of signing up and fighting for the army. They would then be missing out on massive potential economic support as scripts too negative towards the military can be denied support. This has created an atmosphere whereby the average viewer in America is largely only subjected to movies uncritical or outright positive when discussing U.S. military matters. Blockbusters are the movies that draw the largest audiences, thereby they have a bigger reach as more people see the movie and are potentially impacted by its message. To produce a blockbuster involving the army in the plot where the financial ends meet, film companies are often pushed into receiving support from the military. There still exist movies critical of different aspects of the U.S. Military. However, because of the viewership of such movies, they have a more limited cultural reach upon the public. In 2022, the top 10 highest domestic grossing movies in the U.S. accounted for more than half of all ticket sales for that entire year. (Box Office Mojo, 2023)

1.1 Operationalization of terms

Culture – The term is quite complex and can mean different things to different people. This thesis will operationalize culture as any form of artistic expression within the social sphere of a community, regardless of size. I will also be using the definition supplied by Stuart Halls view from a book written by James Procter on the life and times of Stuart Hall as a guideline. In this book Procter describes Hall’s view on culture as a “critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled” (Procter, 2004). This is a technical approach to culture but for the readers sake, culture can often be equated to movies in the context of the text. The analysis however, bases the definition of culture off of Hall’s concept of it.

Propaganda –The encyclopedia Britannica defines propaganda as the “dissemination of information—facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies—to influence public opinion” (Smith, 2023). In the context of this essay, propaganda is a tool used by the government to influence the public, in this case through the medium of Hollywood movies. This text will

use this definition of the term when referring to the word and discussing the concept of propaganda throughout the text.

1.2 Limitations

This essay is a case study investigating heavy ties between the U.S. Military and the film industry in Hollywood and the effects it has on the movies messaging. Because of the nature of the essay being a timeline of sorts mapping out aspects of the topic being discussed, there will be elements of a historic descriptive analysis in the text.

This essay is placed in an American context and will not discuss or contrast the cultural impact in other countries. However, this topic is certainly relevant to countries around the world, as Hollywood has an international influence. The potential effects this has are many, examples could be to increase support for domestic military matters in countries other than the U.S., or to widen the reach of American soft power abroad.

During the early stages of writing this essay, a FOIA request was sent to the U.S. government to be able to delve into the specifics of the budgets within the DOD to find conclusive evidence of the sums the military was spending to support with the production of films. However, even though an answer was promised within a couple of weeks, there never came any information, despite the legal requirement to do so. This changed the nature of the essay into the form that it takes now. In further research it would be of great interest to find these budgets to reveal the economic truths that have not been available to me while writing.

In a DOD interview with the Army Lt. Col. Tim Hyde, the deputy director of the Los Angeles Office of the Chief of Public Affairs states that: “In our office, there’s only three of us,” Hyde said. “If there’s a topic dealing with tanks, I have no clue -- none of us do. ... So, we coordinate regularly with subject matter experts in the field that’s being depicted.” (Lange, 2018). What this would indicate is that budgeting within the Armed Forces for aiding movie production lies within each separate wing of the military instead of within a more centralized public affairs office. This also makes an economic analysis of data difficult because of the decentralized nature of the media relations subdepartments within the U.S. Armed Forces as well as expenditures involving the assistance of movie creation is potentially placed within each military branch.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The research question is as follows: *How can we understand and explain the consequences of the U.S. Armed Forces support for the creation of Hollywood movies?*

The question is stated as such because the essay investigates how the actions taken by the DOD by supporting movies, essentially giving a state subsidy to artificially lower the production costs for movies with a more positive portrayal of the military. The question is descriptive in nature because I want to investigate the nature of the Hollywood-DOD relationship and synthesize theories to understand how this relationship came to be as well as what the effects are.

The purpose of the essay is to create a synthesis of ideas of the theories of Lukes, Hall, and Gramsci, with their respective theories of *three faces of power*, the theory of *Representation*, and the theory of *Cultural Hegemony*. While none of these three theories fit perfectly onto the subject being discussed, by creating a synthesis using parts from each theory, the aim is to better understand the consequences of the DOD-Hollywood-Public relationship.

The case which this thesis is examining is a democracy where the military, in certain instances, seemingly acts in its own self-interest. In this case, by utilizing public funds to aid the creation of culture to increase recruitment. There has been a strong connection between the U.S. military and Hollywood for around 100 years but because of the relative lack of academic writing on the subject discussed in this thesis, I believe that this text will be intradisciplinary relevant. There is a larger presence of discourse outside of academia but relatively sparse amounts of academic texts to be found. Furthermore, there are, to my knowledge, no academic texts synthesizing the theories used in this text to understand the relationship between the Military – Hollywood – the American public. This essay aims to be a building block for future research. It can be used to point the direction for future researchers able to delve deeper with more time and resources at hand.

Because of the discussion on the propagandistic nature of the Pentagon's support for movie creation, there is relevance outside of the sciences. Public funds are being used by a publicly funded institution to pick and choose movies that place the U.S. Military in a better light to further their own interests. These funds, paid for by the public, are then being used to shape the culture around them to increase enlistment in the Armed Forces. Because of the

large role Hollywood plays in the creation of culture, both in the U.S. as well as around the world, this thesis will have value in the sense that it touches on a global cultural and social institution and the machinations that work behind the scenes in the process of creating culture.

2. Historical Overview and Earlier Research

The U.S. Military has had a close relationship with Hollywood for almost 100 years, an early example being the films *Wings*, released in 1927, which used planes from the U.S. Airforce as well as thousands of infantrymen (Suid, 2002). The film ended up winning an Oscar for best picture and a mutually fruitful relationship between the armed services and Hollywood had been established; this carried on through to WWII. In 1942, months after the U.S. entrance into the war, OWI, Office of Wartime Information, was established to monitor the scripts of movies and TV to censor any with un-American and anti-war sentiments (Koppes & Black, 1977).

As Elmer Davies, the Director of the OWI 1942-45, stated:” 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” (GCMF, 2018). The OWI had the power to outright reject scripts or could demand the scripts be rewritten. The scripts would not be broadcast without their approval (Koppes & Black, 1977). Because of the direct censorship, this is the most overt control the military has had over cultural production in the United States in modern times. After the end of the war, the OWI was dismantled, and things returned to a state ante bellum.

The abolishment of the military draft in the late stages of the Vietnam war also placed a larger impetus on military command to attract enough volunteers for a fully functioning army. The armed forces now had to inspire and attract people to join up instead of merely drafting them. This naturally leads to an increased weight being placed on military representation in media, as any negative media would lead to lessened recruitment, while more flattering portrayals would do the opposite. In the 1980s, military cooperation with Hollywood once again increased. With heightened tensions with the Soviet Union as well as a ballooning defense budget under Ronald Reagan, the military presence on screens increased, with the most famous example being *Top Gun* (Zenou, 2022). Following *The Hunt for Red October*’s failure to get military assistance because of the film’s renegade nature, studio heads felt it a necessity to get funding for films in future. The economic fortunes of a movie could be completely different depending on whether assistance was provided or not. The production costs were so much higher without military aid that the director of the

movie, John McTiernan, has said that studios began telling directors and screenwriters that they should "get cooperation from the military, or forget about making the picture" (Zakarin, 2012).

Film has become a large industry in the United States, contributing \$504 billion in 2019, representing roughly 2.4% of the country's total GDP, ranking among the top 10 industries in terms of contribution to GDP (Rosal, 2023). The effect this has economically is obvious, with in total 2.4 million jobs being supported by the Motion Picture Association (MPA, 2023). This makes the film and tv industry important solely on its economic merits. By adding in the cultural impact this industry also has, it aids in explaining that the DOD finds this industry a useful tool to impact public opinion and, thereby, recruitment numbers.

2.1 Earlier Research

While the DOD-Hollywood relationship has received considerable attention in the literature. Especially after controversies such as those surrounding the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* (United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2015) there has been a heightened interest regarding this topic. However, there have been scant amount written using the political theories this text includes. The previous research on the subject is often specifically on one topic or the other, either discussing Hollywood's portrayal of the U.S. military and its interventionist doctrine or writing on the relationship between Hollywood and the military. To my knowledge, there have been no academic texts discussing the connection between how the economic structures between the military and Hollywood work to create subdued propaganda consumed willingly by the public.

There has been limited previous research on the subject of military support for movies and the resulting increase in applicants. One example being *A Study of the Impact of US Department of Defense and Movie Industry Cooperation on Military Application Rates*. (Varzarevsky, 2022). The study's results were that there was a weak correlation overall but that certain segments of the population, such as African Americans as well as women, saw an increase in military application rates even after factoring in other important economic factors such as unemployment rate. What this study did not factor in was the idea that preventative measures also play a part in the assessment the Pentagon makes when it decides to support a movie.

3. Theory

This text will synthesize the ideas of some of the most prominent thinkers on the subject of power through non-coercive means, such as culture. These thinkers are Steven Lukes, with the *three faces of power*. Antonio Gramsci, with his theories on cultural *Hegemony*. As well as the Neo-Gramscite, Stuart Hall with his theory on *Reception*. These theories will be used in the analysis to better understand how subdepartments deep in the Pentagon are one of its most formidable tools when it comes to recruitment. To do this, aspects from all three of these theories will be synthesized into one theory. For this, an introduction of all three will be required.

3.1 Gramscian Theory- Cultural Hegemony

The idea of cultural *hegemony* comes from the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Cultural hegemony refers to how the cultural production of the ruling classes and elites (in the case of this thesis the DOD) can be used to assert *hegemony* over others and by creating the *consent* of the dominated. The *consent* in this case is not particularly consensual, instead it is an indicator that a people have been dominated. One example of *hegemony* could be the ruling classes using their economic and social capital to influence the culture in such a way as to benefit them, by for example controlling the production of culture through owning centers for culture. Whether this is to sew division among poorer classes or to reinforce an idea of upper-class superiority differs. The central tenet is, nevertheless, that by controlling what was being made and discussed in public forums, control can be leveraged over other aspects of society and the *consent* of the dominated can be created (Lears, 1985).

Gramscian theory focuses on the idea of *hegemony*, and within it, the socio-cultural production of *consent*. In the context of this text, the *consent* can be seen as the acceptance and increase in popularity of the U.S. Military as a cause of the socio-cultural production created by the synthesis of the DOD and Hollywood. Therefore, the military achieves cultural hegemony over the American public regarding the military's interests. It is this hegemony that, in turn, leads to an increased acceptance of the military and increase recruitment.

While Gramscian theory was originally tied to the social standings and relations between economic classes, the concepts of *hegemony* and *consent* will be synthesized into my

own theory. The two concepts discussed are the most important because they establish the power relationship between the public and the elite that are relevant to this case.

3.2 Encoding/decoding theory

A prominent neo-Gramscian, Stuart Hall has developed Gramsci's original ideas and applied them to a more modern media landscape, more specifically, movies and television. One of these theories he has penned is his theory on *encoding/decoding*; the basic idea states that there are two concepts which add a deeper meaning and consequence to culture below the surface level of enjoyment, namely *encoding* and *decoding*. *Encoding* signifies the messaging that is concealed and inserted into cultural production, which is then presented to the viewing public. *Decoding* is the activity done by the receiver and consumer of culture and can vary from person to person, some might not *decode* anything at all. There are three different positions one can be in when *decoding*, dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. What is relevant to this essay is the dominant position, as the Hollywood movies with script oversight work within the dominant code. This because they are espousing the code generated by the military elites, which in this context is the DOD (Hall, 2021).

A classic example of encoding would be in *Top Gun* where with the help of material support from the military, the movie portrays the military in a very positive light, and as a community worth signing up for. Of course, this messaging is subjective and changes depending on the *decoding* performed by the consumer of the culture. However, in the instance of *Top Gun*, a recruitment boost can be seen directly following the movie, indicating that the *encoding* of messaging into movies can have a real-world effect (Zenou, 2022).

3.3 Three faces of power

Steven Lukes' *three faces of power*, as described in *Power: A radical view*, released in 1974, can be applied to this situation. To understand the *three faces of power* described in Lukes' book, examples will be used.

1st face of power: An overt exercise of power – An example would be putting a gun to someone's head and making them do something for you. It can also be a much less violent affair, instead using for example economic means to coax someone into doing something.

2nd face of power: Setting the agenda – by controlling what will be discussed, power can be exerted as things uncomfortable to the setter of the agenda can simply be ignored, thereby not letting opponents express their views on topics important to them.

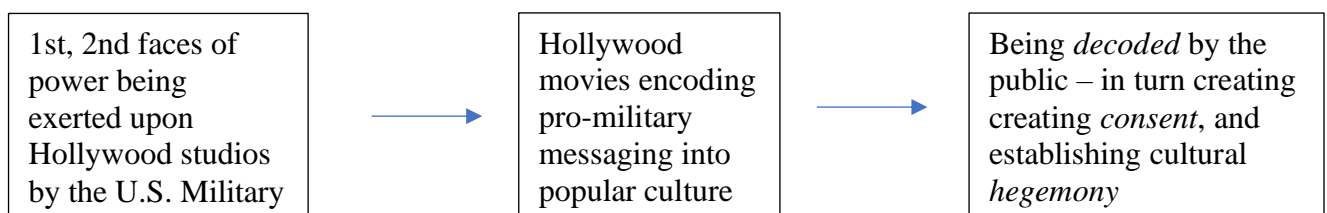
3rd face of power: Preventing people from presenting ideas – By limiting the scope of political action through preventing conflict from arising before it even exists. A highly metaphysical idea where those who perceive themselves as content with the status quo won't challenge it.

By exerting the 1st face of power upon Hollywood filmmakers, a 2nd face of power is exerted upon the moviegoing public as there are fewer movies released with independent script control. This is combined with the fact that making a blockbuster with a large budget that reaches more people becomes much harder without this support, benefiting the U.S. military, who limit the scope of public discourse regarding their affairs.

3.4 Synthesis

In this essay, the parts mentioned will be used from all three theories. None of the three theories are adequate in their own sense to be able to be used for the present case, however, they all contain elements that will be synthesized. The Gramscian ideas can be fused with the ideas of Steven Lukes'. What Gramsci means by cultural *hegemony* is comparable to the third face of power as it is something which is larger than individual action and goes towards influencing the decision-making of populaces. The *encoding* aspect of culture creation by Stuart Hall matches quite well with this synthesis also, the *encoding* of messaging to the dominant position by DOD-aided scriptwriters leads to the production of *consent*, which in turn can be likened to the exertion of the 3rd face of power upon society.

Below is a small graphic to summarize how the three theories are synthesized step by step, which each theory slotting into one of the stages of military affairs seeping into the creation of culture in the United States.



4. Material and Methodology

4.1 Material

The data collection methods are of a qualitative nature when it comes to the movies used as examples. This is because of the large number of movies that have received support from the Pentagon. There is a more quantitative aspect to this essay when looking at the statistics relating to recruitment rate. However, this was meant more as a base of knowledge and to show that there is something of worth to research. Nevertheless, it is to be mentioned that there are quantitative elements to the writing.

In this text, there is a wide variety of material used, from books, articles, and previously written academic texts on the topic, as well as FOIA requests, internal DOD documents and surveys conducted with active-duty personnel. This means that there is a broad use of different types of material in this text which leads to a strong base. Sources were chosen on their relevance and trustworthiness. Certain aspects, such as the newspaper articles used, have no sources for their claims. However, these articles come from accredited and reputable news sources, which makes me inclined to believe what has been written. These texts also overlapped with data from other sources, which strengthens their case.

There are quotes by people in close contact to the topic at hand are spread throughout the essay. This was done to flesh out the discussion as well as to give a human side to the numbers and theory. The quotes used are all from either directors of movies which received support from the DOD. While these types of sources are not always completely accurate and unbiased they help in the creation of a larger picture and give a deeper insight otherwise not available. Most of these quotes used are related to how propaganda works through the lens of entertainment as well and tie well into the lens of the theory being used in this text. In a case study it is always important to include the perspectives of those who experienced and formed the phenomenon being studied.

The figures used in this text are to showcase the level of recruitment and wage growth during the time period chosen in a way that is easy to grasp. The sources used are from believable sources such as *government executive*, a newspaper established in 1969 which intimately reports on the workings of the government.

There is a certain section of the text where a DOD website FAQ is cited. (U.S. Marine Corps Motion Picture and TV Liaison Office) The aim with this was to show how blatant the thinking of the DOD is when regarding which films it refuses to work with such projects are deemed as too critical of military matters or display servicemembers in a negative light.

Certain specific movies are used as examples in this text, these have been chosen as they reflect certain more egregious aspects of the DOD-Hollywood relationship. While there is an element of cherry picking when choosing these films, I feel that there is plenty of other material to back up the stories told from the productions of the movies chosen. The movie that is delved the deepest into is *Act of Valor* (2012). This movie not only received financial support from the DOD, it also demanded active duty marines to join the cast of the movie.

One important note to make is the political nature of many of the academic texts I have read through the writing process for this thesis. The topic discussed is a contentious one which makes many authors prone to slant their writings on the subject. Many are broadly critical and cite texts that are criticized by other academics for not providing sources and being categorically anti-CIA and DOD. To avoid any colouring, texts that are political in nature have therefore been filtered out as they do not provide balanced information.

There are two figures used in this essay, is one used to portray statistics relating to wage growth and the other being used to show recruitment rates to the military. I chose these sources because they provided the insight needed to further the reasoning to more conclusive territory. Because of what these sources indicate, further research is valid as the numbers indicate that. The sources used are from neutral outlets and there is no doubt that what they present is factual.

There are six newspaper articles, they are used to give a more nuanced perspective on the military's role in Hollywood, because of the relative lack of academic writing on this specific topic, these articles were of great help.

There are four texts written by groups that closely watch the actors involved in this text, the DOD and Hollywood, these for example *The George C. Marshall Foundation*, which writes specifically on military affairs.

There are four U.S. government documents directly relating to the DOD-Hollywood relationship. These range from court documents to an FAQ, what they were chosen for was to give a view into the thinking of the military and to explicitly show that the DOD uses movies to increase recruitment.

10 Academic texts were used to aid in understanding the context around the essay as well as to give a fleshed-out background informational supply. These were also important simply to give the author a better understanding of what he was writing about.

4.2 Method - Empirical Case Study

This thesis takes the form of an empirical case study and means to examine the phenomena of the relationship between Hollywood-U.S. military-public. The aim of this case study is to test the theories of Gramsci, Hall, and Lukes and apply them to this relationship. To achieve this, there will be a qualitative analysis using data from various sources, as mentioned in the material section.

To overcome the challenges with reliability that can come with case studies and to limit the element of cherry picking that comes with choosing specific movies as examples, I have included statistics such as recruitment numbers, as well as civilian and military wages. This was done to give an unbiased basis for the thesis that could then be combined with specific examples of movies. This solid basis will help to use inductive reasoning. While the choice of these specific sources and statistical outcomes can be chosen to weigh the essay in one direction, I have aimed to choose data from reputable sources in line with other points of data. There are multiple points of data all pointing towards a similar pattern. Also, using direct quotes from people intimately involved in the relationship between Hollywood and DOD, as well as using sources such as internal documents help to create an investigation that remains close to the phenomenon being studied while remaining unbiased.

By using the theories mentioned, this analysis will take the form of a case study researching the impact the military has had on broader American culture and its views on the joining of the military. Given the open nature of the research question, an inductive approach to data collection was the natural choice. This means allowing the data to speak, moving towards theory. In this case, the inducting can be seen as both a tool to make an argument as well as to point in the direction for future research.

This will be a look at the broader case of military-Hollywood cooperation through 2000-2012 and its effects through the lens of the general trends that are created by this relationship. One movie cannot change a society, it is a broad *encoding* of material that has any lasting effect on the minds of the public (Hall, 2021). Through looking at data, there will be an extrapolation onto the synthesized theory mentioned previously. There is an *x* factor

which cannot be explained with the data acquired for this thesis, there is therefore space for this theory to.

4.2.1 Demarcations

Since the dawn of the Global War on Terror, there have been multiple wars and military actions launched, as a natural consequence of this, a heightened media interest in military affairs has occurred. There was also a larger need for increased recruitment of soldiers as wars were started in Afghanistan and Iraq. All this leads the 12-year period from 2000-2012 to be a well-positioned time for study. The divide between before and after can also be used to show a change within the Pentagon and how different needs of the military result in different strategies when collaborating with the movie industry.

The death of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 marked a shift in the Global War on Terror, GWoT, as the main instigator of the start of the conflict died. The decision to end in 2012 is because of the idea that very little change occurs overnight, and the timetable for movie production supports this. The practices presented in this essay continue to this day, but with some historical distance placed between the writing of the essay and the time frame discussed leads to an increase of available material as there has been more time to write about it. There will be some individual examples outside of the timeframe to give further understanding that the phenomenon of U.S. military intervention in movie creation has been around long before the set timeframe and continues to this day.

The time limitation is to focus the essay on the more modern examples of military influence on the movie industry. The relationship between Hollywood and the American military is old, yet it has vastly expanded, significantly post 9/11. With it, the amount of material surrounding the relationship has also increased. This results in more material to take part in from a more recent timeframe. Thus, I have therefore decided to keep the timeframe relatively short to be able to keep the writing focused on a smaller amount of material.

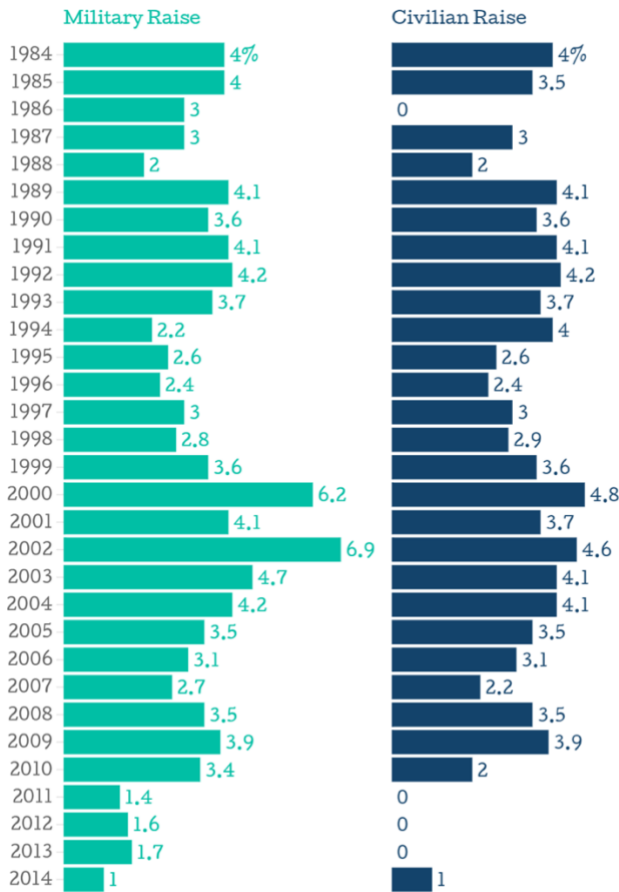
5. Analysis

By using the three theories mentioned in the theory section, we can extrapolate their view on power to better understand how the U.S. Militaries support for the creation of Hollywood movies has an effect on the public.

The base assumption of this text is that the society in which we live is socially constructed, that movies can have an impact in creating the societal context in which its inhabitants live and act. It is through this lens that the consequences of the economic structures of the US. Military's media offices become apparent. Because of the effects movies and other forms of culture can have on society and its general views on matters, understanding what causes the cultural expression to take on the form and message that it does is crucial. Below is an introduction to the analysis, where different data points are used to build a case for the impact of the Hollywood-DOD relationship upon the public.

Because of the nature of a volunteer-only army, most citizens need some form of incentive to join. This can range from the fulfillment of a sense of a patriotic duty towards one's country, bettering one's social standing, fulfilling one's social contract etc. There are also more material reasons that influence decisions. In a 2018 study, 46% of asked U.S. Army enlistees answered they joined for pay and job opportunities, while 9% answered they joined for institutional reasons – love of country, family, and honour. A combination of both influenced 37% to join up (Helmus et.al., 2018). This means that a considerable combined percentage (46%) of enlistees were at least partially socially compelled to join up. This creates a large platform for cultural institutions to have a big sway in how the military is perceived and, thereby, whether they are willing to enlist or not.

As seen in Figure 1 below, during the 2000s, the wage growth for the military was relatively steady with an exception being a post-9/11 boost in 2002 giving military personnel a raise of 6.9%. What can generally be said is that raises were generally in line with inflation and in line with the raises in the civilian sector. This makes the military a potentially attractive employer, however, nothing extraordinary that would indicate that it outcompeted civilian sector work opportunities. This would indicate that there are other factors at play that influenced the recruitment numbers steadily increasing all throughout the 2000's. This, in combination with the survey of military personnel mentioned previously leads to the reasoning that social factors explain the rise in recruitment even as more material means stayed similar to civilian life.



GovExec

Data: CRS

Figure 1 (Katz, 2014)

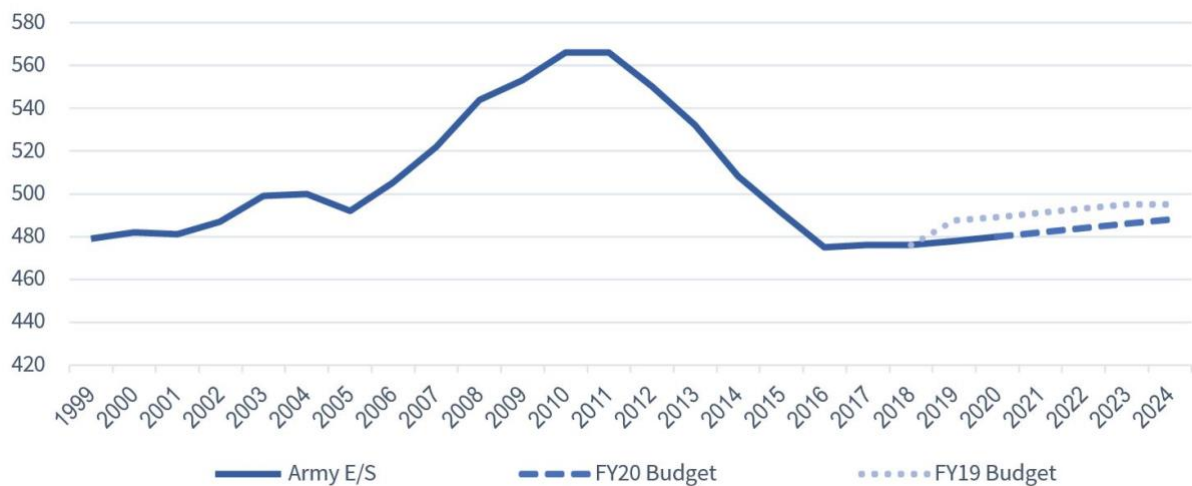


Figure 2 (Cancian, 2019)

Figure 2 shows the number of active-duty personnel measured in hundreds of thousands. What this shows is that the peak of recruitment of active-duty personnel into the army following 9/11 was between 2010-2012. As stated previously, there is no clear indication of

the positive economic reasons for joining being largely superior to those present in the civilian/private sector at the time. What this indicates is that there was a strong will among American enlistees to join up, not because of employment opportunities or because of a sign-up bonus. Instead, there was a broader social context that enticed them. What this is, is hard point out. The question of where these concepts are created is something that the scope of the thesis cannot delve into. However, no one is born patriotic, it is something that is instilled with culture (Baumeister, 2023). How this is instilled is different, however, because of the social basis of patriotism, it would seem likely that it comes at least partly from the culture being consumed.

Culture plays a central role in creating patriotism. Using Hall's theory, patriotism can be seen as part of the dominant position. It is something that is of benefit to the military elites, the DOD, because of the measured impact it can have on the number of enlistees (Helmus et.al., 2018). Countries vary vastly both in what constitutes patriotism as well as how patriotic they are and feel (Forbes, 2008). Because of the importance of culture in the creation of patriotism and the importance of patriotism in joining the army, this goes some way to potentially explaining the interest in aiding movies among DOD officials, as they see messages being *encoded* into film that makes citizens more likely to enlist in the Armed Forces as a positive thing.

According to FOIA requests made in 2014 and 2016, the DOD has assisted in the creation of more than 400 Hollywood movies. According to the documentary *Theatres of War* (2022) more than 2500 pieces of media have received assistance from the DOD. Another source states that from 1911 to 2017, the DOD assisted in the production of 814 films and 1133 TV titles. (Secker & Alford, 2017) What this points to is a widespread military influence in the production of culture in the U.S. Of course, these movies that have received support do not constitute a majority of movies made. However, the number of movies still points to a large reach that the DOD has within this industry.

In the general contract formulated for moviemakers by the DOD, there is mentioned in paragraph 4. d. that if a significant benefit is provided by taking part in a movie, costs for the movie company may be lessened further (Sullivan, 2015). What this goes to show is that there are incentives throughout the process to further placate the DOD in return for an extra decrease in costs. However, when viewing the website for the U.S. Marine Corps Motion Picture and TV Liaison Office, it is clear that its concerns are considerably broader. In the Frequently Asked Question portion, one of the questions is, "What [are] the criteria to obtain assistance?" Part of the answer states that one prerequisite is for the movie to "not appear to

condone or endorse activities by private citizens or organizations that are contrary to U.S. Government policy” (Entertainment Media Liason Office, 2023). What this could mean is very broad, but the fact that a movie cannot voice opinions critical of a public institution for fear of it losing funding from that institution shows how the 2nd face of power in being employed here (Lears, 1985).

An example of complete synthesis of the DOD and Hollywood is the movie *Act of Valor* (2012). A script was written and created to entice people to join the Marines; one ploy to make this movie more realistic was to use serving Navy SEALs as actors in the movie. In this instance, there is a clear-cut connection between the military and Hollywood as some of the most professionally trained troops in the entire U.S. Military are given explicit orders from their superiors to join the cast of this movie (Zakarin, 2012). The movie was synthesized when there was a need within the Navy for increased recruitment of Navy SEALs, among other things, to attract people to sign up was this movie (Anderson, 2012). What this shows is a clear-cut relationship between Hollywood and the military, the fact that troops were given orders to join the cast of the movie shows that this is not a project on the side of government business. Rather that movie creation is the active business of this government department. It also indicates that there is a clear line from movie representation and increased recruitment in the minds of DOD chiefs. In this case the messaging is quite overtly *encoded* into the film with the stated goal to increase recruitment.

Of course, individual examples do not prove anything concrete in and of themselves. They can only help to provide a picture. The examples chosen for this analysis are emblematic of the systematic approach the DOD has taken to the entertainment business. There is great interest among military personnel to provide help for movies that want to portray the military in an attractive way and troops are sometimes ordered to take an active part in the cast of movies to facilitate further recruitment.

This is not only a discussion on what the DOD can do to make themselves seem more appealing to potential recruits but also about using culture to make them seem less unappealing. In many of the recorded instances in which the DOD wanted writers to change the script to approve funding, the changes are about making military personnel seem less unattractive. Examples include removing scenes of troops committing war crimes, doing drugs, or disobeying commands, even in instances where there are historical records proving events. An example is the film about the Cuban missile crisis *Thirteen Days* (2001). The DOD wanted to change a historically accurate scene where the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Military advocated the invasion of Cuba to a scene where the Chiefs are portrayed as

being more cautious. This presents them in a more stable light that would be more favourable to the DOD instead of the actual truth of the situation (Secker & Alford, 2017b). When smoothing over the realities of military life in this way, the viewer of the movie gets a less critical view of the military reinforced. What this creates is a heightened idea for moviegoers about the American military. As previously mentioned, the military now cannot conscript the populace into the army, so instead they must inspire them to join. It is therefore against their own interest to support movies with a more realistic portrayal of how military personnel actually behave. This to further the cultural *hegemony* as dissent is not approved and will not be spread to the masses as there is no funding for a movie with that message, even if it is historically accurate.

The way to reach as large an audience as possible is by making the movie as broadly appealing as possible. The broad appeal of blockbusters is partly because of the fact that they are fun and fast action for the viewing public to enjoy. To achieve this action, often time equipment and personnel are used in larger amounts. What this in turn requires is a large budget. Simple budget management tells us that it is preferable to lower costs and maximize profits. It is, therefore, very reasonable for film studios to accept aid very willingly from the military as it can lower costs dramatically. Movies that otherwise could not be made are made possible, this gives the military large sway over how they themselves are portrayed by the film, as they will simply pull out if it is against their own interests. This is emblematic of the 1st and 2nd *faces of power* being exuded over movie companies.

The U.S. Government has moved away both from overt propaganda as well as from a draft army present during and after WWII. Because of these two factors, things are quite different for the Pentagon in its relationship to the media and the public. Because the public no longer can be forced to fight, they instead need to be inspired to sign up of their own volition. This includes monetary and social benefits or a sense of social pressure. In a quarterly report in 2006, a will to increase the number of sign-ups to special operatives by 15% was presented. A way to do this was by producing inspirational movies featuring serving special operatives to achieve a so-called *Top Gun effect* (Zakarin, 2012).

Having the ability to create culture means you also have power. Possessing that power means you can influence how people in society think and feel; with that comes power. Through the economic means used by the Pentagon to essentially make or break movies if the scripts presented are or are not to the liking of the DOD, they manage to project massive power. Because of this approval process and because of the huge decrease in production costs that follow if a movie is allowed to use military equipment and personnel, as previously

stated, film studios place huge importance on a script being compliant with the DOD. The Pentagon does not, therefore, create culture in the direct sense. Yet using Lukes's *three faces of power*, it becomes evident that the DOD exerts the 1st *face of power* upon the film studios. Since there is a threat of pulling funding, the scripts need to comply. This, in turn, creates a broader landscape in cinema where very few movies involving military equipment, i.e., movies discussing war and broader conflict, are critical of the Pentagon or portray the U.S. military in ways other than completely honourable and compliant. This leads to movies being *encoded* with messaging more positive to the U.S. military, thereby cementing a more militarized cultural *hegemony*.

The effect this has on culture is a lack of diversity of ideas regarding the U.S. military; in turn this could be seen as creating a 3rd *face of power* regarding the general American public. People become more inclined to support the American military and do not realize the opportunity for a broader discourse. Instead, because of the lack of material in the mainstream, ordinary viewers are not subjected to alternative thought. This, in turn, leads to the creation of norms by showing how individuals preferably shall behave. A norm creation in this instance would be the concept that joining the military is something valiant and glamorous. This norm exists artificially and is propped up by the economic structures previously discussed.

The cultural impact of movies, in general, is hard to quantify; this also applies to individual movies. Box office numbers are somewhat of an assistance in determining this. However, they do not necessarily tell too much. The point of this thesis is not to find individual examples to prove a larger point; instead, it is the massive amount of content that is co-produced with the DOD that can help provide evidence. An individual movie, except for exceptional exceptions, will not provide much assistance in changing the cultural views of a culture. However, when a large majority of blockbusters in Hollywood are co-produced with military assistance, as has been the case for decades, the cultural impact is much larger.

Small differences end up making big changes, they have a knock-on effect. This is an interpretation that can be made of how the U.S. military views its work with filmmakers. There is no grand gesture that, with one fell swoop, changes public sentiment overnight. Given time, persistence and a quantitative approach, results can be achieved. If enough culture is *encoded* with messaging positive regarding the U.S. Military there will be results over time.

By flexing its economic muscles, the DOD can get much out of its partnership with Hollywood. Between the two, a fruitful relationship of mutual exploitation proceeds. The

consequence for the public is that the *third face of power* is exerted upon them. The DOD gain large influence among the public as there is lessened opposition and increased goodwill directed towards them. In a world with an army that no longer can conscript its soldiers, an approach involving the construction of a society's culture has instead been instigated to keep enlistment high.

In essence, the three theories chosen for this text can be applied thusly: Lukes' *three faces of power* can be applied to understand how the Pentagon uses its economic leverage of lowering costs for movie production to influence movie scripts in their favour. Thereby using the 1st face of power to exert direct control in what comes the exertion of the 2nd face of power over the movie-going public as the 'agenda' set can be translated into what movies are being released and watched by the public. This exertion of power is done through *encoding*, messaging not meant to be a visible centerpiece of the movie but something that nevertheless has a great impact on the cultural views of the viewer if repeatedly exposed to this *encoding*. What comes of this is the creation of cultural *hegemony*, and the construction of *consent* among the public. In this case, the *consent* is towards a growing military with grander needs for enlistment. In the *hegemonic* view, movies influence the creation and structure of culture; in turn, culture impacts social factors.

6. Conclusion

Wings (1927), the first markedly successful synthesis between Hollywood and the DOD will soon celebrate its centenary, and with it, the relationship between the two parties is sure to grow deeper still. In essence, what this relationship means is that propaganda is being sent out to those simply wanting to enjoy an enjoyable movie experience. The nature of propaganda has evolved, and the form it takes in the modern world would surely not be recognizable to propagandizers of earlier media ages where propaganda was not merely presented in forms of entertainment. The manufacturing of cultural *hegemony*, in this case, is so ubiquitous that it seeps through large facets of the cultural sphere. Instead of the manufacturing of *consent* being somewhat visible, it instead is imbedded in something solely packaged as entertainment to the public.

This trend continues to this day, a recent example is the sequel to *Top Gun*, a movie franchise which has some of the heaviest ties to the military. Released in 2022, In this movie, there is a portrayal of a next-generation plane that, at the time of release, the movie was not publicly known to be in the works. It was, therefore, through *Top Gun: Maverick* that the DOD publicized that a new stealth fighter was being designed. The company tasked with creating the real-life stealth plane helped out with the creation of a similar version used in the movie (Mizokami, 2022). This picture went on to become a big success, leading to this potential jet prototype being publicly displayed to large swathes of the public, bolstering the image of the U.S. Armed Forces.

As established in the text, because of the economic structures created by the military based on whether they loan out equipment and personnel or not, the movie industry today has a very dependent relationship with the military. The logic for the military is seemingly sound, namely to protect its own interests to increase support and recruitment numbers. However, it is easily forgotten that the U.S. Military is publicly funded. It only exists because of the tax people pay, and therefore the relationship becomes between the public and this public institution becomes very asymmetrical. While the Pentagon actively uses the leverages provided by Hollywood to further its own means, large swathes of the public remain uneducated about these methods being used to manipulate public thought and opinion.

What is interesting is the fact that the military is so invested in this relationship to begin with. There is no direct benefit in the short term, neither is there direct tangible benefit from aiding in the production of an individual movie alone. Except for rare exceptions such

as *Top Gun* (1986), the broader idea is to reach an audience far greater than one movie release by continuously working on manufacturing the *consent* of the American public. The almost centennial interest by the military shows that there is something to be gained by the military by influencing the cultural production of the United States.

The point of contention that led to the inspiration for penning this thesis is the fact that the Pentagon is publicly funded and, in turn, uses these funds to influence the public into supporting them further. This thesis has established the clear links between the military and Hollywood in terms of the number of productions it has assisted in producing over a very long period of time that continues to this day. This text has showcased why the DOD finds this industry of interest as well as why Hollywood is willing to accept this support despite losing independent control over the movie script. By synthesizing parts of theories from Gramsci, Hall, and Lukes, this essay has explained the phenomenon occurring and the social and cultural consequences of it.

Recalling the process of writing this essay, there should have been a more thorough audit of the material available at hand earlier in the process. Huge gaps in information were made evident piecemeal instead of all within the first weeks. Therefore there had to be a switch in the design of the essay.

The original intention was to a more quantitative and definitive look at the numbers in this case. However, because of the lack of transparency from the DOD in particular, such information was exceedingly hard to find. A Freedom of Information Act request had been made to access the budgets for the DOD Production Assistance for Movies and Television Productions office. This request was made at the very beginning of the writing process of this thesis. Because of long administrative times that have far exceeded the supposed timeframe for document access there has not been any response which hampered my work. I therefore opted to somewhat change the direction of the essay and work under the presumption that there is no specific budget tied to assisting in the creation of works of culture. If there had been available access to budgets for the media offices present within the U.S. Armed Services, there would have been more material to build a case with. With clear figures representing an increase or drop in expenditure regarding supporting films there would be a greater possibility to establish links and broader open a discussion on why the military is spending these sums.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have learned an enormous amount on the topic discussed. I have always been interested in the ways that the culture in which we live impacts the way we think and feel about various topics. There is a general sense among many of those

I came of age with that grew up in a post-9/11 and post-Iraq war world that the idea of governments using culture and the media to achieve their goals is commonplace and par for the course. I remember being only eight or nine years old, joking about how ‘Bush only invaded Iraq for the oil’. There was a broad sentiment of politics and war seeping through the culture. When speaking to older generations, this gap becomes quite evident as these ideas are not nearly as prevalent in higher ages. This cynicism leads to conspiracy-laden thought and to large mistrust of institutions. What this essay on some level amounts to is the investigation into whether the ideas expressed by many as common knowledge actually carry weight.

To further flesh out this study, there could be further research into who the DOD is trying to reach out to, as it can vary greatly depending on the time frame of the research. In recent years an increased focus has been placed on the recruitment of women and people of colour. While this is an interesting topic for further discussion, it did not fit into the scope of this essay to analyze why and how the U.S. military aims to do this. What can also be of interest for further research is the entrance of the DOD into TV, with them co-creating several hundreds of pieces of television in just a decade. (Secker & Alford, 2017) This could also involve parts of Stuart Hall's theories, focusing more on the *decoding* aspects of reception theory instead of *encoding*.

There is much more to be explored in this field. What was written in this text can be greatly expanded on and hopefully will be in the coming years. To my knowledge, this is one of the first academic text to synthesize the theories of this text and to apply them to the context which I have chosen. This obviously opens for further essays to be written on the topic, as other authors surely would be able to apply other theories or this synthesis upon other cases. What could be done in future by other authors is to look at an even more recent and contemporary timeframe to see if this pattern still holds to this day.

While other countries, such as the author's home country of Sweden, are introducing drafts to bolster their military ranks, the DOD remains confident in its established cultural manufacturing to keep recruitment high, as can be seen by the accelerating pace of partnership with Hollywood. Of course, there are multiple facets of recruitment, and there is often not a single catalyst that compels people to join the army. What this thesis has aimed to do is simply point to one of these aspects and investigate the political and social implications of such a policy where entertainment and popular culture are so seamlessly combined with modern day propaganda.

If both sides continue to receive benefits from the arrangement, something that is unlikely to change there is currently nothing that would indicate its demise. Because of the nature of the manufacturing of culture, there is no feasible window of opportunity for this machination to end through popular means. The entire point is to work on the individual and collective subconscious to retrieve results, which in this case is increased enlistment and a manufactured *consent*. This mutual exploitation between Hollywood and DOD will continue as long as the exploitation stays mutual.

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