

12-2018

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Ryan Alderman

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Citation: Pilot Scholars Version (Modified MLA Style)

Alderman, Ryan, "The Longest Battle: Gender and Race in American Twentieth-Century Civil War Films" (2018). *History Undergraduate Publications and Presentations*. 18.
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The Longest Battle: Gender and Race in American Twentieth-Century Civil War Films

By
Ryan Alderman

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in History
University of Portland
December 2018

On August 12, 2017 a car drove through a group of counter-protestors at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia killing one woman and injuring at least 19 other people.¹ The rally was called “Unite the Right” and it was organized by a group of white supremacists who were protesting the plan to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee that had been standing since 1924.² The situation quickly turned violent as counter-protestors joined the rally in opposition to the white nationalists and it escalated into a large brawl with fist-fighting, mace, projectiles, and makeshift weapons before the car drove through the crowd and police arrived.³ This was the third and arguably the most violent white-supremacist rally organized to protest the removal of the Confederate memorial but this was also not an isolated event. Conflicting opinions over Confederate memorials have caused events like this to occur in cities across the south in recent years. Many people believe that the Confederate statues should be removed because they stand to memorialize offensive and outdated values but others argue that removing the statues would be an attempt to erase history which is unacceptable. The legacy of the Civil War is so deeply important to American culture and identity that over 150 years after it ended people are still led to deadly violence over disagreements about how it should be remembered and memorialized.

Since the founding of the United States, the country has gone through many crucial events that have had an effect on the citizens, the values they hold, and the way they view the world. The American Civil War is one event in particular that has had a drastic effect on the

¹ Hawes Spencer, “A Far-Right Gathering Bursts Into Brawls,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-protests-unite-the-right.html?module=inline>

² Jacey Fortin, “The Statue at the Center of Charlottesville’s Storm,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-rally-protest-statue.html>

³ Hawes Spencer, “A Far-Right Gathering Bursts Into Brawls,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-protests-unite-the-right.html?module=inline>

country's self-identity and history. In the 1860s the growing tensions in the United States between an increasingly industrialized North and an agriculturally based rural south reached a point that caused war to break out. This was primarily caused by disagreements about slavery and the slave trade, but the deep rooted nature and importance of these issues made the situation seem much more complex. There are also other issues surrounding the American Civil War that remain points of contention even today and the Civil War will remain in American's minds forever as a crucial part of what shaped their national identity.

One of the ways the Civil War remains in the American imagination is through the prevalence of the topic in the film industry. Movies are a very popular form of entertainment that often provide a basis for understanding history. The way history is portrayed in film effects the general public's understanding of the event even when the films are partially or entirely fictionalized. The messages or information presented can get complex and go beyond that of the event itself. The ideas portrayed through film tend to have a connection to the time period that they were created in and issues that are current to society at the time may be addressed in various ways so the historical event becomes a platform for telling stories with a focus on different issues relevant to the current time period. While American Civil War films can contain a wide variety of issues some of the most prevalent are the topics of gender and race. These topics were at the forefront of American society for much of the 20th century and were also very important issues during the Civil War as well. Many Civil War film in the 20th century addresses these issues in a variety of ways. The way these issues are presented through portrayals of the Civil War in film can indicate what American's were thinking about and facing at different points in time, as well as how the larger societal view on these issues shifted and changed throughout time.

There are aspects that complicate historical films as well, especially with regards to war films, a more specific genre within historical film. When a war is the subject or platform for a historical movie, a memory of the event is created that is then culturally renegotiated by each future generation. Different films from different decades will portray things in a way that reflect the culture of the generation while also being focused on something that happened in the past. The genre of war movies also builds on itself throughout time, and new films are affected by the renegotiating of the facts and the event as well as the previous movies that already exist within the genre.⁴ Older films created a starting point for working within a certain genre but new ideas, techniques, and forms of expression are added to push the genre further in ways that have not been seen before. This means that outside of the larger cultural issues tackled in historical movies, war movies are evolving on their own as a genre and that will change the way events are portrayed at different periods of time as well. This is important because throughout the 20th century over 700 films were created specifically about the Civil War.⁵

The length of standard films also often provides a challenge to filmmakers because stories must be compacted to fit into a short amount of time, but they must still tell a logical and complete story.⁶ This leads to filmmakers emphasizing a few particular factors of the event while leaving out many others. This can be important because these movies often play a role in shaping the memory of the event in minds of Americans. Filmmakers are also faced with the challenge of creating an exciting and engaging story that will entertain and hold the attention of the audience while still telling a story that is historically accurate enough to be considered a historic film.

⁴ John Trafton, *The American Civil War and the Hollywood War Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 14.

⁵ Peter C. Rollins, *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 58.

⁶ Robert Toplin, *History by Hollywood*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 3-4.

Writers and directors must speculate to complete their narratives and often manipulate facts to make their narrative more interesting.⁷ Sometimes these challenges can create a “historic” movie that is more fiction than it is true events, and when movies are shaping the memories of these events that can cause problems for historical truth and understanding.

Another complicating factor for war movies that can be seen as a changing trend through the genre is the use of themes. Themes are often related to the moral of the story, or the main topic the filmmaker is approaching by using the Civil War as a platform to create a message about society. Courage and reconciliation were common themes within Civil War movies but a more controversial theme that has received a lot of attention is the “Lost Cause” narrative.⁸ The “Lost Cause” is essentially the story of the Civil War from the southern point of view. These movies show the slave-holding Confederate south in a positive light and also portray reconstruction as a cruel and violent process inflicted on white southerners.⁹ Films that make use of this theme have a southern bias to them and are used to shape the narrative of the American south. The war is often portrayed as a hopeless effort and there is emphasis placed on the sacrifices the South made during the war in an attempt to maintain their way of life and the institution of slavery.¹⁰ The various themes and the other complicating factors of historical films often have an influence on the portrayals of race and gender while they also reflect the time period in which they were made.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peter C. Rollins, *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 58.

⁹ Gary W. Gallagher, “Hollywood Has it Both Ways: The Rise, Fall, and Reappearance of the Lost Cause in American Film,” In *Wars Within a War: Controversy and Conflict over the American Civil War*, ed. Joan Waugh, and Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 157-158.

¹⁰ Ibid., 158.

I. Women and Gender in the Civil War and Film

Historians often framed the Civil War as a “white man’s fight” and excluded women and their role from the general history¹¹. It was not until more recently that the history of the home front, along with the history of the battlefield, included women and their previously understated role and contributions. The historical portrayal of women in the Civil War often emphasized the role of women as nurses or as grieving widows on the home front and left out many of the other important changes that occurred to societal structure especially with regards to gender roles.¹² There was history focusing specifically on northern women and their role in politics and southern women and their role in the “lost cause narrative” but beyond that much of the involvement of women in the war was ignored or left out.¹³

These specific roles for women come through in many of the Civil War films from the 20th century. The most common portrayal of women is as wife, fiancée, or girlfriend of a civil war soldier. This theme is present in *Barbara Frietchie* from 1924, *The General* from 1926, and *A Time for Killing* from 1967. Many times the women of these films were tragically torn between their home and the men they loved fighting on the opposite side. Another common portrayal of women is as grieving family members who attempt to do what they can to support their men and the war effort from home. Occasionally the role of a woman as a nurse in the Civil War is focused on in film as well which can be seen in *Birth of a Nation* from 1915 and *Gone with the Wind* from 1939.

¹¹ Susan-Mary Grant, “To Bind Up The Nation’s Wounds: Women and the American Civil War,” In *The Practice of U.S. Women’s History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*, ed. Jay S. Kleinberg, Eileen Boris, and Vicki L. Ruiz (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 108.

¹² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Women were also used in civil war films to drive the narrative in some way. Girlfriends and wives of soldiers would often become the target of the soldier's enemies and be kidnapped, forcing their men to save them. This is a common trend in later civil war films that also fall under the western genre such as *The General*, *A Time for Killing*, and *the Horse Soldiers*. This concept is not historically accurate to the Civil War, but it appears to be a device used by writers to add emotional stake into the narratives that would be boring otherwise, and is an even larger recurring trend for Western movies in general. The use of women as prisoners or captives is often a subplot added to a larger (and often more historically accurate) narrative about the Civil War.

Another pattern that emerges in 20th century civil war film is the role of women in the "lost cause" narrative. This southern-biased myth is perpetuated constantly throughout the 20th century and has a heavy emphasis on strong, independent white women in the south and their participation in the war. The woman's role in this theme stems from observations and beliefs held during the war. Union soldiers frequently discussed their encounters with southern women who were as patriotic and ferocious as the southern men they were fighting, and the image of the strong southern woman was widely accepted in the north.¹⁴ Northern women were often criticized for not being as active in the war effort as southern women, even though their situations were quite different.¹⁵ The efforts of these southern women became the focus of many filmmakers in the 20th century, allowing them to tell the story of a patriotic heroine, but this also solidified and perpetuated the "lost cause" myth in the minds of the American public. Some films

¹⁴ Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

that use a “lost cause” narrative in their portrayals of gender are *Barbara Frietchie*, *Renegade Girl*, *The Horse Soldiers*, *Rio Lobo*, and *Gone with the Wind*.

The women’s suffrage movement and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 was met with much opposition, especially in the south. Southern Conservatives fought these advancements for women and wanted to hold on to the traditional way of life and the values that they fought to defend in the Civil War, and they resisted the change as long as possible until the Nineteenth Amendment forced them to join the rest of the country in giving women the right to vote.¹⁶ The 1920s also saw an increasing number of women in the workforce but they were still extremely restricted in the type of employment available and growth of a female labor force did not change public opinions about working women or their position in society.¹⁷ Women were not viewed or treated as equals just because there were more of them present and succeeding in the labor force. The historiography about women in the 1920s also focused on things that perpetuated the idea of the flapper, a woman more concerned with clothing than with politics, which ignored the advancements made with the Nineteenth Amendment and solidified the idea of a woman’s place being in the home.¹⁸ This reverted the memory and portrayal of women in the 1920s to pre-suffrage ideas about women and their roles in society.

Much like the war itself, these ideas found their way into popular culture like the films of the decade. *The General*, is a 1926 film directed by Clyde Bruckman that reinforces these ideas

¹⁶ Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, “Divided Legacy: The Civil War, Tradition, and “the Woman Question,” 1870-1920,” In *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, ed. Edward D. C. Campbell and Kym S. Rice (Richmond: The Museum of the Confederacy; Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 167.

¹⁷ Estelle B. Freedman, “The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s,” *The Journal of American History* 61, no. 2 (1974), 380.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 379.

about women in the 1920s. The film is set in the south and is focused on a train engineer named Johnnie Gray that desperately wants to serve in the confederate army and fight for the south. His train is stolen by a unit of Union spies with his girlfriend, Annabelle Lee, onboard and he then must save her from the Union soldiers.¹⁹ The movie is a fictional comedy that utilizes physical humor, but it emphasizes the themes of honor and the importance of serving your country. Annabelle Lee is also kidnapped and taken prisoner by the Union unit which is another recurring pattern that can be found in Civil War movies. This kidnapping is also just one of the sexist elements of this movie that contributes to the films overall negative portrayal of women.

The Union spies tie and gag Annabelle Lee and take her to what appears to be the Union headquarters for the area, where a meeting of Generals takes place. Johnnie Gray successfully rescues her, but not without unnecessarily dropping her out of a window for comedic purposes. The Physical humor found in this film is not entirely directed at the female, but the woman is still subject to an alarming amount of physical violence that almost all seems to be caused by her boyfriend, Johnnie Gray. Not long after she is dropped on to the ground she finds herself stuck in a bear trap that her boyfriend struggles to help her out of. After this, Johnnie Gray must sneak her by a Union camp, so he decides to stuff her into a sack and carry her over his shoulder. He does not accomplish this with much care or grace and proceeds to throw her into a cargo car of a train where large boxes and supplies are thrown on top of her. This might be an effective plan to get by the Union soldiers, but it is a cruel and violent thing to subject his girlfriend to.

Later in the movie Johnnie Gray douses Annabelle Lee in a massive amount of high pressure water from a water station along the train tracks, almost knocking her off of the train.

¹⁹ *The General*. Directed by Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton. United States: Buster Keaton Productions, 1927.

This is also a scene in the movie that was meant to be funny, but it really just subjects the woman to more abuse and violence at the hands of her boyfriend, even if it is accidental. There is another scene following this where Annabelle Lee is at the controls of the train and while she gets the train moving, she cannot manage to pull the brake hard enough to stop it. This is just a minor detail, and again while it might be there for comedic purposes, it does not make positive comments about women or their equality to do what men can. The film was created with the purpose to entertain, but it portrayed women or the treatment of women in negative ways, reinforcing the pre-suffrage ideas and values still held in 1920s America.

The 1930s was a complicated and challenging decade for women and the feminist movement in America because of the nationwide conditions created by the Great Depression. Even after gaining the right to vote through the women's suffrage movement, workplace equality was a major issue for women and was at the forefront of the feminist movement for much of the 20th century. During the Great Depression newer feminist ideas about women in the workplace were overshadowed by the traditional standards held in the country. The feminist historian Lois Scharf argues that feminism completely disappeared in the 1930s because public support for working married women dwindled in an economy where so many people, both men and women, were out of work.²⁰ A 1936 Gallup Poll found that 82% of Americans thought women should not be working if their husbands had jobs, including 75% of all American women.²¹

Public opinion was in line with government efforts to improve the economic situation for Americans which had a negative effect on women's rights. In 1932 the government passed the

²⁰ Kristin Celello, "A New Century of Struggle: Feminism and Antifeminism in the United States, 1920-Present," In *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*, ed. Jay S. Kleinberg, Eileen Boris, and Vicki L. Ruiz (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 332.

²¹ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 103.

Federal Economy Act which stated only one spouse could work in government service at a time but most employers interpreted the Act as giving preference to men. This law resulted in consequences such as 75% of American school districts voluntarily banning the employment of married women as teachers whether their husbands were employed or not.²² While the Great Depression created a situation in America where basic survival needs diminished concerns about women's rights and equality, the 1930s were not necessarily a decade without progress for women.

The Great Depression created such extreme unemployment that families all across America were struggling to survive and many women took on the responsibility of providing for their families in any way they could. Many women fell back on housekeeping skills to make do with less and relied on things like canning and baking to save money, while other women set up small businesses like grocery stores, bakeries, restaurants, or dress-making shops to make extra money.²³ Even though it was driven by survival, women were able to work outside of the traditional gender roles during the Great Depression much like during times of war, and it became more common for women to help in providing for their family despite the workplace restrictions placed on women like the Federal Economy Act.

The 1930s also saw progress for women in a few very specific aspects of American life. Women were appointed to prominent positions in Franklin Roosevelt's administration which was a huge breakthrough for women since they were fighting for the right to vote just over ten years earlier. Roosevelt's appointment of women like Frances Perkins to

²² John Olszowka, Marnie M. Sullivan, Brian R. Sheridan, Dennis Hickey, and John Robert Greene, "Gender," In *America in the Thirties* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 171.

²³ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 107.

positions like secretary of labor made government positions seem more accessible to women, which sent messages of equality even while the country was struggling with workplace gender issues exacerbated by the Great Depression.²⁴ First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was also a very important part of the Roosevelt administration and provided a source of inspiration for women across America. She was perceived as more accessible than previous first ladies, and ordinary American women looked to her as a role model often admiring her public achievements.²⁵

Hollywood and the film industry also became more accessible for certain women during the 1930s.²⁶ Even though the industry was only accessible to attractive white women it was still significant for more women to begin appearing in film and in larger roles within the films. A new group of female actresses appearing in films was an indicator of advancement towards equality in the workplace and society despite the fact that the roles they were cast in still often reinforced gender stereotypes.²⁷ Womens' increasing prominence in the film industry also presented American women with more inspiring images of powerful females in American culture that had not been as common before the 1930s.

The epic 1939 film *Gone with the Wind* reflects the status of women and feminism in the 1930s as well as during the Civil War. The film is set in the south around Atlanta during and after the Civil War and follows the tragic experiences of Scarlett O'Hara, the daughter of an Irish plantation owner.²⁸ Scarlett is a complicated person with many character flaws, but ultimately she portrays a strong, independent woman that is willing and able to do anything necessary for

²⁴ John Olszowka, Marnie M. Sullivan, Brian R. Sheridan, Dennis Hickey, and John Robert Greene, "Gender," In *America in the Thirties* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 178.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁶ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Gone with the Wind*. Directed by Victor Fleming. United States: Selznick International Pictures, 1939.

survival. Throughout the film Scarlett is unbelievably selfish, vain, and immature. She is often controlled by her emotions and is easily panicked to the point of not using rational thought. While these personality traits do reinforce negative stereotypes about women, Scarlett's strength and perseverance through extreme tragedy show that women can be strong and independent in a society where they were commonly considered weaker and lesser than men. The film strongly emphasizes the "lost cause" narrative and is sympathetic to the south and their situation during the war and reconstruction. Scarlett's character is an example of the strong southern woman stereotype even though she often accomplishes her goals and improves her situation through the extensive manipulation of others.

At one point in the film after the war has ended the northern "Carpetbaggers" were collecting taxes from Southerners to help pay for the cost of reconstruction even though the majority of the south was already financially devastated by the war. Scarlett and her father do not have the \$300 to pay the taxes on their plantation called Tara and Scarlett's father dies shortly afterwards, forcing Scarlett to find a way to come up with the money herself. She embarks on a quest of manipulation to acquire the money, first going to Rhett Butler, a rich friend who was romantically interested in Scarlett throughout the film. At this point in time Rhett Butler has been imprisoned on "trumped up" charges by the Union army and Scarlett lies to him, telling him she has been doing well since they spoke last when she has really been struggling to survive and that she was miserable and concerned about him knowing he was in trouble. He calls her out on her lie but also cannot give her the money either way because of his imprisonment.

Scarlett then goes to a suitor of her sister Suellen and convinces him that her sister has found someone else to marry. She then convinces the man to marry her instead so she can get his help investing in a lumber mill she wants to take over to make the money necessary to save and

rebuild Tara. Her plan ultimately succeeds and they get married and Scarlett is able to take over the lumber mill and save Tara. Even though Scarlett was dishonest and manipulative in the process, she successfully accomplished her goal and persevered through her problem independently. While the means of accomplishing the goal were not ideal, Scarlett still portrayed a strong woman doing what was necessary for survival, which would be relatable for many women of the 1930s working to provide for themselves and their families during the Great Depression.

Another scene in the movie that displays Scarlett's bravery, strength, and independence involves her taking action to defend herself, her family, and Tara. Shortly after the war ends a lone union soldier returns to Tara looking for things to steal. The man enters the house and starts to search for valuables while Scarlett waits on the stairs with a revolver hidden at her side. The soldier sees her and approaches her and Scarlett waits until he is only a few steps away on the stairs before raising the gun and shooting him in the face. Scarlett's father is still alive at this point but instead of looking for him to help Scarlett bravely handles the situation independently. Scarlett's self-reliance is an important aspect of her character, and her ability to defend and protect herself without a man reflects the action many women had to take during the Great Depression to survive which shows the slight progress towards equality that did occur through the 1930s. Scarlett may not have been an ideal role model for women of the 1930s, but she still portrayed a new, independent, and strong image of a woman in American popular culture that would both inspire women and reflect their own experiences of the Great Depression while working towards breaking down traditional gender stereotypes and standards.

The 1940s was another time period in American history that saw significant fluctuations in public opinion on women's rights and gender roles. Much like the Civil War, World War II

also brought a significant number of women into the American work force to new jobs, but this only lasted through the war.²⁹ As soon as the war ended the government switched their messages about women in the workforce and encouraged women to return to their roles in the home, allowing the men to take their jobs back upon returning from war. The government even gave veterans the right to take jobs from wartime workers and ended a federally funded daycare service designed to help women hold jobs in the labor force. An antifeminist attitude came with the change of message about women in the workforce, and a period without much public support for women's rights followed.³⁰ This continued the old idea that women belong in the home rather than the work force, and while there were still more women employed than before the war, this time period saw very little achieved or even mentioned in terms of equality for women.

The 1946 film *Renegade Girl* is an indicator of society's attitudes and beliefs about women in post-war America. The film follows a woman named Jean Shelby who is a known confederate guerilla and outlaw with connections to William Quantrill. She is an independent and strong southern woman, which partially follows the "lost cause" narrative, but she is also actively involved in combat during the war which is a strange role for a woman to be portrayed in for civil war film. Jean Shelby ends up joining a group of guerillas who she knew through William Quantrill and she is attempting to hunt down a Cherokee Chief, known as "Big Chief White Cloud," who has a personal goal to eliminate the Shelby family entirely.³¹ Jean is the last remaining Shelby, and she joins the group of outlaws because she believes she must kill White Cloud before he kills her.

²⁹ Ronald Allen Goldberg and John Robert Greene, "Postwar America: Prosperity and Problems," In *America in the Forties* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 105.

³⁰ Ibid., 106.

³¹ *Renegade Girl*. Directed by William Berke. United States: Affiliated Productions, 1946.

The group of outlaws that she joins is comprised of six men, all of whom have intentions of marrying Jean Shelby. Each of the men have asked Jean to marry them in the previous year and Jean has told them all no. She decides that the man that puts the most effort into helping her kill White Cloud will get to marry her, and she offers herself as a prize to the outlaws she does not like in order to accomplish her ultimate goal. Despite Jean's rejections, many of the men still try relentlessly to get with Jean shortly after she joins them. The leader of the group, Jerry, showers Jean in compliments and asks repeatedly for her to marry him, and even aggressively attempts to force her to marry him, even though she constantly rejects him with things like "I meant every word I said, I don't belong to you..."

Another one of the outlaws named Joe attempts to convince Jean to marry him at night while the others are asleep, and Jean responds by knocking him out with the handle of her revolver. Later in the film tensions are growing and all of the men are on edge because they all want to marry Jean and they are approaching her goal of finding White Cloud. One of the other men gives her a dress, and asks her to wear it for him, because he claims to think she belongs with someone better than the outlaws. He tells her "I kept thinking of you in it, you belong in it Jean. Will you put it on and wear it just so I can see you once in it?" The film is filled with strange and sexist moments that revolve around Jean being objectified as a prize for the men even though it is not what she really wants to do.

The film's portrayal of women through the main character of Jean Shelby is not entirely negative, but it definitely reinforces the ideas about women in 1940s America that emerged at the end of the Second World War. While Jean has characteristics of a southern woman fitting the "lost cause" narrative, she is also certainly not seen as anything of an equal to the men even though she is an outlaw just like they are. They talk about how she does not belong with them

and how she belongs “in a nice house, wearin’ nice clothes, with a nice husband bringing up nice children” instead. This portrays the common beliefs of the post-war time period, where women were expected to be back in the home with the children, rather than in the workforce with the men. The plot is also driven by an objectification of Jean, with her as the prize for the man that does the most in their efforts to kill White Cloud, rather than one of their equals.

After the decade following World War II, women were finally able to bring the issues of womens rights and equality back into society. The antifeminism attitudes in America began to shift as women made their rights a topic of debate again. The Second-Wave of Feminism movement began in the early 1960s and continued throughout the 1980s.³² The 1960s brought legal breakthroughs to the feminist movement which also helped it gain momentum and attention. The government policies designed to decrease the women labor force after World War II were only partially and temporarily effective and the numbers of women in the workforce increased throughout the 50s and the 60s.³³ Women also made progress legally in 1963 when the Equal Pay Act was passed, requiring employers to establish equal pay scales for men and women. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also helped the women’s movement by barring sex-based discrimination in employment through Title VII.³⁴ These government revisions to law were large breakthroughs for the women’s movement that helped move them on their way to equality to men in American society. These breakthroughs also drew attention to the womens movement and helped it grow and expand as time went on.

³² Kristin A. Goss, “The Second Wave Surges- And Then?,” In *The Paradox of Gender Equality: How American Women’s Groups Gained and Lost Their Public Voice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 48.

³³ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

Films from this time period also start to reflect the progress being made within the women's movement. There are still negative or offensive portrayals of women in films from this time period, but overall the films start to show women more respect and treat them more like equals to men than previous times. This is clear in the film *The Horse Soldiers* from 1959. *The Horse Soldiers* is a western movie about a Union Cavalry mission into Confederate territory. The Union Cavalry unit comes across a southern woman named Hannah Hunter who allows them to stay on her property, but she overhears their plans and must be taken with them as a prisoner so she cannot tell the confederate forces what they are planning.³⁵ This woman is another strong, independent southern woman fitting the "lost cause" theme found in civil war film, but it is taken even further in this film. The woman appears to own and run her own plantation, living alone with an enslaved house servant. Hannah Hunter even mentions that she and her slaves must be in the fields by 5 in the morning, implying that she has field work of her own to do. This is a strange portrayal of a woman during the Civil War. She might be a soldier's widow, which would also fit the "lost cause" narrative, but this detail is not mentioned. She is simply an independent plantation-owning woman for the purposes of the film. Even when she is taken prisoner by the Union Cavalry she is consistently treated with respect, and by the end of the film she is more of an equal to the men riding with the Cavalry rather than a prisoner.

Similar ideas about women were portrayed in the 1965 film *Major Dundee*. The movie is about a union major that leads an unofficial mission into Mexico to go after a group of violent Apaches that have been raiding military bases in Texas. The Major and his men enter a small Mexican village while chasing the Apaches with the intentions of commandeering food and horses, but they encounter a mysterious French woman living among the villagers who is a

³⁵ *The Horse Soldiers*. Directed by John Ford. United States: The Mirisch Company, 1959.

widow of a doctor that was working there. The woman confronts the Major and says “They have no food, no guns, and no women. That is what you want?”³⁶ The woman is living alone in Mexico doing what she can to help the village, and she stands up for them to the Union Cavalry unit passing through. She is portrayed as independent and strong, and also as brave enough to defend the village and the people from an entire military unit passing through. She is ultimately successful and she convinces the Union soldiers to not only leave the village’s supplies alone but she also manages to convince the soldiers to share their own supplies with the village. She manages to facilitate friendly interactions between the two groups, which is a massive feat for a single woman considering one group was a Union Cavalry unit in need of supplies.

II. Race in the Civil War and film

The situation created by the Civil War and the Reconstruction period is clear in Hollywood’s portrayals of the Civil War in early film. D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* is one of the Hollywood’s most infamous historic movies for its great success and extreme racism. *Birth of a Nation* was a groundbreaking movie with a level of technological sophistication other movies had not yet achieved and it was an epic drama that was over 3 hours long, while most other movies at the time were rather unsophisticated short films. The movie was critical in the development of the movie industry and had great box-office success when upon its release.³⁷ The racism in *Birth of a Nation* also goes well beyond the use of white actors in blackface makeup and focuses on offensive racial stereotypes and the glorification of the Ku Klux Klan among other things that show D.W. Griffith’s personal southern bias as a writer and director. The film contains a strong “lost cause” narrative and is full of offensive and inaccurate portrayals of

³⁶ *Major Dundee*. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. United States: Jerry Bresler Productions, 1965.

³⁷ Rory McVeigh, “The Rebirth of Klan Nation, 1915-1924,” In *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 20.

slaves and African Americans that reflected the white culture of the south, particularly that of reconstruction.

The scenes that depict black culture are particularly inaccurate and offensive throughout the film. There are multiple scenes that take place at slave quarters, which is usually the location of joyful, energetic, and care-free gatherings with a lot of dancing and chaos.³⁸ The portrayals that glorify the lives of slaves and their conditions are historically inaccurate and work to obscure the truth. There was no effort made to show the actual situation of slaves and it avoided any poor treatment or conditions, making the institution of slavery seem more moral and ethical than it ever could be. This also portrayed white southerners in a more positive way avoiding any blame that could be possibly placed on them for the situation slavery created. *Birth of a Nation* also glorified field work for slaves, avoiding any negativity surrounding the idea of forced labor or the conditions that the slaves were forced to work in, as well as many other strange and inaccurate interpretations that worked to show the south as the victim and African Americans as a problem.

The second half of *Birth of a Nation* focuses on the Reconstruction period and portrays an extremely skewed version of reconstruction. One of the main characters in the movie is the fictional founder of the Ku Klux Klan, Ben Cameron. There is a scene in the film where a free black man approaches Ben Cameron's young sister while she is fetching water. This man, named Gus, tells her he intends to marry now that he is a free man, and clearly has bad intentions for the little girl. He tries to grab her and chases her to the edge of a cliff, where she jumps to her death just before Ben Cameron can arrive to save her. Cameron and the Klan are portrayed as the

³⁸ *The Birth of a Nation*. Directed by D. W. Griffith. United States: David W. Griffith Corporation, 1915.

defenders of white women's purity while the character of Gus portrays negative Reconstruction era fears and stereotypes about free black men. Cameron and the KKK hold a trial for Gus, find him guilty, and kill him, portraying a victory for the south and the KKK as victims of the terror caused by free blacks during Reconstruction.

Birth of a Nation was so popular and successful in the retelling of the Civil War and Reconstruction story it was actually connected to a 1915 revival of the Ku Klux Klan. The original Ku Klux Klan was the driving force of white southern resistance to African American equality in the south but it was officially disbanded in 1869.³⁹ Colonel William Joseph Simmons reformed the Klan in 1915 to be the ultimate fraternal lodge. The reformation of the Klan was inspired by the rape and murder of a young girl in Georgia as well as the release of *Birth of a Nation* in 1915. The film brought the Ku Klux Klan back into popular culture enough for a revival, and advertisements for the organization were even strategically placed next to promotions for the movie in Atlanta newspapers.⁴⁰ The reformed Klan was also slow to start in 1915, but was more successful by 1920 with increased recruitment efforts. The new Klan's leader also argued that he was not intending to promote religious or racial intolerance, but that did not prevent the Klan from being a symbol of 1920's white supremacy in the south.⁴¹

Other early Hollywood Civil War movies reflect similar values through their portrayals of the Civil War and reconstruction, just on a much smaller scale. *Birth of a Nation* was on its own in terms of the extremity of the blatant racism, but other films still reinforced negative stereotypes and reflected the state of racial issues and relations in the early 20th century. D.W.

³⁹ Charles Reagan Wilson, "Reconstruction," In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 10: Law and Politics*, ed. James W. Ely, and Bradley G. Bond (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 270.

⁴⁰ Rory McVeigh, "The Rebirth of Klan Nation, 1915-1924," In *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

Griffith's other films *The House with Closed Shutters* and *The Battle*, also use white actors in blackface makeup rather than black actors and the only colored roles in both films are for servants or slaves in the background.⁴² Another D.W. Griffith film, *In the Border States*, does not have any black characters at all, and the servant in the house is white, avoiding race entirely.⁴³ These films promote racism through the use of blackface and also reinforce the role of African Americans as servants or slaves and nothing else, which reflects the situation in the south at this time.

Blackface was not exclusive to D.W. Griffith movies and it was used widely in Hollywood until the 1930s when it started to become unacceptable.⁴⁴ The use and popularity of blackface in early Hollywood was a continuation of the racial segregation established in the south during the reconstruction period, and it reassured white southerners that the races were not mixing.⁴⁵ The 1924 film, *Barbara Frietchie*, continues early Hollywood's tradition of blackface makeup and racial stereotypes.⁴⁶ The issue of race is completely ignored throughout the movie, and the only black character is again just a servant, reinforcing the ideas of white supremacy just like other movies from the early 20th century.

By the 1930s African Americans had made some progress towards breaking down many of the disenfranchisement efforts of white southerners that had been established into southern society and culture during the reconstruction period after the war. The NAACP, an African American civil rights organization that was formed in 1908, was working to establish anti-

⁴² *The House With Closed Shutters*. Directed by D. W. Griffith. United States: Biograph Company, 1910. *The Battle*. Directed by D. W. Griffith. United States: Biograph Company, 1911.

⁴³ *In The Border States*. Directed by D.W. Griffith. United States: Biograph Company, 1910.

⁴⁴ Michael Rogin, "'Democracy and Burnt Cork': The End of Blackface, the Beginning of Civil Rights," *Representations*, no. 46, (1994), 4.

⁴⁵ Linda Williams, "Surprised by Blackface: D. W. Griffith and One Exciting Night," In *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Stephen Johnson (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 134.

⁴⁶ *Barbara Frietchie*. Directed by Lambert Hillyer. United States: Regal Pictures, 1924. DVD.

lynching laws and to eliminate poll taxes and literacy tests in the south which were some of the issues interfering with African American rights.⁴⁷ By the 1930s the work of the NAACP along with other factors like the Great Migration had helped to progress African Americans toward equal rights, but they still lived as second class citizens for decades to come.⁴⁸ Throughout the 1930s African American actors and actresses were also starting to establish a place for themselves in film by playing roles that emphasized racial stereotypes.⁴⁹ Black actors and actresses appearing in film at all showed progress because it was an important shift away from the use of blackface in American cinema but the actors and actresses were often only able to play roles that emphasized and reinforced the same old stereotypes still in existence from the Civil War era.

The Great Migration also had an influence in the changing racial situation in the 1920s and 30s. The Great Migration saw over 1.6 million African Americans leave the south and move north to settle in industrial centers with the hope of better employment and a better life where they could enjoy full citizenship without the restricting disenfranchisement laws in the south.⁵⁰ The growing wartime industries during World War I presented African Americans with an opportunity at better employment but there were still racial problems in the north as well, like the 1919 race riots that were a result of the massive immigration of African Americans. Despite the issues it caused, the Great Migration still helped to advance African Americans towards equal rights because African American arts and intellectual movements that came with the shift north started to break down some of the racial stereotypes of the reconstruction and civil war period,

⁴⁷ John Olszowka, Marnie M. Sullivan, Brian R. Sheridan, Dennis Hickey, and John Robert Greene, "African Americans," In *America in the Thirties* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

which is one of the things that allowed African Americans to start establishing a role for themselves in popular culture, like Hollywood films.⁵¹

The Civil War films of the 1930s reflect the changes occurring and the overall situation of African Americans in society. There was clear progress made from the earlier Civil War films that exclusively used blackface makeup or films like *Birth of a Nation* that contained offensive and inaccurate portrayals of African Americans, slaves, and their lives and situation, but there was also still much more progress to be made before African Americans were accurately or appropriately represented on the screen. The 1936 Civil War film *Hearts in Bondage* is an example of this because there is more respect shown for African Americans but they are still confined to roles that reinforce stereotypes and there is not much focus on the racial aspect or influence in the war.⁵² The film did not use blackface makeup and instead used actual African American actors but the roles of the African Americans were strictly that of servants or slaves, and nothing else. The African American servants were also mostly in the background of the film usually as extras rather than characters with an important role in the storyline or film.

The film, *The Arizona Kid*, from 1939 also reflects similar limited progress for African Americans in American society. Again, race is not addressed as the important aspect of the Civil War that it should be, but there is one scene in particular with a portrayal of slaves that shows much more accuracy, truth, and respect to African Americans than seen previously. *The Arizona Kid* is an interesting movie because it is a combination of an early western and a musical about a Confederate officer, Roy Rodgers, who must hunt down the confederate guerilla named McBride. The movie features multiple scenes with Roy Rodgers singing songs, and one of them

⁵¹ Ibid., 83.

⁵² *Hearts in Bondage*. Directed by Lew Ayres. United States: Republic Pictures, 1936.

takes place at a slave quarters.⁵³ The slave quarters are depicted much differently here than they were in *Birth of a Nation* and there is no blackface used. The slaves at the cabin are not joyously dancing and there is not a sense of chaos, they are represented much more accurately and respectfully, sitting around a fire. The slaves are portrayed as much more civilized which avoided some of the common stereotypes used to portray slaves and their situations, but just like many of the other films the only African American roles were that of servants and slaves.

Gone with the Wind is another 1939 Civil War film that portrays the state of African American civil rights and equality from the 1930s. *Gone with the Wind* does not avoid the issue of race by pushing it to the background or by ignoring it completely like many other Civil War films of the 1930s and earlier decades, instead it addresses race in a way that remains sympathetic to the south but also reflects the progress made toward African American civil rights since the time of the Civil War. The film is adapted from an equally famous 1936 novel of the same name written by Margaret Mitchell. Mitchell grew up in the south and drew inspiration for her epic civil war story from D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and the 1905 novel *The Clansman* that *Birth of a Nation* was adapted from, which clearly comes through in certain aspects of the film.⁵⁴ The film follows a similar "lost cause narrative" to *Birth of a Nation* and works to portray the south as the victims of both the war and reconstruction with an emphasis on the northern carpetbaggers that worked to further destroy the south but it does so in a way that is less blatantly racist and more respectful to African Americans overall.

⁵³*The Arizona Kid*. Directed by Joseph Kane. United States: Republic Pictures, 1939.

⁵⁴ David Welky, "Gone With the Wind, but Not Forgotten," In *Everything Was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), 194.

Progress in African American civil rights is shown through one of the film's most famous characters, Scarlett O'Hara's slave named Mammy.⁵⁵ The character of Mammy has a role that is much more important to the film and storyline than what was seen in earlier Civil War films and her character has a much more developed personality than the slaves and servants of earlier films as well. Mammy is an assertive but caring and protective mother figure for Scarlett O'Hara throughout the film. Mammy is a loved part of the family that holds a lot of authority around the house. She also is portrayed as a sassy and strong woman who likes to use the term "white trash" to refer to white people she does not like or respect. In earlier Civil War films the African American actors and actresses were rarely given more than a few lines and they were often not given fully developed personalities, and even when they were they usually emphasized negative traits rather than humanizing or more trivial ones. One of the main characters of the film Rhett Butler even makes a comment about Mammy after he marries Scarlett saying "Mammy is a smart old soul and one of the few people I know whose respect I would like to have," and he proceeds to give Mammy a gift. This scene emphasizes the fact that Mammy is a respected part of the family even to Rhett Butler who is a rich southern white man with racist tendencies. Scenes showing this much respect between white southerners and African American slaves was less common prior to this film and the 1930s and it helps to illustrate the progress made from the time of the Civil War but even from the time of *Birth of a Nation* in 1914.

The actress that played the role of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* is also an example of the few African American actors and actresses that were finally able to create a place for themselves in Hollywood during the 1930s. Hattie McDaniel was born in Wichita, Kansas in

⁵⁵ *Gone With the Wind*. Directed by Victor Fleming. United States: Selznick International Pictures, 1939. DVD.

1895 to former slaves and was the youngest of 13 children.⁵⁶ Like many other people in the United States, McDaniel had trouble finding work during the Great Depression so she moved to Los Angeles and began appearing in films by 1932. She started with background roles and gradually worked her way into more prominent roles but she was always cast as a slave and maid or servant even though she was known to bring more boldness and personality to the role than Hollywood had previously seen.⁵⁷ By the end of the 1930s she had appeared in almost 60 films and she became the first African American to win an Academy Award for her work in *Gone with the Wind* as best supporting actress.⁵⁸ Things like this help to show progress for African American civil rights and the level of equality achieved by the 1930s. While the old racial stereotypes were still mostly in place and shown through McDaniel's role being limited to that of a maid or servant, people like McDaniel were also successfully breaking away from some of the old ideas that had been in place for so long in the 1930s.

While *Gone with the Wind* did avoid some of the more offensive racist ideas about African Americans with characters like Mammy there were other characters in the film that portrayed racist ideas and old stereotypes. One of Scarlett's other slaves named Prissy reinforces racist stereotypes through her personality traits unlike Mammy or the other slaves. While Atlanta is under siege and about to be evacuated in the film Scarlett is left on her own to help her neighbor and friend⁵⁹ Melanie give birth because the doctor is busy taking care of an

⁵⁶ John Olszowka, Marnie M. Sullivan, Brian R. Sheridan, Dennis Hickey, and John Robert Greene, "African Americans," In *America in the Thirties* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 85.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁹ The relationship between Melanie and Scarlett is actually much more complicated than this, but it is not relevant. Melanie is the wife of Ashley Wilkes, who Scarlett is in love with for the entirety of the film even when she is married to other men. Scarlett does not want to take care of Melanie but does so because Ashley asked her to in his absence fighting for the Confederacy. They do develop a sister-like friendship but Scarlett is consistently uncomfortable about Melanie and Ashley's marriage.

overwhelming number of wounded soldiers. Scarlett's slave Prissy initially claims that she can help them but when Melanie goes into labor she admits that she had lied and she actually knows nothing about how to help. This puts Scarlett into a panic but she manages to gain control of the situation and successfully delivers Melanie's baby. Prissy even admits that she does not know why she told such a lie but she tells another lie just a few hours later when she is telling Rhett Butler about the birth of Melanie's baby claiming that she did most of the work and Scarlett mostly just helped her with the process. Prissy's tendency to lie unnecessarily is one of the traits that works to make her seem unintelligent. She explains that she is not lying intentionally and she does not know why she lies which makes it seem like it's driven not by immorality but rather by unintelligence. The portrayal of racist ideas through characters like Prissy holds on to the "lost cause narrative" and the racism still prevalent in American popular culture in the 1930s despite the progress made away from the more blatant racism of films like *Birth of a Nation*.

The negativity towards African American's in *Gone with the Wind* is countered by other scenes that show progress for African American equality in different ways. Shortly after Scarlett has been told she must pay \$300 in taxes to keep her plantation, Tara, Scarlett's father dies. Scarlett is desperately trying to find the money to pay the taxes but she decides to give her father's watch to one of the slaves named Pork. Pork suggests that she sell the watch to get money for the taxes but Scarlett insists that he keep it instead. Even though Scarlett was willing to do just about anything to raise the money to keep Tara it was more important to her for Pork to have her father's watch. This shows how much Scarlett loves her slave and servant Pork and it shows how Pork is a close member of the family just like Mammy. Scenes like this also humanize African Americans compared to scenes in earlier films that portray African Americans as uncivilized barbarians.

Later in the film there is also a scene where Scarlett is ambushed by two criminals while travelling alone. She fights back and screams for help and is rescued by a former field hand from Tara who knows Scarlett well. Even though Scarlett knows the man who saved her from the criminals this scene is a big departure from what was seen in earlier films like *Birth of a Nation*. The fact that the scene features a black man saving a white woman from white men shows how *Gone with the Wind* had progressed away from some of the more racist portrayals of African Americans in earlier films.

African Americans continued to make gradual progress towards equal rights throughout the 20th century, but the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s saw the most successful and monumental progress toward African American rights in American history. Culminating in the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 the Civil Rights movement finally overthrew the system of African American disenfranchisement established in the Reconstruction period.⁶⁰ Black leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. traveled the country arguing on behalf of African American rights bringing much needed publicity and support for the Civil Rights movement while a variety of court cases and protests also gained attention and support for the movement.⁶¹ Despite the significant progress and the clear victory for Civil Rights in the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the struggle for true equality and equal treatment was not over. After the passage of the Act southern states fought it in court throughout the rest of 60s and into the 70s

⁶⁰ Orville Vernon Burton, "Voting Rights Act (1965)," In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 24: Race*, ed. Thomas C. Holt, Laurie B. Green, and Charles Reagan Wilson (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 266.

⁶¹ Richard K. Scher, "Unfinished Business: Writing the Civil Rights Movement," In *Writing Southern Politics: Contemporary Interpretations and Future Directions*, ed. Robert P. Steed, and Laurence W. Moreland (University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 65.

with cases like *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* that worked to challenge the law in various ways.⁶² Even though progress had been made in the right direction the south was still attempting to hold onto the old ways of segregation, racism, and white supremacy set up in Reconstruction 100 years earlier.

This progress is shown through film of the 50s and 60s; there is much more respect shown to African Americans and their situation and role in the Civil War and there is less blatant racism involved in their portrayals. *The Horse Soldiers*, a film from 1959, presented a master-slave relationship that was much different than the earlier portrayals. One of the main characters, a southern woman named Hannah Hunter, lives alone with her enslaved servant Lukey. She clearly loves and cares for her slave like family and Lukey has an actual role in the film, something commonly avoided in earlier films.⁶³ There is also a Union doctor in *the Horse Soldiers* who talks openly about his dislike of racism and must defend his decision to stop at a slave cabin to help them deliver a baby while their unit has their own wounded soldiers the doctor is supposed to be caring for. The doctor is placed under military arrest for insubordination, but he defends his decision and stands by it despite his arrest. Scenes like this were not common in earlier film and it makes sense that scenes like this were becoming more prevalent in the time when the Civil Rights Movement was gaining support and momentum in America.

The films *Major Dundee* from 1965 and *A Time for Killing* from 1967 also show an increase in respect in the portrayals of African Americans, but they go beyond that to actually

⁶² Orville Vernon Burton, "Voting Rights Act (1965)," In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 24: Race*, ed. Thomas C. Holt, Laurie B. Green, and Charles Reagan Wilson (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 266.

⁶³ *The Horse Soldiers*. Directed by John Ford. United States: The Mirisch Company, 1959.

include African Americans in roles that were not exclusively slave or servant positions. In *Major Dundee*, the Major is putting together a renegade unit of soldiers to go after a band of Apache Native Americans that were raiding Union forts in New Mexico near the end of the Civil War. As the Major is establishing his unit a black soldier asks to join and says he wants an opportunity to fight because he has been cleaning stables for two years, and the major allows him and his other “six coloreds” to join.⁶⁴ The inclusion of African American soldiers was an important step in the progression of showing African Americans more accurately in the war and outside of the long established stereotype roles that were so common even though the Major was still blatantly racist in his response to the soldier.

Later in the film one of the recruits is a Confederate prisoner of war who makes racist comments and insults towards one of the black soldiers and says “You’re forgetting your manners, nigger. Come over here and pull off my boots...” This is interrupted by a northern preacher who was travelling with the group as a volunteer who defends the black soldier by violently pulling the confederate man’s boot off himself before proceeding to pull a knife on him as the situation escalates. Scenes like this where a clear stance against racism is taken are important breakthroughs seen in films of the 60s that show progress for African American rights and equality in American popular culture.

The opening scenes in *A Time for Killing*, a film from 1967, also feature African American soldiers carrying out historically accurate non-fighting tasks around the Union camp that the movie starts in. One of the early scenes depicts the trial and execution of a Confederate prisoner who was recently brought into the camp. The firing squad is composed of all African

⁶⁴ *Major Dundee*. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. United States: Jerry Bresler Productions, 1965.

Americans who refuse to shoot the prisoner, which forces the Union Captain to shoot the man himself.⁶⁵ The opening scenes also briefly show the camp cook who is also an African American, and both of these roles would typically be historically accurate non-combat positions for African Americans during the war. These films did not focus a lot of attention on the issues of race involved in the war, but they began to show other side of the African American involvement in the war outside of the stereotyped roles of slave or servant. It was still common for a large portion of the African American civil war story to be ignored or avoided but the inclusion of African American soldiers, even in non-fighting positions, was still progress toward equality in the movie industry and popular culture as well as a shift away from the white southern bias so prevalent in Civil War film up to this point.

While the Civil Rights Movement did see the removal of many of the racist laws in place restricting African American rights the racism and unequal treatment still lives on even today and slow gradual progress towards true equality was made in the decades following the 1960s all the way up to present.⁶⁶ A breakthrough in Civil War cinema finally came in 1989 with the film *Glory*, which told the story of the first black regiment to fight in the Civil War. Up until this point American Cinema had neglected the part of the African American story that shows their true and historically accurate contributions to the war effort. *Glory* was a movie dedicated to telling part of that story that had been ignored for so long by Hollywood and American popular

⁶⁵ *A Time for Killing*. Directed by Phil Karlson. United States: Sage Western Pictures, 1967.

⁶⁶ Richard K. Scher, "Unfinished Business: Writing the Civil Rights Movement," *In Writing Southern Politics: Contemporary Interpretations and Future Directions*, ed. Robert P. Steed, and Laurence W. Moreland (University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 65.

culture. The film follows the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment who were the first African American Regiment created by the Union army to fight in the war.⁶⁷

The movie focuses on the creation of the regiment, the few battles they fought in, and all of the struggles they faced as the first African American unit. The film emphasizes the extreme racism occurring even within the Union army during the creation and implementation of African American regiments and how the African Americans bravely persevered to eventually fight in the war.⁶⁸ The movie does not avoid or diminish the racism and poor treatment directed at the African Americans like so many other Civil War films of the 20th century, instead it highlights these struggles and how the regiment dealt with them. The regiment was under paid at \$10 a month rather than the standard \$13 a month for white soldiers, and in the film the white officer in charge of the men stands with them and their protest by relinquishing his own pay as well, rather than attempting to get them under control or punishing them for their protest.

The commanding officer must also fight to get his unit socks and shoes from a racist quartermaster who does not have a good reason to withhold the supplies, drawing attention to the lack of resources and funding provided to these units just because of racist beliefs. These issues were historically accurate to the challenges faced by African American regiments in the war and *Glory* finally put the neglected story of African American contribution in the Civil War into American cinema and popular culture. *Glory* shows continued progress in equal rights and treatment for African Americans near the end of the 20th century as racism became less prevalent in American popular culture, more respect was shown to African Americans, and the neglected

⁶⁷ Paul Haspel, "The War in Film: The Depiction of Combat in *Glory*," In *The Civil War in Popular Culture: Memory and Meaning*, ed. Lawrence A. Kreiser, and Randal Allred (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 153.

⁶⁸ *Glory*. Directed by Edward Zwick. United States: Freddie Fields Productions, 1989.

story of African American soldiers and their struggles in the war was finally portrayed for American viewers.

III. Conclusion

The Civil War and the major societal issues of the 20th century have a strong connection to American popular culture and more specifically the film industry. The Civil War films of the 20th century show various interpretations of the events that are often affected and influenced by the time period as well as other things like personal bias of directors. These movies indicate the current status of things like race and gender in relation to the Civil War which can provide a reflection of the current events or beliefs of the time period. Film provides a popular culture view into the progression of race and gender in the United States through the way they present women and African Americans in their reinterpretations of the war. While the war ended in 1865, American society continued to struggle with the situation caused by slavery and old traditions in various ways for over a century, and it is clear through current events that the issues have yet to be completely resolved. The Civil War was one of the largest conflicts in American history and it is deeply important to American society and identity because it changed the country in many ways and established a situation that allowed for social change and progression, even though it took an incredibly long time and was often met with much opposition along the way.

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