REAGAN, RAMBO, AND THE RED DAWN: THE IMPACT OF REAGAN'S PRESIDENCY ON HOLLYWOOD OF THE 1980s

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the impact of Ronald Reagan's presidency on Hollywood films of the 1980s. As America entered the 1980s, a shift was seen in the product being released by Hollywood. Film narratives became very different from those released in the decade before. This project analyzes the correlative connections between changes seen in both Hollywood films and presidential rhetoric during this period. Samples were drawn from both Hollywood films and presidential speeches of the era. Through the employment of content analysis, these samples were coded and analyzed to spot distinct similarities and differences between the two mediums.

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CHAPTER I

Dating back to its inception over a century ago, motion pictures have served as a vital source for entertainment and information throughout the world. Ever since the first feature-length *talkie* hit in 1927, film has been used not only as a source for showing but also one for telling a story – it is now a quintessential form of audio and visual media.[1] As technology and innovation continued to flourish, movies began to evolve from simple recordings of people doing ordinary things into a tool for delivering complex, eye-popping, and gut-wrenching tales to the masses. For most of the twentieth century and into today, Hollywood has been the main driving force behind what we see on screen. What once appeared as a town used for the assembly line-like production of motion pictures, has since grown into a multi-billion dollar business which produces thousands of films and television programs each year. The numerous production studios commission scripts and green light projects with the solitary hope of turning a profit, and possibly, providing the world with its next, big blockbuster.

The aim of this thesis project is to examine and analyze the ways in which Ronald Reagan's presidency may have impacted the Hollywood product of the 1980s. This study will focus on the eleven year period from 1977 to 1988, beginning with the inauguration of Jimmy Carter and concluding with the final year of Reagan's presidency. By evaluating both the popular American social trends and the thematic elements of Hollywood pictures of the period, I hope to provide an understanding of how political factors and the President played a role in influencing the change that occurred in the films

[1] *The Jazz Singer* (1927, Alan Crosland) starring Al Jolson is widely recognized as the first feature-film released using audible dialogue.

of this era. Considering that a movie's ability to find an audience depends in part on its incorporation of the popular trends found within society, it is very reasonable to expect that popular policies and issues in the world of politics may work themselves into Hollywood productions. If the ideas and actions of a political elite are embraced by the masses, it is reasonable to expect that, in an attempt to maximize earning potential and attract as large of an audience as possible, movie studios will make an attempt to incorporate such popular themes and motifs in their products. Moreover, the popularity (or lack thereof) of a sitting President should be viewed as a potential contributor to the themes found in movies. Whereas a President helps in shaping popular opinion, mainstream films often times reflect such sentiments.

Whereas a studio's primary goal in producing a screenplay is to return a profit, the product being released has to be able to find an audience. Because of this, Hollywood executives are constantly in search of stories that will cater to the masses. Central to striking a chord with movie-goers, is the process of defining what is currently popular within a society and somehow incorporating it into a two-hour motion picture. The trends and sentiments people are willing to accept in their lives are the same ones that they will embrace while watching a movie on the silver screen.

The act of incorporating the popular into Hollywood films is an ongoing task for those in the film industry. Since popular trends are ever-changing, so are movies released by Hollywood studios. Although a certain type of film may have been immensely popular two decades ago, it is unlikely that the exact same formula would work today. Even if such a formula can be recycled, it would be important to change it in a way that modern

problems, concerns, trends, and ideals were incorporated. While in many cases it may be relatively simple to see what is popular in today's world, the act of finding out why it is proves much more daunting. As Timothy Gould writes: "When you begin to investigate the popular element of the arts you are beginning from somewhere *outside* of the popular. To investigate the popular you must somehow locate it within other thoughts and feelings and other cultural productions' receptions" (Gould 121). Thus, it is important to remove ourselves from the cultural mindset and analyze the reasons why certain things have been embraced by the masses, and others have not.

Of course, time serves as a key causal mechanism in probing the identification of popular trends. As noted earlier, the popular is not permanent – it is ever-changing. Once one trend or style runs its course, another emerges to take its place, and so on. Therefore, time acts as a primary causal mechanism for what is adapted as being popular. As time runs its course, what was once popular ultimately is relegated to becoming vintage or nostalgic. It is, in part, for this reason that each decade seems to take on a unique life of its own.

Considering the power of films to influence and shape the public's psyche, it is important to study its relationship with politics. Often, movies provide social commentaries that delve into the pressing political issues of the time. In addition, they also serve a historical purpose, relying on them to show us what American conditions were like in a specific time and place. Also, it must be noted that the players who determine which films are made and which are not hold the power of pushing certain issues and topics to the American forefront. In some cases, such as during World War II,

Hollywood played a key role in providing propaganda pieces to retain popular support for military action abroad. Therefore, it is important to look at movies as more than just simple entertainment since they hold the capacity to shape public opinion.

The relationship between film and politics has become an area of growing interest in the world of political science. However, relatively few reliable studies have been done thus far. Whereas some existing studies focus on relationships between the two areas, I intend to focus on the impact that one – politics – tends to have upon the other – film. In turn, I hope to provide evidence suggesting that messages conveyed by the President during the 1980s played a role in the changes seen in Hollywood films of the time. Whereas films have evolved into a medium for capturing and depicting elements of real life and shaping political attitudes, the political world serves as one of the most influential elements on shaping Hollywood films.

This paper will focus on the cases of two former American Presidents – Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, and how their actions and policies were perceived by the American public. This will be done in hopes of pointing out similarities and differences between the two leaders and the eras in which they served as Commander-in Chief. With hindsight, we can readily draw from memory the ways in which each presidency was associated with national mood of the time. While the Carter presidency is often remembered as a time of stagnation coming in the first years following Vietnam and Watergate, Reagan's time in office is identified as the beginning of the end of the Cold War and, to some, a time for national renewal. In turn, it can be expected that the films that were being released during each presidency reflected the moods which were

prevalent throughout America at the time. In particular, some of the highest-grossing films of the 1980s were action movies and revisionist narratives regarding the Vietnam War. Also, many films of the time took on real-life issues such as political unrest in Latin America, terrorism, and the Cold War. Seeing that Ronald Reagan served as president during this time, and that he is remembered for his effective oratory, I hypothesize that his presidency had an influence on the changes that were seen in Hollywood films between the 1970s and 1980s.

In the following chapter I will provide an overview of the eleven-year period being studied. First, I will examine the major political issues and events that were prevalent during the presidencies of both Carter and Reagan. Although several issues came and went as can be expected in an ever-changing world, some issues such as the Cold War and Middle-Eastern relations were constants throughout both administrations. In turn, we will also see how the overall national mood changed through the course of time and how it affected each man's standing as a leader in the eyes of the American masses. The second part of the overview will focus on the types of film that were being released in the late 1970s up through the 1980s. Whereas many of the films released in the 1970s offered a cynical and tragic tone, the 1980s saw a shift into a more crowd-pleasing *hero-saves-the-day* type of fare. To help with this, I will include a literature review of the existing publications that will help set the framework for much of this study. This portion will aim to explain many of the key elements and motifs that contributed in making the films of each decade starkly different from one another.

Next, I will layout the methodological process that was undertaken in completing this study. This thesis will rely heavily on the quantitative method of content analysis to create an empirical point of reference for the study. Through the development of two separate coding sheets, I will closely examine a sample of the major speeches given by both presidents, as well as a sample of some of the most popular films of the period being studied.[2] While two different coding sheets and protocols will be used in respect to each sample, they will both consist of similar variables. The major issues and talking points found through the analysis of the speeches will be restructured in a way so that they will be applicable to the world of film. Specifically, the coding sheet used for films will emphasize how such variables are found in relation to elements such as protagonist-antagonist relationship, plot, setting, and semiotics.

A statistical analysis of the data findings will then be provided in the following chapter. By first analyzing the coding results of the speeches and then the films, I will be able to point to select instances where certain topics either entered the American mainstream or faded out. For instance, variables concerning U.S.-Soviet relations and American morale will aid in spotting any rhetorical shifts that may have occurred through time. After explaining the results of both coding exercises, I will provide an assessment of how the findings from each relate to one another. A central goal is to find correlation between events in the political arena and themes presented in the films over a period of time. If my hypothesis is correct, then I would expect to see that changes in political discourse precede any significant changes in the content of Hollywood narratives.

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[2] Coding Sheets A and B can both be found in the Appendix section of this paper.

In Chapter 5, I will undertake a qualitative analysis to help further explain the factors that play a role in my findings. While the speeches and films used in the coding experiments are only samples, this section will allow the incorporation of other relevant addresses and movies that worked their way into the American culture between 1977 and 1988. Specifically, I hope to draw on instances in which my findings either agree with or contradict aspects of their work.

Lastly, a brief conclusion will be included in the final chapter. This summation is intended to reiterate key points and findings made throughout the text of my thesis. Also, I hope to make suggestions on how one can successfully go about researching this or similar topics in the future. In addition, I hope to provide a brief commentary on the implications that my research findings have on the future of studying the relationship between politics and film.

CHAPTER II

During the tumultuous 1970s, Americans were left in a cynical daze due to the failures in Vietnam and the fallout from the Watergate scandal. Whereas Richard Nixon resigned from office in disgrace and his successor, Gerald R. Ford had made the unpopular decision to pardon President Nixon, it was Jimmy Carter who was given the duty to heal a nation that was still reeling after years of disappointment. Entering into office in 1977, Carter's presidency was marked by great difficulty. During his tenure he was faced with heightening tensions with the Soviet Union, skyrocketing inflation rates, an energy crisis, mid-east turmoil, and the Iranian Hostage Crisis. By the end of the decade, Americans still had not found a way to restore their confidence. In a 1979 televised addressed, President Carter even shed light on this concern by saying: "For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people feel that the next five years will be worse than the past five years".[3]

Although the Cold War would reach its conclusion a decade-and-a-half later, tensions between the East and West seemed to be unwavering. It appeared to most that Carter was eager to open a dialogue with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev regarding arms control. However, little progress was made during Carter's term in office. Early on it was clear that Soviet leadership was "uneasy about Carter's desire for sharp reductions in nuclear weapons, and they were upset by the president's outspoken criticism of human rights violations in their country" (Slocum-Schaffer 121-122). Despite the signing of the SALT II treaty by both Carter and Brezhnev after a long series of debates, criticism of the

[3] President Carter delivered this speech on July 15, 1979. It would later be dubbed as the "Crisis of Confidence" speech.

administration's policy remained.[4] While some viewed the treaty as another step toward lasting peace, many blasted it as part of the continuing "long line of concessions made to Moscow" by the Carter Administration (Slocum-Schaffer 121). Whatever progress, if any, which was made by the SALT II agreement, would be short-lived as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on Christmas Day 1979 – once again heightening tensions between the Democratic West and the Communist East.

While the success of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt marked a high-point for Carter's time in office, it would be another event involving a Middle Eastern nation that would prove most detrimental for his re-election hopes. Criticism of Carter began to stream out of Iran following the Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power. Initially, members of the Carter Administration had praised Khomeini as "a reasonable, moderate and in every way adequate substitute for the despised Shah". In fact, Ambassador Andrew Young and Department of State Country Director for Iran Henry Precht had actually praised the Ayatollah as a leader; Young even went as far to say that the Ayatollah was "some kind of saint". On November 4, 1979 in Tehran, a group of radical Iranian students seized the American Embassy taking over 60 hostages in protest of the Carter Administration granting the former Shah entrance into the United States to receive medical treatment for cancer. The hostage-takers went on to demand that the Shah be returned to his home country to be executed and that the U.S. pay billions of dollars to Iran's new government (Spencer 77, 80). Refusing to meet the demands, the crisis lasted for a total of 444 days, saw the highly-publicized failure of an American

[4] SALT II stands for Strategic Arms Limitations Talk. This was the continuation of a previous treaty which was set to expire in October 1977 (Slocum-Schaffer 122).

military rescue attempt, and would not end until the hours after Jimmy Carter had left his seat as president. The crisis proved costly for Carter in that it marked the entirety of his final year in office. Furthermore, the situation added to an already apparent sense of weakness that had consumed the American public following Vietnam. The sense of nationalism and pride that consumed the nation following World War II seemed to be lost as the United States appeared more vulnerable than ever before on the world stage.

On the homefront, Americans of all races and backgrounds seemed to be burdened by a litany of hardships. By 1978 the inflation rate had risen to 6.8 percent only to nearly double to 13.3 percent by the end of 1979, and finally reaching the 20 percent mark sometime during 1980 (Slocum-Schaffer 68-70). Combined with a failing economy was the problem of unemployment. By 1980, unemployment had reached its highest percentage during the Carter years – 7.0 percent. Those suffering the most from a rise in unemployment were returning Vietnam veterans who had little luck in attaining jobs. To make matters worse, "the value of the dollar on foreign money markers declined" during the final years of the Carter Presidency (Slocum-Schaffer 68-70). To say the least, American troubles abroad were reflected here at home. The nation appeared to be entering a period of desperation never before seen. Carter's approval rating plummeted and a majority of Americans had yet to regain the confidence in government which they had displayed prior to the Vietnam War. As author Robert M. Collins notes in summing up the decade, "The 1970s were a time of testing for Americans, and many came to fear that nation had lost its ability to master its problems" (Collins 7).

Despite varying degrees of pessimism felt throughout the nation by the end of the 1970s, many saw a sign of hope in the form of Republican Presidential Candidate Ronald Reagan. Challenging the incumbent in the 1980 presidential race, the former California governor and one-time Hollywood actor re-emerged on the national stage as a stark contrast to Jimmy Carter. Running on promises to shrink "Big Government", stimulate the stalling economy, and build up a renewed national defense, it was easy to see that Reagan was, for the most part, the *anti-Carter*. For example, whereas on only the second day of his presidency Carter had pardoned "virtually all Vietnam-era draft resisters and allowing those living abroad to return to the United States", Reagan had drawn national attention during his days as governor by going toe-to-toe with young radical groups, such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Black Panthers throughout the 1960s (Slocum-Schaffer 65). Furthermore, what helped Reagan set himself apart from his opponent the most was his attack on Carter's failures in leadership and foreign policy. "Reagan charged that the Carter administration had allowed U.S. military capabilities to become dangerously weak, and that Carter was 'totally oblivious' to the Soviet Union's drive toward world domination" (Slocum-Schaffer 86). Perhaps the defining moment of the 1980 presidential race came just a week before the election when the two candidates squared off in a final debate before voters went to the polls. Reagan summed up his bid for the Oval Office by directly addressing the American people and bluntly asking if their quality of life had improved during Carter's time in office.[5] Whether by convincing the

[5] The final Carter-Reagan Debate occurred on October 28, 1980, only days before the election. During which, Reagan looked into the camera and asked the American people: "Are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago? Is there more or less unemployment in the country than there was four years ago? Is America respected throughout

public of major national concerns or by striking fear that another four years of the Carter administration would prove detrimental, Ronald Reagan succeeded in winning the election by a landslide in the electoral college; in turn, opening the door for a new course in the country's direction.

Throughout his presidency, Reagan worked hard to set himself apart from his predecessors on domestic and foreign issues. At home, he went forward with his promise to cut so-called unnecessary expenditures in the national budget – mainly coming in the form of reduced funding to social programs. Also, he made good on drastic tax cuts to the American public; though, most opponents would chastise such cuts claiming that they only benefited the nation's upper-class. The new President enjoyed largely favorable ratings, which spiked only a few months following his inauguration when he survived a failed attempt on his life.[6] Reagan's ability to survive the assassination attempt would serve as a catalyst for his persona as president. By cheating apparent death at such a late stage in his life Reagan would go on to symbolize, what Susan Jeffords terms as, the *hard body*; whereas critics were often quick to draw attention to Carter's weaknesses, Reagan would go on to thrive through way of his symbolic masculinity. Jeffords sums up the relationship between the "Reagan Revolution" and the issue of masculinity as a political tool as follows: "It was a revolution whose success pivoted on the ability of Ronald Reagan and his administration to portray themselves successfully as distinctively

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the world as it was? Do you feel that our security is as safe, that we're as strong as we were four years ago?"

[6] On March 30, 1981 the 70 year-old Reagan survived a bullet delivered by would-be assassin John Hinckley, Jr. After a hospital stay, Reagan would appear before a joint session of Congress in a nationally televised address. The warm-reception by Congress and the President's speech would make it into one of the key events of Reagan's time in office.

masculine, not merely as men but as decisive, tough, aggressive, strong, and domineering men" (*Hard Bodies* 11).

Perhaps no element of Reagan's presidency better reinforced this issue of symbolic masculinity as did his managing of foreign policy issues throughout his eight years in Washington. Setting the tone that would define much of his presidency, Reagan's first victory on the international stage came when the remaining hostage from the Iran crisis were released on the evening of his inauguration; however, it must be noted that Jimmy Carter spent his last several hours as president negotiating the ultimate release. Reagan wasted no time in engaging the Soviet Union in a massive arms race in the final years of the Cold War. Despite cuts to virtually all other aspects of the federal budget, Reagan consistently ordered an increase in defense spending in each year throughout his presidency. Most notably, his plans for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), also known as "Star Wars", became a key point for debate in East-West arms negotiations throughout the decade. Reagan attempted on several occasions to reach out to the Soviet leadership to further talks in hopes of ending the Cold War era. However, progress was slow during his first term as three Secretary Generals of the Soviet Union (Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Cherneko) would die during his first fifty months in office. It would not be until Mikhail Gorbachev was installed as the Soviet leader in 1985 that serious progress toward a peaceful resolution would begin to be realized. While Reagan's firm stance against Communism has become well-known throughout the world, it is interesting to note that throughout his presidency he managed

to balance much of his rhetoric between a hostile and reconciliatory tone toward the Soviets, as we will see later in an examination of his major speeches while in office.

In addition to Soviet relations, Reagan also fought hard to stop what he perceived as the spread of communism to the Latin American nations – most notably in El Salvador and Nicaragua. In addition military actions in Grenada and Libya would also mark his presidency. While the virtues of his policies in these situations continue to be debated, it is felt by many that much of Reagan's action on the international stage was an attempt at erasing the stigma that was left by American defeat in Vietnam. Like much of the country following the war, Reagan had felt that the nation was now viewed as weak throughout the world. Although the events and final result of Vietnam could never be erased, Reagan would attempt to restore America's standing as a bona-fide "Super Power". A new era of flag-waving Americans emerged, as reflected by the "Morning in America" slogan on which Reagan successfully ran on for re-election in 1984. In many of his State of the Union speeches, Reagan would emphasize that America was back. Seemingly, the administration worked hard to incorporate this message in nearly every one of its policies throughout the 1980s.

Despite the occasional misstep, including the near disastrous Iran-Contra Scandal, Reagan left office in 1989 with a high approval. In his eyes, and in the eyes of many Americans, the nation's strength had been restored and prosperous days seemed to be ahead. It appeared at least that the 1980s that Ronald Reagan was leaving behind were a far cry from the 1970s Jimmy Carter had left. At home, unemployment rates had dropped, inflation rates decreased in drastic numbers, and the economy had recovered. In

addition, the Soviet Union appeared to be crumbling as America seemed to have regained its international clout. While debate will continue as to the effectiveness of his presidency, the sentiment felt by a majority of Americans at the time of his departure from Washington was that Ronald Reagan had left the nation in better shape than it had been in just a decade prior. Reagan reflected this belief in his farewell address, saying: "We made a difference. We made the city stronger. We made the city freer, and we left her in good hands."[7]

Turning to the films of the era, one can easily spot a stark contrast between the films of the 1970s and those of the 1980s. Whereas Hollywood of the 1970s included many of the carry-over sentiments that were felt during the late-1960s, the 1980s brought with it an apparent shift in the tones of its films. As the nation moved farther away from the tumultuous events surrounding civil rights, Vietnam, Watergate, and the early feminist movements, so did Hollywood productions.

The national malaise that Jimmy Carter spoke of was evidenced by several motion pictures of the late-1970s. Many of these films were much darker than in years before in their depictions of crime, war, and the establishment. Young Hollywood mavericks such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Dennis Hopper, and others relied on the archetype of the *anti-hero* in their attempts to convey social and political messages through film. Unlike the chivalrous and honorable heroes played by the likes of John Wayne and Cary Grant in the previous era, the anti-hero was often a loner with a dark,

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[7] President Reagan's Farwell Address was delivered on January 11, 1989 from the Oval Office. The mention of leaving America in "good hands" is a reference to the fact that Reagan's Vice President for eight years, George H.W. Bush, had been elected as the 41st President of the United States just two months earlier.

cynical outlook of the world who was willing to bend, and even shatter the laws and norms of society to attain what they desired. While the anti-hero had been in existence decades earlier (most often in the gangster films of the 1930s and 40s), it was not until its re-emergence in the late-1960s that it plummeted into its deepest and darkest depictions. In its latter incarnation the anti-hero evolved into a much more violent, vulnerable, and solitary type of character who was most often only out for himself with little, if any, regard for others.[8] In addition, anti-heroes of the time were usually easily identifiable with working-class America. More often than not they possessed little money, held lowly jobs, and were struggling to make their mark on a world in which they felt lost.

While films like *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg) and *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas) helped to ring in the modern blockbuster movement, it was a great volume of socially-conscious films by up-and-coming Hollywood talents which garnered high critical marks and set the tone for cinematic tone of the era.[9] The late-1970s brought with it the first of a series of films which took a retrospective look at the Vietnam War. Two highly-regarded films of the time, *Coming Home* (1978, Hal Ashby) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978, Michael Cimino), provided audiences with probing examinations into the emotional and psychological trauma felt by returning veterans. In addition, *Taxi Driver* (1976, Martin Scorsese), *Network* (1976, Sidney Lumet), and many of the films from the "Blaxploitation" movement offered unique commentaries regarding the social and

[8] Examples of anti-heroes from this period are found in the films *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, Arthur Penn), *The Godfather I and II* (1972 and 1974, Francis Ford Coppola), and *Taxi Driver* (1976, Martin Scorsese).
[9] Following the success of *Star Wars*, studio executives discovered "an attendance pattern for the movie that they had never seen before: many viewers, especially teenagers, were not just coming back to see the movie twice – the usual pattern for a blockbuster film – they were coming back three and four times. Some were even watching it twenty or thirty times!" (Slocum-Schaffer 184).

political climates present in the United States following the 1960s. Such commentaries were highly critical of the traditional political establishment and set out to challenge the norms which many Americans held on to dearly.

Perhaps what was most strikingly different about seventies film was the dramatic increase in the depictions of sex and violence and use of profane language on the big screen. According to Stephanie A. Slocum-Schaffer, "the loosening of sexual mores and the sexual revolution during the late 1960s and early 1970s prompted profound changes" in the Hollywood product (Slocum-Schaffer 184-85). During this time, nudity and the common use of four-letter words had become a mainstay of American cinema. By using the anti-hero archetype as a catalyst, young directors also began to incorporate a much more brutal and realistic form of violence than in the decades before. An increased amount of blood and killing sprees may have been relatively new, but examples of such during this era certainly were not few-and-far between.

As the nation transitioned into a new decade with a newly-elected leader, Hollywood films slowly began to take another form. Nationalistic and jingoistic overtones of the eighties replaced the dark cynicism that consumed much of the earlier decade. The anti-hero which served as a driving narrative force in earlier films began to fade away and a new type of hero began to take form. Drawing on Jeffords' analysis of the Hollywood *hard body*, this new hero would help to restore the ultra-masculine characteristics that were absent throughout much of the 1970s. To be a hero in 1980s cinema, for the most part, meant to possess an often intimidating stature and to be drawn toward violent tendencies. As mentioned earlier, the anti-hero of the seventies was also a

rather violent character-type; however, what set the new hard body apart from the traditional anti-hero was the fact that the hard body was more prone to standing up for a greater good. Whereas the anti-hero seemed to resort to violence for the simple sake of resorting to violence, the new eighties hero was doing so in defense of something bigger than himself – often times, for the country as a whole. Also, the 1980s saw a more over-the-top, cartoonish sort of violence, which in ways, made it more acceptable and more marketable to the masses. Again, this is a clear contrast from earlier films where the directors aimed for accuracy and realism in their depictions of violence.

One of the most striking differences found in film between the two decades was its depiction of the American soldier. In the 1980s, soldiers became finely-tuned warriors who relied on both their most natural instincts of survival and the concept of technology – the latter being a blatant sign of the changing times. Soldiers, as well as other forms of 1980s protagonists, did not seem to carry nearly as much emotional baggage as the anti-heroes that came before them. While film in the 1970s often drew attention upon psychological and emotional issues, the 1980s focused much more on the physical. For the most part we only saw our heroes on the surface, rather than diving in to explore their complexities. In particular, revisionist narratives about the Vietnam War allowed cinematic heroes to right the wrongs of the past and have a chance at redemption. This is evidenced by films such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985, George P. Cosmatos) and *Uncommon Valor* (1983, Ted Kotcheff).

I have relied on the works of Susan Jeffords as a launching pad in researching this thesis. Jeffords has written two works that concentrates directly upon the eras of interest

in this study. In "Debriding Vietnam: The Resurrection of the White American Male" and *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Jeffords focuses on the changes in ways masculinity was depicted on film between the 1970s and 1980s. In "Debriding Vietnam", Jeffords notes a shift that occurred in the portrayals of the American soldiers on film. She claims that due to the nation's changing perception of the Vietnam veteran throughout the late-1970s and early-1980s, Americans began to see those who had returned home from the war as victims. Whereas the majority of the nation's people were too involved emotionally while the war was actually going on, the years that followed brought with them an opportunity to realize the poor living conditions of returning vets. Jeffords writes that "many veterans suffered loss of employment and education, physical handicaps, dissolution of families and varying degrees of psychological and emotional stress" ("Debriding Vietnam" 533).

However, what is of greatest interest to this study is Jeffords' assessment of how patriarchy helped to create an acceptable shift back to traditional masculine motifs in film.[10] This re-emergence of patriarchy was most-often rooted in the omniscient presence of Reaganology in the films of the 1980s. Struggles concerning civil and women's rights in the previous decades were often seen as threats to the traditional patriarchy which contributed to the status quo in American life. By reinstituting the presence of patriarchy in the United States, Reagan returned the nation to a state similar to that of the 1950s. Although rarely explicitly referenced within the text of the films, Reagan's policies and ideologies were apparent in several narratives. "Reaganology would have us see this

[10] In this paper, I define *motif* as a "recurring salient thematic element; a dominant idea or central theme found in a film."

rebirth as a sign of a 'New America' one that . . . would engage in another conflict like Vietnam only 'with the clear intention of winning'" ("Debriding Vietnam" 537).[11] In addition, similar to the ways in which public opinion toward returning veterans had changed over the years, Americans began to direct the majority of blame for the war on senators, congressmen, and other types of Washington bureaucrats. Taking this into consideration, Reagan managed to distance himself from the failures in Vietnam – at least in the eyes of the American public. In Reagan, many Americans saw a crusader who would never have allowed an American defeat if he had been in office. Through the use of revisionist storytelling, many films of the 1980s were based on this premise that if the war were continued under Reagan, America would have a chance at victory.

Jeffords takes her argument one step further in *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. Here, the author claims that Hollywood heroes in each decade were distinctively different from one another, and in some ways, identifiable with the man who was serving as president at the time. Specifically, cinematic heroes of the 1970s are identified as corresponding more closely with the Carter "soft body" imagery, while eighties film adapted the persona of the Reagan "hard body" (*Hard Bodies* 13). While I do agree that the "hard body" politicking and imagery associated with Reagan contributed to the evolution of the 1980s action hero, I feel that films of the 1970s were more so influenced by the national mood and prevailing cynicism than by any elite cues that Jimmy Carter had to offer. The sentiments felt throughout the U.S. during late-1970s were basically remnants of events which had occurred in the years prior to Carter's

[11] In November of 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was quoted as saying that America would only engage in another Vietnam-type scenario "with the clear intention of winning" (537).

inauguration. Issues such as Vietnam, Watergate, civil rights, and women's rights had been in the news long before Jimmy Carter had ever announced his candidacy. Further, Jeffords holds that Reagan's persona and policies helped create an ultra-masculine hero archetype which would become the standard for Hollywood films throughout much of the decade. These cinematic heroes will most often be in the revisionist Vietnam narratives released in the 1980s.

In his recent book *Hollywood's New Radicalism*, Ben Dickenson does not deny that Reagan influenced Hollywood of the time. However, he appears too quick to write off many of the era's films as farcical and lowbrow, failing to examine the deeper social and political contexts of the films. Rather, he sees many of these films as nothing more than a jingoistic reincarnation of American propaganda. He claims that during the 1970s Wall Street players began purchasing major Hollywood studios and, in turn, ending the age of the young Hollywood maverick whose artistic social commentaries helped make the decade a golden age for filmmaking. Dickenson writes that "in the 1980s President Ronald Reagan's fiscal policy supported these businessmen, through cutting their taxes and changing legislation to suit their needs," and at the same time, silenced the voice of Hollywood's many left-wing activists (Dickenson XIV). The author goes on to address how some Hollywood execs even re-worked existing scripts to incorporate Reagan policies and ideals. Despite the challenges they faced, the opinions of Hollywood progressives were too strong to be held to complete silence. Dickenson points to the work of Oliver Stone as examples of successful and critically acclaimed films that found in audience in spite of this attempt to drown out the voice of opposition. However, it must

be realized that examples such as the films of Oliver Stone were simply the exception during the eighties, not the rule. In his argument, Dickenson neglects pointing to the impact of Reagan's rhetoric on public opinion. In other words, he claims that this change in Hollywood film only came as the result of an inside job on behalf of studio execs trying to push their own political agendas. This is problematic in that it leaves out the aspect of "supply-and-demand" as it relates to the film industry. Again, if something is popular in the real world, it stands a good chance of being popular in the world of cinema.

In addition, this thesis will set out to explain why Dickenson's argument lacks the comprehensiveness needed in trying to explain the relationship between Washington and Hollywood in the 1980s. While Dickenson's assessments of studio politicking and the presence of Hollywood progressives during the 1980s are valid and important points, the author fails to examine the picture as a whole. He offers very little credence to the financial success of the era's films that possessed several motifs which were reflective of policies and rhetoric set forth by the Reagan Administration. Further, he views such films merely as examples of lowbrow entertainment, neglecting to make any attempt at examining the cultural and social significance of their narratives. This approach is different from Jeffords who prefers to probe the imagery and semiotics found within the films as a means to finding a relationship with ideas being communicated from Washington at the time. In order to create a more complete study that offers definitive results, one must make an attempt at finding the links between the political, the artistic, and the popular. Taking this into consideration, we must first establish grounding for

what is meant by "popular" before beginning to evaluate its relationship to the political and entertainment arenas.

In the article "Pursuing the Popular", Timothy Gould sets out to discover why certain motifs and trends become popular while others never catch on. His argument focuses on four areas of interest that contribute to the formation of the popular. They are: 1) the pleasures of the popular, 2) the role of convention, 3) shock effects, and 4) critical access to the popular (Gould 119). Gould's investigation into this topic is two-fold. Not only is he interested in investigating *how* something becomes accepted into the popular culture, but also *that* it is accepted by the masses. The author recognizes that the "consumer of popular culture" often seeks entertainment as a means for escapism (Gould 120). Furthermore, an audience is more likely to embrace narratives which are familiar to their lives or relatable to the world around them. Within these narratives lay the stimuli of shock, such as forms of violence or eroticism, which often fulfills an audience's desire to be entertained. The fourth plank of Gould's study is at work in this thesis, as I attempt to critically view films of the 1970s and 1980s through a political lens that relates to the rhetoric offered by Presidents Carter and Reagan during their terms in office.

Gould's observations regarding the characteristics of the popular will be kept in consideration during my qualitative analysis of both the film and speech samples. It will be of great importance to accurately delineate which rhetorical and cinematic themes succeeded the greatest in becoming popular among the masses. Furthermore, I will be able to provide evidence of the certain popular themes that were common between these two separate arenas.

Chapter III

To analyze presidential rhetoric and Hollywood films, I employ both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. I began by developing a coding sheet, which includes variables intended to measure both domestic and international issues of the time quantitatively, to analyze the rhetoric communicated by both Presidents Carter and Reagan. To this end I constructed several dichotomous variables intended to provide evidence of how presidential discourse varied over time and allow me to gauge the impact of these changes on Hollywood films. A copy of all variables is included in Appendix A. The variables can be grouped into three category types: domestic, international, and sentiment. The domestic variables primarily deal with issues of the economy such as unemployment and poverty, as well as drugs. The international variables focus on America's relations abroad, specifically, US relations with the Soviet Union, Latin American and Middle Eastern nations, as well as the perceived threats of communism and terrorism that were communicated to the American people from 1977 to 1988. Central to this aspect are variables intended to measure whether or not the United States, at any time, was under the direct threat of a specific enemy nation, group, or faction. In accommodating to Cold War moods that spanned the course of decades, the Soviet variables measure/capture fluctuations in presidential rhetoric which may have occurred in regards to relations with the USSR. This aims to reflect the changing tone which resulted from any diplomatic progress or setbacks that may have occurred over the years being studied. Finally, a Vietnam variable has been included to record the ways in which that war was spoken about by presidents since its occurrence.

The third variable group being implemented is designed to capture the U.S. national sentiment of the time. This area focuses on symbolic language usage meant to invoke American pride, as well as that which may reflect negative moods felt throughout the nation. In addition, a variable is devoted to the notion of *recovery*. Any language that is used to articulate the bettering of conditions or rebounding of America will be recorded and analyzed.

When choosing the sample to be analyzed, this research project is interested primarily with presidential rhetoric which has been directly relayed to the American people. Therefore, the sample being used is made up of speeches which were televised live and direct to the public, rather than speeches filtered through journalistic or political editorializing. The sample includes fifteen presidential addresses beginning with Carter's inaugural in 1977, and concluding with Reagan's farewell address in early 1989.[12] Thus, the sample is made up only of inaugural, farewell, and State of the Union addresses. Since Reagan served two terms to Carter's one, the former is represented with ten speeches while five are included from the latter. This allows parity and consistency through time. Special addresses, such as Carter's *Crisis of Confidence* speech and Reagan's addresses at the Brandenberg Gate and following the *Challenger* disaster are justifiably omitted in order to maintain this consistency and maintain a common forum by which each leader was able to communicate his message. Once the coding was completed, the results were analyzed to examine variation over time. In the following

[12] Although, President Reagan's farewell address was delivered on January 11, 1989 (nine days prior to leaving office), this paper's area of interest ends in 1988 – Reagan's final full year as president.

chapter, I will explain any changes that occurred in these rhetorical areas as they relate to the important events that led to such a change in tone.

A second coding sheet and protocol was created to analyze the film sample.[13] By drawing directly on the issues and rhetoric contained within the texts of the sample speeches, I have devised a similar set of dichotomous variables which place such topics in the terms of cinema. Variables involving issues of the economy and international relations have been translated into terms involving plot, setting, antagonist and protagonist roles, and action. In addition, two semiotic variables have been included to measure the use of symbolism within the films. These semiotic variables are concerned with the ways in which the American flag and/or any American landmarks are depicted in the films. Also, rhetorical variables have been added to gauge the films' underlying tones regarding American Pride and Anti-Communist sentiments.

In choosing the film sample to be analyzed, I wanted to focus on films that were easily accessible to film-goers in the late 1970s and 1980s. For that reason, the sample being used has been pulled from a list of the top twenty highest-grossing movies released each year from 1977 to 1988. Due to the large volume of films such a list would have included, I have narrowed this filmography down to a manageable sample by focusing on genre classifications set forth by the Internet Movie Database (IMDB). Specifically, I have chosen to include only those films deemed as "action" or "war" that take place during the Cold War era following the conclusion of World War II. To further narrow this sample, all *action*/*war* films which share the sub-genres of "sci-fi", "romance",

[13] CODING SHEET B found in *Appendix A*

"animation", "horror" or "comedy" have also been omitted. This has resulted in a sample of 23 of the highest-grossing films released between 1977 and 1988.

Through this narrowing process, a sample that is reflective of the broad catalog of films released during the era has been devised. The decision to analyze the highest-grossing films of the time means that the films being assessed are not only the ones that U.S. theater-goers were most prone to spend their money on seeing, but also were among the most popular of their time. Several have gone on to play iconic roles in popular culture. However, this study will not be limited to an analysis of popular films. Rather, the qualitative section of this thesis will incorporate several of those films that failed at the domestic box office, but still contained social and political commentaries of the world during the era being studied. In the following chapter, the data results of both coding exercises are analyzed using statistical analysis to determine the variation and correlation between the speeches and films over time.

Chapter IV

The Speeches

Much has been said over the years in regards to the ways in which Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter differed as leaders. In studying the presidencies of each man, one will be sure to notice a great deal of contrast between the two. Taking this into consideration, it was interesting to discover several similarities between the pair during my analysis of their presidential speeches. Despite their division by party lines, platform, and policy, there appear to have been certain occasions during each presidency in which the two communicated similar sentiments to the American people. Specifically, there were two occasions of similarity that were most surprising. These were the parallels in tone used by both men in describing relations with the Soviet Union, and also in terms of more abstract issues such as *American Morale*, *America facing crisis or struggle*, and similar topics.

While history has remembered Reagan as a Cold War warrior who embarked on an eight-year struggle to end the stalemate between East-West, Jimmy Carter has been remembered as a much softer, passive leader who lacked his successor's zeal on the issue. However, a closer look reveals that there existed very little rhetorical difference between the two presidents, at least in terms of their major speeches. Thus, a variable was included to measure the tones used by each man to communicate to the public the varying states of relations with the USSR. Four coding possibilities were offered in response to this variable – *all or mostly hostile (1)*, *all or mostly reconciliatory (2)*, *fairly balanced (3)*, and *not mentioned (0)*. Upon coding, it was discovered that the percent by which either man spoke of US-Soviet relations in a primarily hostile tone was quite close.

Although Carter only invoked some form of hostility 20% of the time, it was surprising to see that Reagan's tone toward the USSR was at its most aggressive in only 30% of the speeches. Further, and perhaps most shocking is that Carter and Reagan were identical in their use of a reconciliatory tone, with both being coded at 40% of the time. In addition, Reagan managed to balance both tones in 20% of his speeches, while Carter completely neglected to speak on the issue of US-USSR relations in 40% of his speeches.

Table 1.A US-USSR Relations

Orator	Hostile	Reconciliatory	Balanced	Not Mentioned
Carter	20%	40%	0%	40%
Reagan	30%	40%	20%	10%

The preceding findings are of great interest when taking into consideration our pre-conceived notions regarding both presidencies. Although Carter is remembered for his liberalism and "dove" status and Reagan for his ultra-conservatism and "hawk" mentality, each men appear to have been rhetorically similar on Cold War issues in their Inaugural, Farewell, and State of the Union addresses.

Variables regarding the nation's renewal, struggles, and successes also resulted in unexpected findings. Whereas Carter's legacy has in large part been formed by the fact that he presided over the nation during a time in which it experienced its most overwhelming malaise since the Great Depression, and that Ronald Reagan invoked themes such as "a shining city upon a hill" and "morning in America" throughout his

presidency, it would be expected that Carter failed to communicate the same amount of positive rhetoric that his successor became known for. For instance, both men frequently communicated to the American people the idea of a rebirth of nationalism by way of *new beginnings*, *better days*, and other variations of a rebounding America. While such positive sentiments were omnipresent (100%) throughout Reagan's eight years, Carter managed to articulate similar notions in 80% of his speeches. Moreover, both presidents managed to attribute much of their success to the American people at similar rates with Carter and Reagan doing so in 60% and 50% of their respective speeches. Conversely, even the topic of a struggling nation or an America in crisis resulted in similar rhetorical results by both men. Whereas Carter acknowledged a weakening America in 40% of his addresses, Reagan did so slightly less frequently at only 30%. It must be noted that all acknowledgments of this "weakened" America occurred during a three-year span beginning on January 23rd, 1980 and concluding on January 25th, 1983.[14]

Table 1.B American Renewal, Success, and Weakness

Orator	American Renewal	Contributing Success	Weakened America
Carter	80%	60%	40%
Reagan	100%	50%	30%

[14] The Iran Hostage Crisis began on November 4, 1979 and went on to last through January 20, 1981. In addition, growing inflation, interest loans, unemployment, and Cold War tensions were all overwhelmingly present in the news media during this three year stretch.

In light of these unanticipated similarities in rhetorical leadership between Presidents Carter and Reagan, several variables help to illustrate the differences that existed regarding the policies of each administration. The greatest area of discrepancy between the two leaders regarded the issue of drugs. At no time in the five speeches coded did Carter mention the presence or threat of drugs in the United States. On the other hand, beginning with 1983's State of the Union address, Reagan communicated the notion of drugs as a major problem 60% of the time throughout the duration of his presidency. The timing of Reagan's incorporation of anti-drug rhetoric within in his speeches coincides with the implementation of the widely-publicized "Just Say No" campaign which was spearheaded by his wife, Nancy.

A discrepancy also exists between the two presidents in the frequencies by which they communicated the idea of a high morale among Americans. Reagan managed to communicate the idea of strong American morale in 90% of his speeches while President Carter managed to do so only 60% of the time. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the aforementioned malaise present throughout the country during his term in office, Carter still managed to articulate the notion of a strong American morale in more than half of his major speeches. However, this still appears to be a far cry from the overwhelming amount of times in which Reagan incorporated the same idea into his speeches.

Issues regarding the economy were also communicated differently by each leader. Whereas Carter only managed to speak of an improving economy 40% of the time, in contrast, Reagan spoke of it getting stronger in 90% of his major speeches. Although Reagan acknowledged problems involving inflation, interest rates, and unemployment in

his early speeches, it was rare for such issues to be the crux of Reagan's assessment of the overall economy. In fact, the only time that Reagan allowed the negatives to overshadow the positives in terms of economic issues came during his first inaugural address in January of 1981.[15] Despite such a broad discrepancy between the two leaders, both men spoke of an improving unemployment rate more than fifty-percent of the time with Carter and Reagan doing so in 60% and 80% of their respective speeches.

Whereas Carter and Reagan were similar in their tones regarding relations with the Soviet Union, we find greater variation between the two by looking at how often they communicated the idea of communism as an enemy of the United States.

Table 2.A America at Risk

Orator	Communism as an Enemy	USSR as an Enemy	Facing a Specific Threat
Carter	60%	60%	60%
Reagan	90%	90%	40%

While not narrowed to just the USSR, this variable concentrated on communism as a broad ideology and form of government. It was found that Carter incorporated such a theme into 60% of his addresses while Reagan emphasized the notion of communism as an enemy an overwhelming 90% of the time. Speaking more often and over a longer period of time than his predecessor, this type of anti-communist rhetoric served as a

[15] In his First Inaugural, Reagan states: "These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. . . It threatens to shatter the lives of millions. . . We must act today in order to preserve tomorrow."

mainstay throughout Reagan's addresses to the American public. Similarly, the exact same results were found when coding to see if the Soviet Union was mentioned as a clear *enemy* or *adversary*, with Carter again at 60% and Reagan at 90%. However, President Carter alluded more frequently to America facing a specific threat, not limited to communist entities, such as Iran during the Hostage Crisis of the late-70s. In fact, he did so 60% of the time compared to Reagan who had done so in only 40% of his speeches. Not limited solely to communist nations and factions, this variable was purposely constructed as a measure of how often either leader stated that the country was being threatened by a specific hostile adversary.

The final topic of interest which resulted in a rhetorical difference between both leaders concerns the conflict in Vietnam. Although both men entered the Oval Office following the war's conclusion, it is important to include such a variable in hopes of examining how it was spoken about over time. The ultimate findings appear to be quite interesting in that Jimmy Carter, the first post-Vietnam president, never explicitly mentioned the Vietnam War in any of his major speeches while in office. On the other hand, Reagan spoke of Vietnam in 30% of his major addresses – his first inaugural, the 1985 State of the Union, and finally in his farewell. Also, Reagan managed to speak of the subject in three different ways on each separate occasion; first, by mentioning the "heroes" who had served in the war, then by relaying a human-interest story about a Vietnamese girl and her family, and later by acknowledging the Vietnamese pullout from Cambodia. While it comes as no surprise that Reagan made mention of the war in hindsight, Carter's failure to mention it was an unanticipated finding. Having taken office

less than two years after the fall of Saigon, it is interesting to find that Vietnam was never used as a talking point essential to the Carter Administration. Similarly, there exists a discrepancy in how often each leader publicly praised the *heroics*, *bravery*, and *courage* of the American military. Whereas Carter touched on this subject in only one of his five major speeches, Reagan managed to incorporate such a theme in 70% of his major addresses. The restoration of pride in the American military served as a mainstay throughout the Reagan presidency. The 40th President of the United States set such a tone as early as his first State of the Union address, and continued to use the *pride* motif to his advantage throughout his first term in office.

The Movies

Much like the analysis of the presidential speeches, the coding of the film sample resulted in varying degrees of similarity and difference over time. In order to better explain the presence of variation over time, the film analyses has been done by breaking the era from 1977-1988 into three periods of interest: 1977-1980, 1981-1984, and 1985-1988. Each period represents one presidential term, beginning with Carter's presidency and concluding with Reagan's second four years in office. From the sample being coded, six films were released between 1977 and 1980, nine films from 1981 to 1984, and eight films came out during the period from 1985 to 1988.

First, it must be noted that since this sample is composed solely of films from the *Action* and *War* film genres, the protagonists in these films resorted to violence an overwhelming amount of the time (over 95%). The only case that did not contain this depiction of violence was seen in 1978's *Coming Home* – about a returning Vietnam

veteran struggling to acclimate to post-war life. Also, at *no time* within these twenty-three films does the protagonist instigate the violent action in the films. Rather, it is the villain who actively instigates such action – leading the hero to respond violently. Hence, the protagonists' violent actions are almost always justifiable in that they are either acting out of self-defense or to protect a greater good.

Two variables showed very little change over time. In viewing to determine how often the films' protagonist were fighting against either drug or crime lords, it was found that this occurred 33% of the time during the first two terms being looked at, and increasing slightly to 37.5% in the final term. Similar consistency was maintained over time when analyzing the villain's relationship to Middle Eastern and Latin American influences. Such a depiction only occurred once and it was during the second term occurring between 1981 and 1984 (11%). Both the first and third terms saw no instance in which the film's primary villain or antagonist force was influenced by either of these regions.

The greatest degrees of variation over the presidential terms occurred mainly in variables capturing what the protagonist was fighting against, the presence of a Soviet or Communist antagonist, and the incorporation of *American Pride* and/or *Anti-Communist* motifs. This is shown below in Table 3.A.

Table 3.A Protagonist-Antagonist Persona

Presidential Term	Military Protag.	Protag. vs. For. Threat	Primary Comm. Antagonist	USSR-Connected Antagonist
1977-80	50%	33%	0%	0%
1981-84	22%	44%	11%	33%
1985-88	37.5%	87.5%	62.5%	62.5%

The presence of heroes affiliated with the United States Armed Forces lessened over the years. In contrast, instances in which the primary protagonists were engaged in struggles against foreign threats increased drastically over the 11 year timeframe beginning with 33% of the time during the Carter years and reaching an overwhelming 87.5% by the end of Reagan's presidency. In terms of the presence of military-affiliated protagonists, characters that identified with the military forces of other countries (e.g. James Bond) were not included in that I was interested primarily in the portrayals of the American soldier / veteran. Moreover, in addition to explicit depictions of such characters as soldiers, any references or allusions to past participation in the military were included.[16]

Even more drastic shifts occur over time in regards to two variables concerning the depictions of the films' antagonists or villains. During the period ranging from 1977 to 1980 there were no instances found within this sample where the primary villain was a communist, nor were there any mentions of the villain having a relationship with Soviet forces. However, both of these themes begin to change noticeably as we enter the 1980s. Although only 11% of villains seen between 1981 and 1984 were portrayed as communists, one-third of all villains during this period were depicted as being connected

[16] For example, in the *Rambo* Trilogy, the character of John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) is a former member of the US Army Green Berets. Furthermore, the film *Blue Thunder* (1983, John Badham) centers around a helicopter pilot in the Los Angeles police force who is mentioned to have been a Vietnam veteran.

to either Soviet factions or the USSR. Most striking is that out of the sample's eight films released from 1985 to 1988, 62.5% included a primary villain who was communist as well as a villain directly connected to the Soviet Union. In terms of the thematic elements measured by each variable, both went from 0% to 62.5% in just over a decade.

The final area that showed substantial variation over time relates to the presence of motifs found within the sampled films. There were no signs of an *American Pride Motif* found in the films released during the Carter period.[17] Similarly, the same films carried no examples of *Anti-Communist Motifs* at work. During the first Reagan term however, both motifs begin to appear as the American pride variable shows up 11% of the time and the Anti-Communist sentiment is seen at a rate of 22%. Both increase in the second Reagan period as American pride rises to 37.5% and Anti-Communist themes work their way into 62.5% of the films.

Another, interesting fluctuation was also seen in issues carrying over from the Vietnam era. Fifty-percent of the films being released during the first and third time-periods contained either an explicit depiction, reference, or mention of the war in Vietnam, while the subject appeared only 33% of the time from 1981 to 1984. In addition, portrayals of anti-establishment protagonists declined steadily from the late-1970s into the 1980s. One-third of films released between 1977 and 1980 contained such a character-type, while this dropped to just over 22% in the second period, and to a low 12.5% during Reagan's second term. In all, only five of the twenty-three films used in the sample contained an anti-establishment protagonist, with three occurrences coming in the

[17] An *American Pride Motif* is the presence of a central thematic element expounding the virtues of what it means to be an American.

form of a Vietnam vet and the other two being renegade cops as portrayed by Clint Eastwood.[18]

Finally, a variable was to gauge the presence of presidential references within the films. The purpose of this was to assess how overtly Hollywood attempted to related presidential politics to the storylines unfolding within its films. An example of this appears in *Cobra* (1986, George P. Cosmatos) when a portrait of Reagan is seen hanging on a wall. In addition any generic mention of "the president" in any of the films, that does not include the portrayal of a fictional president, was also coded as "1". If a film did not include a reference to the president, or if it only referenced a real-life president from a previous era, it was then coded as "0". For example, the appearance of President Kennedy's portrait in *Deer Hunter* was coded as "0" due to the fact that he was not the sitting president during the time of the film's release.[19] It was found that references to the sitting president were rare – in fact, no action / war movies released between 1977 and 1980 contained any references to Jimmy Carter. On the other hand, references were made about Reagan or "the president" in 22% of the films released in the second and third time periods under review.

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[18] In both *The Gauntlet* (1977, Clint Eastwood) and *Sudden Impact* (1983, Clint Eastwood) the main character is a cop willing bend the rules in order to carry out justice and preserve lawfulness.

[19] In *The Deer Hunter*, a photo of President John F. Kennedy is seen hanging from a wall. Seeing that Kennedy's assassination occurred in 1963 and that the film is set in the 1970s, the reference to Kennedy is coded as "0" due to the fact he was not the sitting President in the world presented within the film.

Chapter V

In viewing the film sample in a chronological order by year of release, what becomes evident is how certain thematic elements contained within the films begin to evolve. In particular, moving from the late-1970s into the 1980s, clear transformations are seen regarding the hero-villain dynamic, anti-Communist and anti-Soviet tones, anti-establishment sentiment, the depiction of the American military, and the depictions and references concerning the Vietnam War. This chapter will explore each of these thematic elements in relation to Hollywood films and how they changed over time in connection with presidential rhetoric and significant events that unfolded over time.

Anti-Soviet and Anti-Communist Rhetoric

Through closer examinations of both data sets it appears that several correlations occur over time between issues contained in the speeches and movies. Particularly, changes in Cold War rhetoric regarding Communism and the Soviet Union were followed by an increase of similar sentiments on film. As seen in Table 4.A, the increase of communist and Soviet-affiliated antagonistic forces portrayed in films corresponded with the increase in presidential rhetoric labeling the Soviet Union and the ideology of Communism as enemies of the United States. Although the Cold War had been a constant throughout the decades preceding the 1980s, the growing frequency with which Reagan incorporated the “Evil Empire” into his speeches was translated into a similar incorporation in the films being released by Hollywood.

Table 4.A Cold War Rhetoric – Hollywood Films

Orator	*Soviets as Enemy*	*Communism as Enemy*
Carter	60%	60%
Reagan (1st Term)	75%	75%
Reagan (2nd Term)	100%	100%
Films by Pres. Term	*Soviet-Affiliated Enemy*	*Main Villain Commun..*
1977-1980	0%	0%
1981-1984	33%	11%
1985-1988	62.5%	62.5%

Although Reagan is better known for his tough stances involving the Soviet Union, Jimmy Carter also presented a steady stream of anti-Soviet and anti-communist rhetoric throughout his lone term in office. However, Carter offset much of the more aggressive language by incorporating an equal amount of reconciliatory talk; mainly, emphasizing the need to come to terms on SALT II and further limit the production of arms between the two nations. It was not until 1980 and Americans were being held captive in Iran that Carter's rhetoric turned primarily hostile. During that year's State of the Union Address, Carter states to the Iranian government that the United States is no enemy to their people and that "the real danger to their nation lies in the north, in the Soviet Union and from the Soviet troops now in Afghanistan."[20] By using the invasion of Afghanistan as means to persuade the Iranian government that the Soviet Union is "the real danger", Carter becomes more conciliatory to the hostage takers and more hostile toward the communist government of the Soviet Union. Carter's hostility toward the USSR reached even a greater magnitude two months later when he officially announced

[20] Address to the Joint Session of Congress; January 23, 1980

that the United States would boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics which were to be held in Moscow.

Whereas Carter's strongest anti-Soviet rhetoric did not surface until the final year of his presidential term, Hollywood, for the most part, also neglected using Soviet forces as a main source of cinematic villainy throughout much of the late-1970s. Instead, the era was married to the idea of domestic-minded antagonistic forces such as the establishment and American society itself. Out of the six films sampled from the era for use in the coding experiment, three portrayed the psychological conflicts resulting from participation in wars (*The Deer Hunter*, *Coming Home*, and *Apocalypse Now*), one offered a look at the wayward practices of the police establishment (*The Gauntlet*), and the remaining two were sequels to films released during an earlier part of the decade (the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* and Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky II* in 1979). In fact, *The Spy Who Loved Me* had the famed British spy working with a KGB operative to recover stolen submarines – perhaps signaling a further cooling of Cold War tensions prior to the late seventies. On the other hand, the other five films of this time all offered various takes on the already existing anti-hero of the era.

Political Scientist Ronnie D. Lipschutz claims that by the end of his term in office, Carter had deviated from his original promises of easing Cold War tensions, becoming "a fully reconstructed Cold Warrior" who laid the groundwork for much of Reagan's arms policy (Lipschutz 145). This assessment of Carter is problematic in that it draws too close of a connection between him and his successor. As evidenced in analyzing Carter's speeches, it appears that any substantial change in tone was simply

reactionary to events that had recently unfolded. Particularly, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan drew an increase in hostile tone directed by Carter toward the USSR. On the other hand, Reagan as both candidate and president introduced a level of "anti-Soviet Cold War rhetoric not seen since the 1950's" (Lipschutz 145). Despite his own form of reconciliatory tone toward the USSR that appeared from time to time, Reagan never seemed to miss an opportunity to depict the Soviets as the United State's primary enemy. In doing so, Reagan often made his case to the American public for instituting a military and arms buildup – all the while, expressing his desire of bringing the Soviet leadership to the negotiating table. However, as seen in his 1982 State of the Union, Reagan's tone toward the Russians was poignant and firm from the start of his days in the White House. Citing the role of the USSR in oppressing the Polish people, Reagan made clear that the only way to be taken seriously by this adversary was to do so from a position of strength – foreshadowing his later policy of "peace through strength". Moreover, Reagan managed to insert subtle criticism of previous administrations by noting that in the past, the US had "sought the moderation of Soviet power through a process of restraint and accommodation" while "the Soviets engaged in an unrelenting buildup of their military forces."[21] Only a year into his presidency, it becomes clear that Ronald Reagan's methods to easing Cold War tensions would greatly contrast the policies set forth by prior administrations just a few years before.

Reagan's anti-communist and anti-Soviet rhetoric would persist throughout his presidency, although softening a bit during his second term with the installation of Mikhail Gorbachev as the Soviet Premier. Perhaps the best example of the way in which

[21] Address to the Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union; January 26, 1982

Reagan managed to balance the profundity of stern anti-communist language with the presence of sincere reconciliatory tones came during his Farwell Address, televised just more than a week before leaving the Oval Office.[22] Segueing to the subject of US-Soviet relations, Reagan reiterates the rhetorical hostility which he displayed throughout his eight years in office by stating, "nothing is less free than pure communism." Yet the progress made over the previous few years are reflected as he continues, "and yet we have, the past few years, forged a satisfying new closeness with the Soviet Union." Here, he hints at the successes forged in the Geneva summits with Gorbachev and the signing of 1987's Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF). Further, Reagan manages to once-and-for-all separate himself from Jimmy Carter and previous administrations by saying that "the detente of the 1970's was based not on actions but promises" and that "President Gorbachev has brought about some internal democratic reforms." In Reagan's mind, and in the message he is relaying to the American public, the Cold War is ending; and that he, not Jimmy Carter, was the man who achieved this. While this study does not wish to examine the actual role Reagan may have played in bringing closure to East-West tensions, the rhetoric he used in communicating to the American public helped to portray him as a Cold Warrior unlike the previous president.

Reagan's continuing emphasis of communism and the Soviet Union as the ultimate evil gradually began to translate into the world of American cinema. Two Bond films released early in the decade, *For Your Eyes Only* (1981, John Glen) and *Octopussy* (1983, John Glen), provided audiences with primary villains connected to Soviet influences – although, neither were Russians. Also in 1983, escalating tensions between

[22] Farwell Address to the Nation; January 11, 1989

East and West were offered in the movie *WarGames* (1983, John Badham). Set around the notion of a teenager partaking in a computer game that unknowingly leads to the possiblity of World War III, *WarGames* does little to demonize the USSR. Rather, it focuses solely on the potential for nuclear engagement.

It is not until 1984 that we begin to see blatant attempts by Hollywood to incorporate Reagan's hardcore rhetoric into its films. The release of *Red Dawn* (1984, John Milius) becomes the first instance in the 1980s where an *action* film depicting Soviet and communist antagonists catches the attention of mainstream moviegoers to become one of the year's top-twenty highest grossing films at the domestic box office. The film takes place during the early days of World War III and revolves around a group of high school kids whose small Colorado town has been invaded. The film opens with a series of text cards which summarize the events which lead to the invasion of the United State:

> *Soviet Union suffers worst wheat harvest in 55 years... Labor and food riots in Poland. Soviet troops invade... Cuba and Nicaragua reach troop strength goals of 500,000. El Salvador and Honduras fall... Greens Party gains control of West German Parliament. Demands withdrawal of nuclear weapons from European soil... Mexico plunged into revolution... NATO dissolves. United States stands alone.*

The Soviet Union, aligned with Cuban and Nicaraguan forces, have pressed forward into the Great Plains. The film's first scene depicts Soviet paratroopers launching an assault on the protagonists' high school. The group of kids, led by the slightly older Jeb (Patrick Swayze), venture into the woods in hopes of survival. Upon reentering their town, the group discovers that the town has been completely overrun by opposing forces. Banners

adorned with the image of Lenin are draped throughout the town, Soviet soldiers are seen burning books in the streets, and tanks patrol the plazas and avenues. Jeb and younger brother Matt (Charlie Sheen) learn that their father and others are being held hostage at a local drive-in that has been converted into a re-education camp where propaganda reels are being shown on continuous loop. There, they confront their father who tells them that the boys' mother has been killed. As months pass, the group begins engaging in guerilla actions. Armed with guns and artillery, they begin fighting the opposition and even liberating hostages who are to be put to death – leaving the mark of "Wolverines" where they succeed.[23] Eventually, the opposition forces catch wind of the youths and see them as formidable foes that must be apprehended or killed. Ultimately, only two members of the pack survive the events of the film. In the closing scene, an epilogue of sorts, the camera pans over a monument dubbed "Partisan Rock" which has been made into a memorial for the group of kids who had contributed to an American victory in the war. Erica (Lea Thompson) is heard off screen, voicing over the image of "Partisan Rock":

> "In time, this war - like every other war - ended. But I never forgot. And I come to this place often, when no one else does. In the early days of World War 3, guerillas - mostly children - placed the names of their lost upon this rock. They fought here alone and gave up their lives, so that this nation should not perish from the earth."

Red Dawn managed to incorporate an interesting interpretation to the Cold War in that, by symbolically using teenagers as representative of the United States, cast the US as an underdog. The protagonists' succeeded and fought valiantly despite being at a disadvantage compared to their well-equipped communist counterparts. In turn, this sets

[23] Throughout *Red Dawn* the kids refer to themselves as "Wolverines". A reference to their high school mascot.

the framework for many American Cold War films produced during the 1980s in that it depicts "the clash between technology and individual will" (Lipschutz 164). Although during this time the United States had an actual advantage over the Soviets in terms of nuclear and military strength, the film portrays the will for freedom and victory as the driving force behind the characters' actions. In addition, the film draws a clear distinction between *good* and *evil*. At all times within the text of the film, the Soviet-led forces are seen as evil while the American teens are seen as essentially good and righteous. Furthermore, *Red Dawn* is remembered as the first film in history to be dubbed as PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America. Because of this, what was once a very "grown-up" issue (the Cold War) has been reframed to become teen-friendly – further widening its appeal to filmgoers.

Aside from being teen-friendly, the film also draws widely on American history which may be more closely relatable to older audiences. The film's setting and the design of the town is reminiscent to our images of the Old West – a time in our nation's history that is revered in part for its violence and antagonistic nature. Also, as Lipschutz states, the movie draws links between the "struggle for freedom" and America's forefathers (Lipschutz 164). A statue of Theodore Roosevelt is seen early on – a clear allusion to the similarities between the Wolverines and Roosevelt's "Rough Riders". The fact that the Wolverines are later memorialized leads us to believe that, in terms of the America presented in the film, the kids are to become remembered in the lexicon of American history.

In his book *Hollywood's New Radicalism*, Ben Dickenson spends time describing some of the motivating forces behind *Red Dawn's* production. He recalls a story once told by Peter Bart, a former producer at Paramount Pictures. Bart claims that he had once commissioned a film that would follow the psychological traumas experienced by a group of American teenagers that were forced into fighting a war against the Russians. Once Bart had lost creative control of the picture, the film's executive and its new director radically changed the story presented in the original script. The final product proved to be "a cold-war propaganda film in which patriotic, jingoistic children hold off a Soviet invasion" (Dickenson 25-26). While Dickenson's investigations into the film's production may be true, his assessment of the motivations behind these actions is insufficient. He sees these radical changes solely as the result of two Hollywood players' (director and executive) grooming of the film to meet their own ideological beliefs. However, he does not take into consideration the possibilities that such decisions were made in an attempt to broaden the film's audience and optimize its financial success. It must be pointed out that shifts such as these occurred on film following the start of Reagan's demonizing of the Soviet Union and Latin American nations. In addition, Reagan was enjoying high popularity among Americans at the same time such pre-production changes occurred. Again, the movie industry is concerned with one primary objective – making money. What better way to make money, than to maximize your film's appeal across the board – making it as palpable as possible across the board.

Clearly the most financially successful and popular depiction anti-Soviet sentiments in Hollywood came one year later with the release of *Rambo: First Blood Part*

II – a sequel to 1982's *First Blood* (1982, Ted Kotcheff). John Rambo, a former Green Beret and Vietnam veteran, is approached on behalf of the president (assumed to be Reagan because it is contemporaneously insinuated) to infiltrate the Vietnamese prison camp that he had successfully escaped from over a decade earlier to gather reconnaissance on possible surviving POWs – "Americans who have been left behind to suffer and starve because Congress is unwilling to appropriate money for their rescue" (*Hard Bodies* 37).[24] After agreeing to partake in the mission, Rambo is told that he is only to take photos of any survivors – under no circumstance is he to attempt a rescue. Later, Rambo is left for dead by Washington bureaucrats. Through survival instinct and superior will, Rambo succeeds in not only defeating his Soviet and Vietnamese aggressors, but also in rescuing several POWs.

While Dickenson is quick to dismiss the *Rambo* films as nothing more than the chronicles of "a lunatic soldier faced with hordes of non-white enemies and who, somehow, defeats them single-handedly," there is a great deal of political and social commentary at work within the text of these movies. In this section, I will focus on the anti-communist and anti-Soviet overtones which helped make *Rambo II* the second-most highest grossing film of 1985.

Whereas *Red Dawn* employed teenagers to save the day, the second *Rambo* film relied on the more conventional archetype of the American soldier. However, the presence of the Soviet military as the primary villain acts as a mutual antagonistic element between both films. Again, we see Soviet forces perpetuating the violence and

[24] "The President" is first referenced by Trautman (Richard Crenna) in the film's opening scene. Later, a photograph of Ronald Reagan is seen posted behind Murdoch's (Charles Napier) desk.

aggressive nature of the film. In her study of "hard body" imagery in eighties Hollywood, Susan Jeffords explains that a "hard" adversary was needed in order to make American aggression acceptable to audiences – such is satisfied as we see Russian soldiers acting as advisors to the Vietnamese forces (*Hard Bodies* 38). We see this motif in action when the muscular and astonishingly fit Rambo squares off in hand-to-hand combat with the physically imposing Sergeant Yushin (Voyo Goric). Although Rambo is more muscular – sporting six-pack abs and muscular definition – it is the towering Yushin who is cast in the position of strength. This is one of the main themes expressed by Reagan throughout his presidency; during the 1970s, while America's arms production was in a state of stagnation, the Soviets were actively moving ahead with weapon development in hopes of gaining an upper hand in the Cold War conflict. As Jeffords writes, during the "years when American bodies were getting fat and comfortable, Soviet bodies were hardening themselves for the coming battle" (*Hard Bodies* 38). Reagan, through his presidential rhetoric, helped form the image of this formidable and intimidating foe. However, it was Hollywood through the production of films such as *Rambo*, who managed to put a face on Reagan's verbal imagery.

Despite being armed with guns and exploding arrows, Rambo is seen (similarly to the kids of *Red Dawn*) at a great disadvantage militarily. He is one man against hundreds. The survival instincts acquired during Special Forces training prove superior to the Soviets' technological advantage. According to Lipschutz, "Rambo relies on more innate skills than equipment – harking back to Davy Crockett and Natty Bumpo" (Lipschutz 163-64). As a result, Rambo becomes a modern day American folk hero – despite being

fictional. The character, as judged through his massive popularity, becomes a condensation symbol of sorts in which American filmgoers see their government's policies at work – and for some, their personal politics displayed. The similarities seen between Reagan's rhetoric and Rambo's actions make it possible for the masses to associate one with the other. Whereas we heard Ronald Reagan demonize the Soviet Union, we *saw* Rambo taking action against it.

While *Rambo* was 1985's second highest-grossing film, another Sylvester Stallone movie with similar overtones cashed in at third. *Rocky IV* (1985, Sylvester Stallone), the third sequel in the popular *Rocky* franchise, follows Rocky Balboa to the Soviet Union where he is to face the seemingly unstoppable Ivan Drago on Christmas Day. While *Rocky IV* does not include the explosive action presented in the aforementioned movies, it carries with it perhaps the most blatant and explicit examples of Reagan-esque sentiments regarding the Cold War.

Once again, America – represented by both Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers) and Rocky Balboa – is cast as the underdog in opposition with the intimidating and fearless Russian fighter, Ivan Drago (Dolph Lundgren). Drago, a former Olympic champion, takes on Creed in what is intended as an exhibition match. However, the Russian's strength proves overwhelming and tragedy ensues as Creed is pummeled to his death before a sold-out crowd. As a result, Rocky agrees to a fight on the Soviet phenom's home turf.

Several interesting visuals are at work in *Rocky IV*. First, is the presentation of Apollo Creed before his fight with Drago. Creed comes dancing and parading to the ring

draped in red, white, and blue trunks. James Brown (as himself) offers an enthusiastic rendition of "Living in America" as American flags flail throughout the crowd. The giant Russian, stands alone – silent, but aware of all that is going on around him. Following Creed's defeat and ensuing death, a Soviet flag is draped over Drago's shoulders as he provides a post-fight interview. From this scene, it becomes clear that a definitive line has been drawn between East and West.

Rocky leaves the US, opting to train among the winter elements of Russia. Here again, we see the "clash between technology and individual will" that Lipschutz claims is at the core of many Cold War films (Lipschutz 164). As Drago trains in a state-of-the-art fitness facility complete with an indoor track and sleek nautilus machines, Rocky chops wood and runs through several feet of snow to get into fighting shape. We even watch as Drago is administered what appears to be a performance-enhancing drug, intravenously. In short, the message being conveyed to filmgoers once again is, no force is stronger than the old-fashioned American work ethic – especially not anything associated with communism or the Soviet Union.

A mainstay of all *Rocky* films before and since has been the inclusion of the climactic fight at the tail-end of the third act. Fighting in front of a severely partisan crowd, Rocky is viewed once again as the ultimate underdog – a man trying to prove he's more than just another bum from the neighborhood.[25] Above the crowd we see a Gorbachev look-alike surrounded by other men apparently associated with the Soviet government. Those in the crowd are unanimous in their support for Drago. However, as

[25] This is an allusion to one of the more memorable lines from the first film *Rocky* (1976, John G. Avildsen).

Rocky's courage and determination becomes evident over the course of fifteen rounds, so does the Russian crowd's new found respect for the American champion. Chants of *"Drago! Drago!"* soon turn into screams of *"Rocky! Rocky!"*

The film culminates in what is arguably the most memorable of Reagan-esque scenes from the 1980s. After knocking out Drago and avenging the death of his friend, a bloodied Rocky stands in the center of the ring draped in the American flag. The once-partisan Soviet crowd has now risen to their feet, and Drago looks on from his corner. Rocky, who only nine years prior had been seen as nothing more than a "bum" from a Philadelphia neighborhood, now has the whole world listening – especially the Russian people.

> "During this fight, I've seen a lot of changing, in the way you feel about me, and in the way I feel about you. In here, there were two guys killing each other, but I guess that's better than twenty million. I guess what I'm trying to say, is that if I can change, and you can change, everybody can change!"

Rocky's evocation is met with resounding applause from the Russian crowd – including the Gorbachev look-alike from above. While such a cinematic resolve could be dismissed as hokey and sophomoric, Rocky's concluding monologue is highly reflective of Reagan rhetoric. While Reagan continuously approved and advocated for increases to defense spending, he constantly emphasized the need to avoid the use of nuclear arms – knowing that such action would certainly result in casualties of catastrophic proportions. *Rocky IV* unfolds much like Reagan's eight years in office. Anti-Soviet/communist sentiments are communicated throughout as the enemy is cast as intimidating and essentially evil. But in the end, just as with Reagan, the emphasis begins to be placed on co-existence – our

abilities as Superpowers to lay down our weapons and "change" our perceptions of one another.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that cinematic depictions of Communist villains are centralized primarily to Soviet factions – despite ways in which Reagan also emphasized the threat of communist-affiliated forces in Latin America. During his second term in office, Reagan escalated his verbal assault on Communist forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador. In his 1985 State of the Union, President Reagan claims that "the Sandinista dictatorship of Nicaragua . . . not only persecutes its people, the church, and denies a free press, but arms and provides bases for Communist terrorists attacking neighboring states."[26] In terms of El Salvador, "the US Treasury gave $6 billion dollars over 12 years to its chosen side" throughout much of the 1980s (Dickenson 21). The President continued to emphasize the need to provide aid and assistance to the "freedom fighters" who were opposing communism throughout Central America. However, unlike Reagan's stance and policies toward the USSR, this initiative never garnered wide-range support from the American public. Furthermore, as Table 4.B reflects, Hollywood neglected to take Reagan's cues and refrained from greatly increasing its depictions of Central American communism on film the same way it had in regards to the Soviet-type.

[26] Address to the Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union; February 6, 1985

Table 4.B Latin American Communism – Hollywood

Term	*Latin American Enemy (speeches)*	*Latin American Enemy (on film)*
1977-1980	0%	0%
1981-1984	25%	11%
1985-1988	66%	0%

In fact only one film during in the entire sample cast Latin American communism as an antagonistic force, that being *Red Dawn*. As stated previously, *Red Dawn* presents a Soviet-led opposition that includes Nicaraguan and Cuban military forces. Whereas both the Soviets and Latino characters are presented as enemies, the latter is eventually shown in a sympathetic and humane light. The character of Colonel Ernesto Bella (Ron O'Neal) is introduced as a true-believer and advocate for the invading forces. However, as the film progresses, he begins to see the plight of himself and his comrades as similar to America's failures in Vietnam – going as far as to refer to the need to capture the "hearts and minds" of the American people. Later, we see Bella drafting a letter to his family. In it, he writes, "So much is lost . . . There is no more revolution, only you to come back to. I will post my resignation." Unlike his Soviet counterparts, he sees the futility of their mission and grows weary of their objectives. During one of the film's more poignant scenes, Bella comes face-to-face with Jed, who is carrying his severely wounded brother. Bella's gun is drawn as Jed freezes with tears in his eyes. The Colonel refrains from shooting and drops his weapon, allowing the boys to flee.

The aforementioned scene is quite relevant when considering that Reagan's Central American policies, while rhetorically similar to the tone used in describing the USSR, never received strong support from the American public.[27] The Hollywood community was especially critical of this aspect of Reagan ideology. Actors such as Ed Asner, Jr., Elizabeth Montgomery, and Mike Farrell were all vocal critics of the policies set forth by the Reagan Administration regarding Central America (Dickenson 12-14, 27-28). Although *Red Dawn* depicted the Latin American adversaries in a more humanistic light than the Soviet characters, it remains important that they were still cast as enemies in accordance with Reagan philosophy. In the film, they are inflicting an act of aggression on American soil in the name of communist ideals.

Reagan's failure to garner support on the subject of Central American communism is reflected by its lack of incorporation into Hollywood films of the decade. The fact that examples seldom appear reinforce this. As Gould claims regarding the popular, "the idea of popular cultures is conceptually and historically linked to a situation in which popular forms and works and events exist in context of both a relatively complex society and a larger set of cultural issues, practices, and ideologies" (Gould 120). Considering the fact that Reagan's popularity was in no way grounded by any ability to sway Americans on this topic prevents it from becoming a repeated motif in popular films of the 1980s. In fact, films such as *Salvador* (1986, Oliver Stone) and *UnderFire* (1983, Roger Spottiswoode) best articulate the opinions of the American majority regarding this topic. While neither film was particularly successful at the box

[27] See "Framing CONTRA-dictions: Media Framing & Public Opposition to U.S. Foreign Policy in Central America" by Dr. Hector Perla Jr., Ph.D.

office, both were critically acclaimed and managed to depict the events in El Salvador and Nicaragua as different from the ways described by President Reagan. Furthermore, it can be said that, in terms of cinema, it was easier and more accessible to paint the Soviets as evil than it was to do the same to the Central American nations. Americans, by and large, saw the Soviet Union as Reagan did – the clear *evil* to America's *good*. It makes sense then to see that Hollywood took its cue from Reagan's success in selling this belief to the American public. The opposite can be said for the issue of Latin American communism throughout the 1980s.

Anti-Establishment Overtones

Throughout much of the 1960s and 70s, a great segment of American society found itself in opposition with the nation's establishment. The issues of Vietnam, civil rights, and women's liberation fueled millions of conscientious youths to rise up and voice their disapproval with the policies set forth from Washington. While the majority of the anti-establishment movement played out during the Oval Office tenures of President Johnson and Nixon, such sentiments were still being felt throughout the tail-end of the 1970s and into the eighties. This section will examine ways in which such emotions were addressed by Presidents Carter and Reagan and how the anti-establishment motif played out in Hollywood films released during their years in office.

As alluded to earlier in this paper, Jimmy Carter's presidency has been remembered by many for the turbulent domestic and international events that unfolded during his tenure. Having taken the presidency less than two years after the American pullout in Vietnam, Carter was faced with a considerable amount of lingering anti-

establishment sentiment upon entering office. America had not yet recovered from the memories of Vietnam, Cold War tensions were escalating, inflation was hitting record-highs, unemployment was spiraling out of control, and the United States would quickly find itself at odds with the Iranian government. Such events led to the overwhelming malaise felt throughout the nation toward the end of the 1970s. Americans, by and large, felt vulnerable at the hands of the Soviet Union and Iran. Dire conditions felt by many in regard to domestic concerns only exacerbated this "crisis of confidence."

Carter, himself, recognized the growing lack of faith in government and in America's ability to redeem itself on the international stage. In his notorious "Crisis of Confidence" speech, President Carter acknowledges this lack of faith and deems it as a direct threat to the American way of life. He states:

> "The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America."

The speech culminates with Carter's own admission that the people are aware of this problem and that a majority of Americans feel that the next five years will be worse than the previous five. In truth, Carter cannot be held entirely accountable for this crisis of confidence. His administration was not treated with the luxury of time to move past the enduring pains associated with the Vietnam War. However, what is remembered by most is that "in the late 1970s a malaise enveloped the nation's dominant elites. America's confidence was broken . . . Instead of shaping history, the nation let itself be buffeted by events" (*Hard Bodies* 7).

While he incorporated positive rhetoric regarding American morale into many of his speeches, it is his admission of this malaise that he most widely remembered for. Although this may very well have been an attempt at being forthright and honest with the public, it was seen as a sign of weakness, and to some degree, the willingness to accept America's downfall. As Spencer writes, Jimmy Carter gave himself to the American people as "a manager who would never tell a lie" (Spencer 151). However, this apparently was not the type of approach desired by the masses. Rather, they wanted a healer. Somebody who, lying or not, would tell them that all was improving and that better days lay ahead. Judging by the lack of approval felt for the president, the public had not yet been given a reason to once again trust the establishment.

Several motion pictures released during Carter's term in office accurately reflect the anti-establishment sentiments that had consumed the country for several years. At the core of many such films lays the *anti-hero* – a unique type of protagonist who is most often out for his own best interests, who often times blurs the line between right and wrong. The anti-hero archetype appeared regularly in films concerning law enforcement officers, military personnel, and films from the Blaxploitation movement. Films from the latter genre seldom appeared among the highest grossing films of each year, however movies like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971, Melvin Van Peebles) and *Black Caesar* (1973, Larry Cohen) serve as some of the best examples of being able to incorporate anti-establishment ideas into films. These types of films often placed an overwhelming emphasis on issues of racism, poverty, drugs, and police corruption which, in the real world, played a role in America's contempt for the establishment.

Drawing on the coding sample used in this study, *The Gauntlet* is noteworthy in its depiction of a somewhat morally-ambiguous cop's struggle with the corrupt police department out to get him. This film could just as easily fit into one of Clint Eastwood's most noteworthy film series, the *Dirty Harry* franchise, in that the movie's protagonist must venture outside the parameters of the law in order to do what is right. In *The Gauntlet*, Shockley, the alcoholic and violent cop portrayed by Eastwood, is set-up for death as he is transporting a convicted prostitute (Sondra Locke) with mob ties. The underlying theme of the film's text is that the law establishment no longer stands for what is right. Righteousness has been compromised within the police force's ranks. Traditionally, it is perceived that police officers are charged with the duty to protect and serve. Once such a notion is abandoned, a cynicism consumes society and anarchy can ensue. Ultimately, Shockley proves his innocence and good triumphs over evil. But that does not erase that fact that the film presents its main character as the exception to the corrupt rule of the police department.

Perhaps the sampled film which best articulates defiance toward the Washington establishment is 1978's *Coming Home*. Jon Voight portrays Luke, a paralyzed Vietnam veteran haunted by the emotional and psychological toll of Vietnam who struggles to become re-acclimate with life at home. He finds solace in the form of Sally (Jane Fonda), a military wife who volunteers at the VA hospital where Luke stays. The pair rely on each other for emotional support as Luke tries to come to terms with his emotional baggage and Sally copes with the fact that her own husband (Bruce Dern) is serving in Vietnam.

It is made clear throughout the film that Luke's troubled state is the direct result of his involvement in Vietnam. The depictions of his trouble are intended to be a direct assault on the policies set forth by the US government. During the film's climactic monologue, Luke "delivers a guilt-ridden and tearful lament about his personal actions in Vietnam" to a group of high school students ("Debriding Vietnam" 528). He holds little back in voicing the ills of going into war without reason. A large segment of the population, predominately younger America, shares Luke's views on the war and the need to hold the establishment accountable for a war which many feel was unnecessary. Later, I will address other aspects found in the film regarding the experience and portrayal of Vietnam veterans. However at this time, it is important to recognize the aforementioned parallels between the film's anti-establishment commentary and the feelings held by the American public during this period of the late-1970s.

Moving onto Reagan's entrance into the White House, America was still in a place far from regaining its trust in government. While the Iran-Hostage crisis ended the night of Reagan's inauguration, America was still faced with economic crises, unemployment issues, and the Soviet Union's ongoing occupation of Afghanistan. Reagan was seen as a 'hawk' similar to Richard Nixon, but more so as the opposite of Jimmy Carter. Frankly, it can be argued that more than anything else, the fact that Reagan was the anti-Jimmy Carter factored into his victory in the 1980 election. Jeffords draws a stark contrast between the presidential personas of Carter and Reagan. She assesses the conditions present at the onset of the 1980s and America's perception of Carter as follows: [he] "was not 'man enough' to run a superpower nation, the world was in crisis,

a crisis that only a return of the 'physical king' and father could resolve" (*Hard Bodies* 11). With Reagan's defeat of Carter came the re-emergence of patriarchy and the "physical king" which she refers to. She goes on to write that "both Reagan and Hollywood participated in a radical shift away from the attitudes, public policies, and national concerns that characterized the late 1970s and the Carter administration" (*Hard Bodies* 15). In order for this shift to ultimately occur, it was vital for Reagan to make an attempt at disassociating America with the malaise and cynicism that had defined it in most recent years.

Rhetorically, Reagan himself can be described as somewhat of an "anti-establishment figure" in the contempt he regularly articulated in regards to "Big Government." He managed to cast himself as a Washington outsider who shared the in the belief held by the common American that government was contributing to an insufficient quality of life. In his first inaugural address, Reagan speaks bluntly on this issue:

> "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. From time to time we've been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else? All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden."

Here, same as his predecessor, Reagan acknowledges that there is indeed a problem facing the American people. However, rather than accepting it as what it is, he employs proactive language to offer the sense that he plans to do something about it. Reagan's anti-big government rhetoric grows stronger in future speeches and persists throughout his presidency. In his 1986 State of the Union address, Reagan criticizes excessive

spending for "horse-and-buggy programs that waste tax dollars and squander human potential."[28] Moreover, he declares the headway made throughout his five years in Washington citing the creation of 9 million new jobs, 37 consecutive months of economic growth, and an inflation rate that had fallen to just 4% compared to 12% in 1980. He sums up such improvements by dubbing these successes as part of the "great American comeback."

Reagan successfully curbed the ongoing malaise which had contributed to the persistency of sentiments associated with the anti-establishment movements. By claiming that it was "Morning in America", and that America was back, Reagan gave many a reason to once again place trust in the Executive Branch.[29] Even more so, Reagan gave many a reason to once again believe in America and the American dream. What would continue as a mainstay throughout Reagan's experience as a rhetorical leader began in his first inaugural address. Upon taking the Oath of Office, Reagan "we're too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams" and that Americans "have every right to dream heroic dreams." Display the patriarchy that Jeffords describes, Reagan reinstates the notion that America is the greatest of nations, and that the potential of her people is limitless. The eroding confidence that Carter had mentioned just a year-and-a-half before had now been restored and, to many, nothing seemed impossible.

The presence of anti-establishment themes in Hollywood films began to wane early on in the 1980s, however a few examples can be found among some of the era's most popular films. Only three films sampled during Reagan's eight years possessed anti-

[28] Address to the Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union; February 4, 1986
[29] The official campaign slogan for Reagan-Bush '84 was "Morning in America."

establishment themes. It should also be noted that one of the films (*Sudden Impact*) was the fourth installment in the *Dirty Harry* series, and the other two were the first two movies of the *Rambo* trilogy. This is important since *Sudden Impact* is essentially a carry-over from the previous decade, and that the *Rambo* films' anti-establishment tones have often been ignored due to the overwhelming jingoistic overtones that the movies are most often remembered for having.

In *Sudden Impact*, "Dirty" Harry Callahan follows a trail of apparent serial murders. It is later revealed that the murderer is a woman exacting revenge on a group of individuals who raped her a decade earlier. The film re-teams Eastwood with Sandra Locke, who plays the murderer he is chasing, his costar from 1977's *The Gauntlet*. The anti-establishment commentary has been minimized in comparison to the first film of the series which was released in 1971. Here, the only example seen comes early on when Callahan voices his displeasure for the judicial system. A criminal gets off on grounds that "Dirty" Harry did not follow proper protocol in collecting the necessary evidence. The police department then proceeds to place Callahan on leave for this.

In addition to limiting anti-establishment sentiments within the film, Callahan himself appears as somewhat of a caricature of his previous self. In other words, the anti-hero archetype has become watered-down by 1983. While Eastwood's character is still portrayed as a loner at odds with the system, the films plot constricts his ability to exemplify substantial anti-hero characteristics. Rather, the film divides the majority of its time between the murderer's quest for revenge and Callahan's pursuit of her. As further proof of this attempt at making "Dirty" Harry more palpable to America in the 1980's,

the film's most popular line – "Go ahead. Make my day" – would later be used by Reagan in expressing "his veto challenge to a congressional tax increase" (*Hard Bodies* 4).[30] While Reagan's incorporation of the movie's famous line is an example of the president taking a cue from Hollywood, it also signifies that the beliefs of Reagan, and likely those who approved of his action, were essentially along the same lines as the themes being presented in Hollywood at this time. Similar instances of co-existence between Hollywood and the Washington establishment were not apparent during Carter's four years in office.

In *First Blood* (1982, Ted Kotcheff), we see Rambo squaring off against an Oregon Sheriff's department and members of the National Guard. Although the final two films of the franchise were loaded with anti-communist, anti-Soviet, and pro-American themes, the first installment serves as a 90-minute commentary on the wrongs perpetuated by the establishment toward returning Vietnam vets. While the next section of this thesis will venture more in-depth into the depiction of the Vietnam veteran, the following analysis will aim to address the presence of the establishment as enemy within the film.

While quietly passing through the town of Hope, Oregon, Rambo is stopped by Sheriff Will Teasle (Brian Dennehy). Teasle insists that Rambo's kind (perceived as vagrants) are not welcome in the town, and he provides the loner with an unwanted and unneeded ride to the edge of town. The Sheriff's distain for the film's protagonist is best summed up when he advises him to, "get a haircut and take a bath" so that he wouldn't

[30] In a speech given on March 13, 1985, Reagan is quoted as saying, "I have only one thing to say to the tax increasers. Go ahead. Make my day."

"get hassled so much." As Jeffords notes, "The sheriff's animosity is focused solely on how Rambo's body looks and smells" (*Hard Bodies* 31). As Teasle drives off, watches as Rambo turns around and begins walking back toward the town – he proceeds to arrest him. At the station, the other deputy's aggressively handle Rambo; their actions cause Rambo to flashback to the horrors he had experience as a prisoner of war during Vietnam. The antagonists' actions force Rambo to escape from the station and head into the woods, attempting to make his way away from the town. Led by Teasle, the officers venture into the woods after him in a futile attempt to apprehend a man guilty of no real crime. The remainder of the film depicts a violent struggle between Rambo and the establishment that aims to capture him.

Based on Rambo's appearance, Teasle essentially views the film's protagonist in a light similar to the way in which members of the previous era's counter-culture movement were viewed by the establishment. The long-haired and unshaven Rambo is seen wearing an Army jacket, complete with American flags sewn onto the fabric – visually similar to the images of returning Vietnam vets who actively protested and marched in defiance of the war they had returned from. Not until later in the film are the officers made aware of Rambo's exemplary service in the United States Army. This does little to sway Teasle as he seeks to bring Rambo to justice, viewing him as responsible for injuries sustained by several deputies.

The core of the film's anti-establishment overtones lies in its articulation of Rambo's inability to find peace at home. Whereas he was part of a violent struggle between nations during Vietnam, he has come home only to be thrust into a battle with

members of the same establishment upon whose behalf he willingly fought a war for. As he declares to his former commanding officer, Trautman, Rambo was once entrusted with handling state-of-the-art military equipment and is now unable to hold a job at a car wash. This was similar to the experiences of thousand of Vietnam vets returning from the war that added to the disdain toward government felt by many Americans at the close of the 1970s. Also, similar to the way in which men were sent to fight in Vietnam, Rambo was forced into the film's conflict not by choice, but by the instigations of the establishment. As previously stated, Rambo was simply passing by. At no time prior to his escape from arrest do we see Rambo engaging in any sort of behavior which would have instigated the way in which he would later be treated. Rather, Rambo again is begin forced to act in a way that otherwise would be against his will. The way by which characters representing the establishment act in *First Blood* clearly illustrate them as an enemy to the pursuit of happiness.

Finally, the movie's climax touches on the ways in which the establishment created something that they are no longer able to control. Hunched over and crying, Rambo recalls the horrific memories he still carries with him from his days in Vietnam. He had been conditioned by the military to think and act in a certain way; to be able to rely solely on survival instincts in order to reach an objective. Rambo expresses "confusion over his inability to adjust to life after the war" in stating that "you don't just turn it off" ("Debriding Vietnam" 531). Rambo, like Luke in *Coming Home*, is engaged in a constant struggle to once again become acclimated with the ways of society. Both characters have been abandoned by the system which had once embraced them. They left

to serve as American sons, only to return, in some degree, as strangers. Also, Rambo's comments appear to subvert the presence of the hard body persona.

Anti-establishment tones are seen in the second *Rambo* film in the form of a Washington bureaucrat, Murdock, charged with overseeing the reconnaissance mission Rambo has been recruited to take part in. Despite Rambo's involvement per the request of the President (again, alluded to being Reagan), Murdock calls the shots as the film's hero is dropped behind enemy lines. It is Murdock who instructs his aerial team to abort the extraction mission that would bring Rambo back to base. Murdock, and those serving in positions similar to his, is viewed as responsible for the mistreatment of Rambo. Moreover, Murdock's bureaucratic persona is cast into greater negative light during a heated exchange where Trautman rehashes the wrongdoings of government officials toward the end of the Vietnam War. Trautman accuses Murdock and the establishment of reneging on their promise to pay the Viet Cong four-and-a-half billion dollars in war reparations. Their failure to pay resulted in the Vietnamese keeping American soldiers in captivity. Whereas Trautman emphasizes that cost and time should not be a factor in rescuing POWs, Murdock fails to see his point – claiming that what's done is done.

The movie's depiction of bureaucrats closely identifies with Reagan's holding that "government is the problem." At no time within the film's text is any blame placed on the president or his policies. As far as Rambo, Trautman, and the referenced President are concerned, the mission was intended to be the next step at recovering soldiers still being held in captivity. Reagan, and his policies, appears to be saved from any critical critique set forth by the filmmakers. Further, none of the anti-establishment

commentaries found in any of these films can be held as reflective of actions taken by the Reagan Administration; whereas *Sudden Impact* is the continuation of a character first seen during the tumultuous days of the early 1970s, and that the Rambo character was conceptualized, in terms of films, during the very early days of Reagan's presidency.[31] On the other hand, the fact that the first sequel in the *Rambo* franchise was released four years into the Reagan presidency, we can see how the aforementioned anti-big government rhetoric used by Reagan was incorporated into the film. Reagan's popularity and rhetorical effectiveness enabled *Rambo: First Blood Part II* to transform the typical anti-establishment film into a binary of anti-establishment motifs set against a strong measure of patriotic and pro-American themes.

As Dickenson accurately notes, more traditional anti-establishment films, though sparse, did appear during the 1980s. As previously mentioned, this was often seen in films that took on the subject of American policies toward Central America. However, Dickenson points to another film that directly engages Reagan's economic policies and the phenomenon known as the "Reagan Revolution."

Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987) was not among the top-twenty highest grossing films of 1987, however it did make a very profitable 43.8-million dollars at the domestic box office and earned Michael Douglas a Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of corporate tycoon, Gordon Gekko. In it, the ambitious broker Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) climbs Wall Street's ladder of power by dealing with Douglas' Gekko. Throughout the film, "turns ordinary Americans into victims by buying up companies on the stock exchange and

[31] It is important that the film series is adapted from a 1972 book of the same title, written by David Morrell. The book's story is the basis for the first film in the series.

laying off their employees, to make a quick profit" (Dickenson 3). The film, in its entirety, serves as screenwriter Stone's interpretation of the events which unfolded as part of the "economic recovery" seen during Reagan's tenure in office.

While the film is extremely critical of Reagan policies and American greed, the film's popularity can be seen as adverse of Stone's original intention. Dickenson writes that "in Gekko, Oliver Stone created an iconic representation of what he thought was wrong with 1980s America" (Dickenson 11). Further, "Gekko is charismatic, with a glint in his eye and a rasping chuckle" (Dickenson 11). Despite his evil deeds, Gekko's charm and style make him quite likable. The masses who glorified the "Reagan Revolution" likely did not bother to see past the surface qualities of this character. *Wall Street* was seen as a hip and stylistic film by many, rather than a horrific narrative similar to Stone's Oscar-winning *Platoon* (1987). The line used in Stone's screenplay to sum up the Reagan economic platform is that "greed is good" – spoken by Douglas' character. Recognizing the popularity of Reagan and the economic recovery he claimed to have played a hand in, it can be held that Gekko's assessment of greed was not necessarily accepted as it was intended by Stone.

As compared to the anti-establishment tones set forth by the young Hollywood mavericks throughout the 1970s, the 1980s brought with it "a far more difficult time for Hollywood progressives (Dickenson 11). As Dickenson summates, "the 1980s was . . . a decade dominated by right-wing pictures but a decade in which these could be released side-by-side with a handful of cinematic critiques of American society" (Dickenson 25). While Dickenson's statement is true, I reiterate the fact that such critiques failed to gain

the same degree of popularity as many of the so-called "right-wing pictures" which were released alongside them. The fact that filmgoers chose such films over more thought-provoking pictures is a testament to the effectiveness of Reagan's rhetoric and oratory. Seeing that such shifts in film followed similar shifts seen in presidential rhetoric of the time, it appears that Hollywood may have taken a cue from Reagan's speeches in its decision to move away from more critical commentary narratives, in favor of the more popular pro-establishment / government / Reagan pictures of the 1980s.

The American Soldier and Revisiting Vietnam

The ongoing debate and outcry over the Vietnam War had consumed much of the nation throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. As a cornerstone of the anti-establishment movement, American involvement in the war divided much of the nation and dominated the nightly news for over a decade. Despite taking place thousands of miles away, "the war was in many ways also fought at home" as "the nation became more highly divided than at any time since the Civil War" (Slocum-Schaffer 209). Although the Fall of Saigon in 1975 signaled the American pullout from Vietnam, the war and its fallout continue to be felt throughout the remainder of the seventies into the 1980s.

Elected in the year following the end of American involvement, Jimmy Carter, unlike his predecessors, was not forced with managing an inherited war. However, the living conditions of returning veterans were an issue the 39th President was forced to deal with. The Carter Administration was faced with the task of answering questions that circled around questionable tactics used by previous administrations while fighting the

war. The declining health seen in the lives of Vietnam veterans called into question the usage of Agent Orange in combating the Vietnamese. The outcry by veterans, families, and anti-war voices culminated in 1979 when "a class action lawsuit was brought against five chemical manufacturers of Agent Orange" (Slocum-Schaffer 208). Although the suit was settled out of court for the sum of $180 million, the wide-attention shed on the issue only strengthen the disdain toward the war and the government that had been in existence for more than a decade.

Another stigma felt in the immediate years following the war was the issue of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that inflicted many of America's servicemen. This syndrome is "characterized by feeling of deep depression often alternating with uncontrollable rage, intolerable flashbacks, and severe insomnia" (Slocum-Schaffer 209). While similar conditions had been experienced by veterans of previous wars, never before did the issue receive so much national attention, nor did it ever before have an effect on such a high population of veterans. In addition to being burdened by the memories of combat, returning soldiers were also forced to phase hefty criticisms from select segments of the population who transferred their disgust over the war toward them – at times "calling them 'baby-killers' and 'drug addicts'" (Slocum-Shaffer 208). While such sentiments were not felt by all who had opposed the war, the presence of the emotions toward the troops helped to further prolong the divisions felt throughout the United States in the late-1970s.

The presence of post-traumatic stress disorder in the lives of Vietnam veterans often times led to further difficulties in their attempts to readjust to domestic life. Jeffords

recounts that in the years following the war's conclusion, "many veterans suffered loss of employment and education, physical handicaps, dissolution of families", as well as the aforementioned emotional toll the war had on these men ("Debriding Vietnam" 533). Unlike the soldiers returning from World War II who were welcomed back to the factory jobs they had left behind to fight on their country's behalf, Vietnam vets had great difficulty finding steady employment. Their struggles to acclimate to American life were further escalated by the fact they had not succeeded – the war had been lost. Whether the war had been lost by the soldiers themselves, or by tactical errors made by military and government elites, the fact of the matter is that "the soldiers returned home not in victory but in defeat, and not to appreciative parades but to a public that had grown bitter and cynical about the war" (Slocum-Shaffer 208).

Turning to presidential rhetoric used at the time, it is important to note that President Carter made no mention of the Vietnam Conflict during any of his major presidential addresses. This is not to say that Carter was unsympathetic toward the Vietnam vets. In fact, the President declared the week of May 28 thru June 3, 1979 to be Vietnam Veterans' Week throughout the nation ("Debriding Vietnam" 532). However, it is uncertain what his motives were in not addressing such a probing issue during his State of the Union, inaugural, or farewell Addresses. Perhaps, President Carter recognized how disastrous the war had been in terms of his predecessors' legacies and opted not to look back in hindsight at such a divisive issue in our nation's history. While no explicit mention of the Vietnam War was made during these speeches, the President did address topics concerning unemployment – which was a pressing issue for returning soldiers.

However, again, Carter made no attempt to connect this topic to the subject of returning Vietnam vets in the United States. In addition, Carter also recognized the existing hostility toward the federal government, again neglecting to tie one to the other. In his inaugural address he states his hope that by the end of his presidency he would have "enabled our people to be proud of their own Government once again."[32]

President Carter's neglect in invoking the events and sentiments regarding the Vietnam War can be perceived as reflexive of the American people's desire to forget about the defeat in Vietnam. The tail-end of the 1970s marked the beginning of a healing process that would extend well into the next decade. The films released during this time also reflected the negative attitudes felt toward the war in that they were at times critical of the government's handling of the war and treatment of veterans. Further, the three films (*Coming Home*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now*) sampled from the period between 1977 and 1980 which displayed depictions of Vietnam all possessed varying illustrations of the psychological traumas experienced by those who had fought. While *Apocalypse Now* uses Vietnam as a backdrop to the general psychological horrors of war, instead I will focus on *Coming Home* and *The Deer Hunter* whose narratives are more closely specific to the Vietnam experience.

As mentioned in a previous section, *Coming Home* served as a quintessential example of the Vietnam film released during this era. In addition to its clear anti-establishment narrative, the film emphasizes the psychological torment felt by its protagonist. Suffering from paralysis and seemingly alone in the world, the film opens with Luke being treated in a sub-sufficient VA hospital. Early on the audience is exposed

[32] Inaugural Address; January 20, 1977

to the mistreatment of the patients and the adversarial relationship between staff and veterans. In other words, the hospital's staff appears to be both unequipped and somewhat unqualified to deal with the needs of the vets. This tense relationship is exacerbated by Luke's apparent alcoholism which makes him even more cantankerous toward those around him. However, the sub-par conditions of the hospital are vital in the way director Hal Ashby presents his critique of life after war. Most striking is Luke's need for a wheelchair. Although he later receives the proper means for transportation, Luke is first seen laying flat on a gurney, struggling to push forward with the aid of a pair of crutches. The films harrowing illustration of the VA hospital did nothing short of reinforcing the notion of the government's ongoing mistreatment of returning vets.

As previously mentioned, Luke finds peace in the form of Sally who assists in easing the pains he has brought home with him from the war. The opposite can be said for the character of Bill (Robert Caradine), a fellow vet staying at the VA hospital. Though Bill is seen only sparingly throughout the first two acts of the film, he is portrayed as severely troubled – more so than Luke. Whereas Luke is able to find comfort in his newfound relationship, Bill fails to find peace and eventually succumbs to his psychological crises and kills himself. Suicide was not uncommon for the Vietnam vet following the war. In her research, Stephanie Slocum-Shaffer found that "some figures suggest that more Vietnam veterans have committed suicide since the war than died in it" (Slocum-Shaffer 209).[33] Bill's ultimate fate is reflective of the point made by Slocum-Shaffer regarding a high number of veteran suicides following their tours of duty.

[33] Despite addressing the existence of such "figures", Slocum-Shaffer offers no definitive evidence or statistics supporting this claim.

Sally's officer husband, Captain Bob Hyde (Bruce Dern) is introduced as the stereotypical military man – gung-ho and hell-bent to serve his nation. Whereas Luke oozes with vulnerability and weakness, Bob Hyde appears stern and seemingly emotionless at first. However, as his time in Vietnam goes on, so does a growing degree of emotional unrest. As Sally probes her husband for details about the war, he voices his reluctance to recall the events. Upon returning from Vietnam, Bob immediately proceeds to get drunk – falling asleep with a loaded gun in his hand. The film culminates when Bob confronts Luke and Sally about their affair. Increasingly unstable and conflicted, Bob holds the pair at gunpoint, using a loaded rifle and bayonet. During this central scene Bob himself appears to wander into some degree of a flashback in that he refers to his wife as a "slope" and to Luke as a "Jody".[34] This is a direct allusion to the post-traumatic experiences felt by many in American society.

In another striking scene, Luke chains himself and his wheelchair to the gate of a Marine Corps recruitment office. He is arrested and goes on to claim that his actions were intended "to stop any others from going to Vietnam", adding that there are "enough ways to commit suicide at home." Judging by his actions and comments in this seen, Luke sees Vietnam as nothing more than a means to death. His experiences and emotional traumas have reached the point where any good intentions he may have had for fighting in the war have been washed away. In other words, for Luke, no good has nor will come from American involvement in Vietnam.

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[34] *Slope* is a derogatory term of racial nature used to describe people of Asian origin. The term *Jody* is used throughout the American military as a reference to one living a luxurious civilian life, rather than the hardship of military existence.

The Deer Hunter, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1978, offers audiences with a similar analysis of the experiences faced by veterans returning from the war. The film follows the lives of three Pennsylvania steel workers who go off to fight in Vietnam. The movie offers a look at how each are affected by the war, as well as the toll it takes on those they leave behind at home. Scenes of joy and happiness are peppered throughout the first act as the character's attend the wedding of Steve (John Savage), which doubles as a sending off party for him and his two friends Mike (Robert DeNiro) and Nick (Christopher Walken). All three men appear pleased with the prospect of going off to fight on behalf of the United States. However, joy quickly turns to heart-ache and psychological trauma when the film's second act opens against the backdrop of Vietnam. Amid a military skirmish, Steve and Nick are reacquainted with Mike, who now appears more hardened as result of the war. Mike, the protagonist who is referred to by the film's title, and his buddies are captured by Vietnamese soldiers and placed in a makeshift prison camp.

It is during their captivity that we see the most explicit and disturbing image of Vietnam that is offered by the films of this era. The three men, along with other prisoners, are forced into partaking in a game of Russian roulette. The friends are held in a water pit below a hut. Their fear of inevitable death grows as the game's *losers* are tossed into the water. While Mike and Nick appear rather calm as they discuss possible strategies, Steve continues to lose control more and more – becoming frantic. When it is his turn, Mike devises a risky plan which entails the request for more bullets in the gun. Here, Mike succeeds in killing his captors, making an escape possible. The scene is tense

in its depiction of torture and death. The director, Michael Cimino, succeeds illustrating for filmgoers the horrific nature of war. In addition, the scene offers a direct look into the type of inciting incident which may lead a soldier to later experience post-war traumas.

Although all three men escape death at the hands of the Vietnamese, they are separated. We see as Mike returns home, Nick remains in Vietnam, and Steve is admitted into a VA Hospital not unlike the one seen in *Coming Home*. It is Mike's later quest to reconnect with his buddies which drives the narrative's commentary regarding the post-war experiences of the Vietnam vet. Although he manages to eventually reacquaint himself with the men and women he left back in Pennsylvania, Mike is reluctant to become acclimated with civilian life. This is seen most clearly when he avoids a welcoming party in his hometown. While back home, Mike learns that Steve's wife (Rutanya Alda) is bedridden with grief as a result of her husband's unwillingness to talk to her following the war. Mike travels to sees Steve and finds his friend in a wheelchair, having had both legs amputated. Although he convinces his friend to return home to his wife, Mike learns that Nick is still in Saigon.

Mike succeeds in finding Nick; however his one-time hunting buddy now appears to be a shell of himself. Of the three friends, Nick has felt the heaviest psychological toll. His experience in the prison camp has led him into Saigon's back alleys, taking part in illegal high-stakes games of Russian roulette. Despite his pleas, Mike is unable to get through to Nick, who acts as if they have never met. The tension escalates as Mike, making one last attempt to get through to his friend, sits down across from Nick for a match of the deadly game. As Mike continues to plead, he begins to make ground – Nick

starts to remember, as he fights back tears. However, the war has taken its toll on Mike's friend; Nick picks up the weapon, presses it against his temple, and ends his life. This action and the downward spiral that Nick goes through, is reminiscent of the suicidal aspect of post-war experiences. Nick, like Bill in *Coming Home*, succumbs to life after war. However, unlike with the case of Bill, we get to see Nick as he was before being sent to war. In the film's first act he is seen as laughing and jovial – a far contrast to his later mood. *The Deer Hunter* further exemplifies the overwhelming cynicism and displeasure aimed toward the memories associated with the Vietnam War in the late-1970s.

Several of the soldier characters depicted in both *Coming Home* and *The Deer Hunter* identify with Jeffords' critique of the "soft bodies" found in films of the era. Jeffords holds that the soft body correlated with the attitudes felt throughout Carter's presidency. She notes that during this time "strength and preparedness were, according to Reagan historians, abandoned in favor of negotiation and capitulation" (*Hard Bodies* 32). The central characteristic of what Jeffords describes as the perceived soft body, both on film and in real life, is apparent weakness. The author cites Roger Rosenblatt's assessment of Jimmy Carter's presidency to aid in articulating the root of the soft body in the 1970s, and how it had an affect on American sentiment and morale: "[Carter] made Americans feel two things they are not used to feeling, and will not abide. He made them feel puny and he made them feel insecure" (*Hard Bodies* 26).

The feelings that Rosenblatt presumes Carter instilled in Americans are interpreted by both of these films regarding Vietnam. All three of the central veterans depicted in

Coming Home, as well the Steve and Nick characters of *The Deer Hunter*, eventually gain a sense that they are lost in the world. At one time or another, each are depicted as solitary and closed off to the rest of society. In addition, the characters of Bill and Nick both tragically succumb to their demons – unable to overcome the odds, as would be expected from a "hard body". While the protagonists of Luke and Mike ultimately survive the films' narrations, they too are both left changed and softened by their films' ends. We see this in the closing moments of *Coming Home* when Luke renounces his actions in the war in front of a high school audience. In the case of Mike in *The Deer Hunter*, a once-proficient hunter and gamesman, he is unable to bring himself to shooting a buck he has a clear aim on during a post-war hunting trip. While it can be argued that both characters have been changed for the better, what is important to realize is that their new-found humanity and personas classify them as soft bodies by the standards articulated by Susan Jeffords.

As America moved further into the 1980s, its sentiments regarding Vietnam and the American military began to take a different shape. Whereas views of the US military during the 1970s were shaped by its defeat in Vietnam, the eighties were seen by many as a rebirth of military strength. Increases in defense spending in response to the persistent tensions of the Cold War were accompanied by the return of pride in the American military that was articulated through the rhetoric used throughout Reagan's presidency. While Carter managed to distance the issue of Vietnam from his major presidential speeches, Reagan wasted no time in addressing the issue, as seen during his first inaugural address in early 1981. Here, Reagan mentioned "the jungles of a place called

Vietnam" alongside places like Omaha Beach, Guadalcanal, and Pork Chop Hill where heroes had fallen to pay the price of freedom. Reagan went on to make further references to the Vietnam War in two more of his major presidential addresses.

Reagan took time in additional speeches to further emphasize the notion of Vietnam veterans as military heroes not unlike those who had fought in the nation's previous wars. Perhaps the most significant rhetorical comments on the Vietnam vets as heroes came during a 1984 address delivered at Arlington National cemetery to honor an unknown soldier who had died in the war. Here, Reagan further cements his recollection of the war as different from the views the rest of America had of it during and following its events. On this day, the President described the veterans as men "who were never welcomed home with speeches and bands, but who were never defeated in battle and were heroes as surely as any who have ever fought in a noble cause".[35] It is also important to note that Reagan acknowledged the actions of the government as responsible for the war – not the soldiers themselves. He states, "we've learned that government owes the people an explanation and needs their support for its actions at home and abroad."

Reagan's ability to delineate between the soldiers and government officials aids in placing a new spin on the events of the war. After all, many of those who had served in Vietnam did so without choice, and without supporting governmental policy. This aspect of Reagan rhetoric identifies with Jeffords' holding that the American public began to view the Vietnam veterans with a growing degree of sympathy as years passed following the war. During this period, the failures of the American effort in Vietnam were more often seen as the result of actions taken by the bureaucrats and politicians serving in

[35] Address Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict; May 28, 1984

Washington at the time rather than the soldiers who had fought. Jeffords assesses that this change in sentiment allowed for the veterans to become disassociated with the notions "that they were simply not good soldiers, that they became lazy, or that they abandoned the project of winning 'hearts and minds';" and to have such an illustration be replaced by the idea that it was another body (US government) whose actions prevented an American victory ("Debriding Vietnam" 525-26). Further, Jeffords claims that Reagan's remarks on Vietnam, specifically those spoken at the commemoration of the Unknown Soldier, aided the President in rework[ing] history in order to produce . . . happy 'present' he desired" (*Hard Bodies* 73). Although the American campaign in Vietnam had not occurred under his watch, Reagan made it clear to the American public that the events and fallouts which were its end result remained a very important topic in his vision of American life in the 1980s.

In addition to the revisionist take on Vietnam, Reagan also made references to the war as a tool in better communicating the conditions of the Cold War as they were during the 1980s. This is seen in the text of a nationally televised prime-time address in February of 1986 on the topic of national security. Reagan states the following: "In the 1970's one strategic country after another fell under the domination of the Soviet Union. The fall of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam gave the Soviet Union a strategic position on the South China Sea."[36] Reagan's comments not only remind the public of the events of decades before, but also hold them as relevant to what was current at the time. For the President Vietnam was not simply a failure in foreign policy, but more importantly a victory for the Soviet Union and communism.

[36] Address to the Nation on National Security; February 26, 1986.

In Reagan's eyes, the looming threat of the Cold War placed a high value on the presence of a reliable military force. Reagan helped to reconstruct the image of the American military to a broader extent by emphasizing a new found pride in those who serve in the Armed Forces. This was seen only a year into his presidency at the State of the Union, when Reagan declared that, "together we've begun to restore that margin of military safety that ensures peace. Our country's uniform is being worn once again with pride." He went on to claim that this restoration of pride had aided the nation in setting course for a "new beginning." The notions of pride in the military and new beginnings would become a mainstay throughout the catalogue of speeches given by Reagan during his time in Washington. Specifically, the emphasis on a renewed and stronger American military appears most frequently in the major addresses given during his first term from 1981 to early 1985. This is further supported the following year when Reagan states the following:

> "As we begin our third year, we have put in place a defense program that redeems the neglect of the past decade. We have developed a realistic military strategy to deter threats to peace and to protect freedom if deterrence fails. Our Armed Forces are finally properly paid; after years of neglect are well trained and becoming better equipped and supplied. And the American uniform is once again worn with pride."[37]

Here, Reagan insinuates that in prior years the government had neglected to take care of its men and women in uniform. This is significant in that it further distances the President from his predecessors, in an attempt to place himself in the position of a Commander-in-Chief who genuinely cares for those who serve. In addition, Reagan declares his intention

[37] Address to the Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union; January 25, 1983

of maintaining peace through a strong front – in other words, a *peace through strength*.[38] In all, comments made by Reagan throughout his presidency continuously evoked a clear purpose for military strength, as well as a high regard for those who served.

Whereas presidential rhetoric regarding the US military and Vietnam shifted in tone from the Carter years to the Reagan era, a correlative change was seen in Hollywood during first half of the 1980s. More often than in the previous decade, soldier characters were viewed as heroes fighting on behalf of a righteous and necessary cause. While some of these films carried with them miniscule hints and references to prior anti-establishment and anti-war themes, the majority possessed pro-US and pro-military overtones. In addition, revisionist films regarding the Vietnam War began to be seen as early as 1983. Films of this nature often saw veterans being sent back into Vietnam to once again fight Vietnamese and communist forces. Such revisionist films provided American audiences the chance to relive the events of Vietnam on a different term – specifically, this allowed the American entity to prevail victorious. Jeffords views such revisionist films as necessary for re-establishing the superiority of traditional American prowess. She writes:

> "If Hollywood masculinity was going to construct a character who was superior in internal if not external strength to his foreign counterparts, then one source for that redemption was to return to the place where masculine integrity, ethics and strength were presumably lost – the Vietnam War" (*Hard Bodies* 118).

The following section will analyze the narratives of these films in attempt to show how they correlate with the messages and motifs articulated by Ronald Reagan.

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[38] "Peace through Strength" was a term used by the President throughout his time in office. It was intended to articulate the belief that America's greatest hope for peace was through the presence of a strengthened military advantage.

Depictions of Vietnam veterans during the first few years of the 1980s were somewhat similar to those seen at the end of the 1970s. Although not quite as explicit as in *Coming Home* and *The Deer Hunter*, the psychological traumas of those returning from the war were often emphasized in films depicting vets. For example, at multiple times in *Blue Thunder*, the protagonist becomes haunted by flashbacks of his time as a helicopter pilot during the war. Further, as previously mentioned, the character of John Rambo in *First Blood* also experiences flashbacks of being tortured as a POW, while he is being booked at a local police station. Cinematic motifs such as these which were regularly associated with the experiences of Vietnam veterans begin to wane as the nation ventured further into the 1980s, and as Reagan's rhetoric regarding the war and the nation's military became more constant.

In December of 1983, nearly three years after Reagan's inauguration as President, the first notable example of Vietnam revisionism appeared out of Hollywood in the form of *Uncommon Valor*. Here, Col. Cal Rhodes (Gene Hackman) devises a scheme to re-enter Vietnam to rescue his son who was captured during the war. Rhodes reassembles the surviving members of his son's team to aid him in the rescue mission. While the idea is initially met with varying degrees of reluctance by the group of vets, all eventually agree to assist in the effort. Although the film managed to fairly-well financially at the box office, it failed to become one of the twenty highest grossing films of 1983. Silmilarly, the following year saw the release of *Missing in Action* (1984, Joseph Zito). Braddock (Chuck Norris), a former POW, ventures back to Vietnam in search of captured military personnel who he believes were left behind by the US government. Like

Uncommon Valor, *Missing in Action* failed to become one of the highest-grossing films of the year. However, the movie managed to make enough money to spawn to sequels and become a cult franchise.

While not part of the coding sample used in this thesis project, the aforementioned films are important in that they created the cinematic formula for other revisionist films of the era. In addition, both films make attempts at directly engaging a subject matter that was frowned upon in recent years, and transforming it into a jingoistic narrative which incorporates pro-US themes. In both films, the protagonists' actions are viewed as noble and right. As Col. Rhodes expounds in *Uncommon Valor*, "this time nobody can dispute the rightness of what we're doing." Whereas the depictions of Vietnam vets in films of the previous era were characterized by the presence of regret and psychological crises, we see shift beginning to occur. Now, the films' heroes are allowed to feel proud about their actions. Unlike the disillusioned characters of previous films, these men are comforted with the belief that their actions carry purpose.

The revisionist movement culminates in 1985 with the release of *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. Here, not only do we see the most financially successful revisionist film, but also the quintessential depiction of the era's *hard body*. As Jeffords notes, "taken in order, the *Rambo* films narrate the production of the hard body during the Reagan years" (*Hard Bodies* 28). From 1982 to 1988, three *Rambo* films were released in American theaters. Through the course of the franchise, viewers watch as John Rambo evolves from a tormented and subdued Vietnam vet into an ultra-violent tool for fighting American campaigns abroad.

Whereas Vietnam references contained in *First Blood* were similar to those made in films like *Coming Home* and *Deer Hunter* in that they focused mainly on the loss and crises concerning those who had fought, the second *Rambo* film suppresses such motifs and redirects responsibility for the loss of the war to the bureaucrats and officials who had orchestrated it. Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser interpret this aspect of the film as follows: "By implicating American policy and government bureaucracy in past defeat . . . the film exonerates the regular soldier from culpability in American defeat" (Studlar and Desser 13). Such a shift by point in the decade correlates with Reagan's vehement emphasis that the military's failures were not the result of soldiers lacking in courage or bravery. Moreover, the fact that the negative aspects of war which had been articulated in previous Vietnam movies is suppressed in favor of more jingoistic themes involving senses of duty and honor, signal that Hollywood had taken a cue from Reagan's evocations that America's military uniform was once again being worn with pride. What makes the presence of such "pride" possible in a film like *Rambo* is that the protagonist is placed in a situation where his actions are viewed as necessary and right.

By being sent back to Vietnam under the assumption he is to rescue remaining POWs, Rambo is given the ability to rewrite the end of the Vietnam War. When he is first asked to aid on the rescue/reconnaissance mission, Rambo looks at his mentor (Col. Trautman) and softly asks, "Do we get to win this time?" Rambo's statement in the opening minutes allows the audience to realize that the remainder of the film will be devoted to answering this question – that for the next two hours, an event that has gone down as a black-eye in America's history may actually be redeemed.

The fantastical element of the film, as well as similar movies released before it, is the cornerstone of the revisionist movement of the 1980s. Studlar and Desser point out that "the mass media, including cinema and television, have proven to be important mechanisms whereby this rewriting – this re-imaging – of the past can occur" (Studlar and Desser 10). However in order for outrageous storylines, such as the one found in the second *Rambo* film, to be embraced, something must first occur in which these ideologies can be transformed into relatable material for audiences. It should be viewed that Reagan's consistent reiteration of military strength and pride aided in making such scenarios and themes more palatable for American audiences. Through his speeches, Reagan made several attempts at communicating the idea that American forces were growing stronger each day. By placing an unwavering emphasis on such an idea throughout his first term, it is reasonable to conclude that Reagan was successful in assuring Americans that the military of the 1980s was stronger and better led than the one that had failed during the Vietnam era.

The film's conclusion tends to hearken back to concerns addressed by Luke at the end of *Coming Home*. Luke's speech before the high school assembly emphasizes the hells of war – the regret, traumas, and emotional scarring that comes with serving in a combat scenario. In addition, Luke's earlier protest at the recruitment center indicates that he feels the nation, specifically the military, has blood on their hands. It is clear that he possesses animosity toward his country as result of taking part in, what he views as, an unnecessary war. In contrast, John Rambo's final words to Col. Trautman at the close of *Rambo* signifies an effort to make clear that the protagonist does not hold any ill will

toward the nation he apparently loves, but rather to the opinions of those who hold Vietnam veterans responsible for the events of the war.

> Trautman: You get a second medal of honor for this.
> (Rambo looks toward the rescued POWs)
> Rambo: You should give it to them. They deserve it more.
> Trautman: You don't belong here. Why don't you come back with me?
> Rambo: Back to what? My friends died here, let me die here.
> Trautman: The war . . . the whole conflict may have been wrong. But damn it, don't hate your country for it.
> Rambo: Hate? I'd die for it.
> Trautman: Then what is it you want?
> Rambo: I want . . . what they want . . . and every other guy who came over here and spilled his guts and gave everything he had, wants! For our country to love us, as much as we love it! That's what I want.

Unlike the emphases found in Luke's speech, Rambo's speech is grounded in duty, honor, camaraderie, and sacrifice. Luke and Rambo are the same in that neither possesses any personal desire for medals or commendation, but unlike his cinematic counterpart, Rambo recognizes the honor that has been displayed by the military and suggests that the awards be given to others who have sacrificed more than him. Moreover, and most important, Rambo *is* willing to die for his country. Whereas Luke equates death in battle as an absolute negative, Rambo's words lead audiences to believe that death is a price Rambo is willing to pay.

Playing off of his final speech in the franchise's first installment, Rambo reiterates the desire to be accepted at home. While he had previously articulated the feelings of loss and displacement that welcomed him back to domestic life following the conclusion of his tour, he is now going as far as to express the desire to have his love of country be reciprocated upon him. John Rambo – a veteran, a felon, a man who has seeped through society's cracks – *loves* his country. The protagonist's utterance is a

profound endorsement of Reagan's approach to presidential oration and rhetoric. As president, it seems Reagan never missed an opportunity to articulate his appreciation of those who serve in the US military. Even when alluding to the negative aspects associated with the loss in Vietnam, Reagan's ability to separate soldiers from policymakers made it possible for Americans to adopt similar mentalities and place one entity in a negative light, while setting the other on a pedestal of respect.

In addition, Rambo's concluding words are important in analyzing how the reclamation of traditional American characteristics of heroism and domination had been reclaimed by 1985 to solidify the renewed presence of the 1980s hard body, on film and in life. Jeffords employs the work of Jurgen Link when articulating her hard body theory. She writes: "This hard body became for Reaganism what Jurgen Link has called a 'collective symbol,' what he defines as 'collective pictures that are culturally 'anchored' in the most literal sense and that act as carriers of symbolic meaning'" (*Hard Bodies* 25). Adding to this is Gould's belief that "certain figures within mass culture are taken as 'representative' of certain issues that the rest of us are also facing" (Gould 126-27). In analyzing the speeches of Ronald Reagan, several recurring themes are found that were widely embraced by the American public. Perhaps noting the public's acceptance of certain themes and ideas, Hollywood provided an outlet where characters and stories that also possessed these thematic traits could be displayed. Much like the ways that characters portrayed by John Wayne and James Cagney reinforced traditional notions of American heroism, revisionist films of the 1980s serve as a necessary companion piece to Reagan rhetoric in developing what would become the modern hard body of the era.

Many of the films, specifically the *Rambos*, took their thematic cues from Reagan's speeches and shaped them to fit the cinematic format. For instance, there exists a clear contrast in Rambo's physical appearance between the first and second films. Most apparent is an increase in muscle mass and definition. This reflects Reagan's continuing endorsements for a stronger military. Further, Rambo's physique contrasts with those of his enemies in the second film. Stripping away the roles that survival instinct and technological advantages play in a combat situation, audiences see from the onset that physical strength is a must. In the America of 1985, Rambo's body served as a blatant illustration of America's growing strength on the international front. Moreover, this aids in removing Reagan's America from the perceived weaknesses that were present during the days of Jimmy Carter. In addition, Jeffords sees this at work in the juxtaposition between Rambo and Murdock, the bureaucrat. Whereas Rambo's muscles ripple and glisten as he maneuvers throughout the jungles of Vietnam, "Murdock sweats uncomfortably throughout the film, drinking imported Cokes and positioning himself in front of fans" (*Hard Bodies* 37). Although he is a government official, Murdock is clearly a remnant of the previous era's political structure. Considering the vehement opposition articulated by Reagan toward big-government throughout his presidency, both Reagan and Rambo set apart from the Murdock character. If Murdock is weak and Rambo is strong, Reagan must also be viewed as strong – or as Jeffords would describe, *hard*.

In light of Hollywood's revisionist takes on Vietnam and reconfiguration of the American soldier, a few exceptions to this formula managed to seep out of Hollywood during this period. In particular, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987, Stanley Kubrick), and

Hamburger Hill (1987, John Irvin) all provided audiences with depictions of Vietnam that fell more in line with the pictures made at the tail-end of the 1970s. Each of these films focused on the war as it occurred in the proper time, place, and setting – sans any hint of revisionist narratives. Much like *Coming Home* and *The Deer Hunter*, the films emphasized the traumas and crises experienced by the soldiers.

Of these films, *Platoon* is most noteworthy in that it was awarded the Academy Award for Best Picture and also garnered high ticket sales at the box office. The picture is a comprehensive examination of the Vietnam experience in that it depicts soldiers coming from various races, ethnicities, and belief systems. Whereas the revisionist films strive to re-imagine the war in hopes of altering its end, films like *Platoon* relive the war in the hope of better understanding it. Dickenson describes *Platoon* and other films by Oliver Stone as having displayed the ability to "[borrow] from a gritty, realistic, and technically inventive body of films that had come to prominence in American cinema two decades previously" (Dickenson 6). Moreover, movies similar to *Platoon* that were released during the decade "showed US soldiers as vulnerable men who are often uncomfortable with their role in war, and who have incompetent superiors" (Dickenson 24-25). Dickenson is correct in his observation regarding the texts of such films and the fact that they are reminiscent of a previous cinematic movement. However, the author makes a mistake in his work in his failure to take note of the relevant social and political themes of the era's revisionist films. Although films of the revisionist movement lacked the believability and realism of other movies concerning Vietnam, underneath their violence-laden, special-effects-driven narratives lay important commentaries regarding

the American military and the perception of the Vietnam War as they were in the 1980s. In considering the messages communicated by Ronald Reagan and the changing opinions of the American public at the time, any study that dismisses such popular films due to their lack of artistic quality is simply incomplete.

Chapter VI

During the 1980s, America witnessed dramatic shifts in the contents and tones of both presidential rhetoric and Hollywood narratives. Not unlike the ever-changing emergences and disappearances of fads in society, what was a popular message in one era becomes an irrelevant one in the next. In the final days of the 1970s, Hollywood films shared in the cynical malaise that had come over much of the American public. The wounds of Vietnam, the struggles for social and civil justice, and the distrust in government continued to be felt throughout the nation. However, as a lift in America's morale coincided with the election of new leadership, the themes found within Hollywood movies of the time began to take their cues from a popular president. While it would be difficult to determine if Ronald Reagan's presidency was the sole reason for the emergence of such a new Hollywood formula, it is hard to deny the connection between messages conveyed by the Commander-in-Chief and similar thematic elements found in films.

It is important to continue studying the relationships between the political arena and the world of entertainment. Whereas politicians and statesmen play direct roles the events and issues that define an era, movies often times serve as mechanisms for further molding our understandings of such topics for concern. Washington elites and Hollywood filmmakers are both provided with forums to speak out on pressing issues and take actions to shape public opinion. In addition, both politicians and film studios possess relationships with the American public that may influence the messages they set out to convey. Ultimately, it is the people who determine what is popular and what is not. In

turn, they have the power to choose which politician is embraced or what film has a $50-million opening weekend. In the 1980s, the American public embraced many Ronald Reagan's ideas and beliefs, as well as the Hollywood films that incorporated them into their narratives.

This thesis project focused on a limited era from 1977 to 1988. Although I feel that in studying the films and rhetoric of the time I have managed to assemble a complete study, the relationship between politics and film must continue to be studied for years to come. In today's world *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004, Michael Moore) managed to make over $100-million dollars at the box office, and the weekly action series *24* has recently won the Emmy Award for Best Television Drama. Political images and themes are still very much alive in the various forms of artistic media. The use of content analysis, combined with a sampling method similar to the one used in this study, holds the potential for allowing researchers to gather a more comprehensive understanding to the extent of how politics continue to influence the Hollywood product.

In addition to studying the present, we must also continue to analyze the events and happenings of the past – as I have done here. For instance, there is still a great deal to look at in the case of correlations and similarities found between Reagan rhetoric and Hollywood films. Perhaps if one is to take a cue from this work and further elaborate on its findings, the researcher may benefit from analyzing a more comprehensive sample of the decades' films. In other words, whereas this film sample has been narrowed down to include only those from the *action* and *war* genres that managed to succeed at the box office, it may be helpful to probe films from other genres to note of any other significant

similarities that exist. A similar approach in regards to the presidential speeches may also be helpful. Rather than limiting the analysis down to the major speeches delivered by Presidents Carter and Reagan, a future study may be interested in including speeches that were not delivered in front of an optimum number of television viewers. In addition, this type of research would be benefited by conducting interviews with those who were present in both the presidential administrations, as well as those who were employed at major Hollywood studios at the time.

Regardless of what future studies may hold, this thesis project has provided evidence that shifts in presidential rhetoric between the tenures of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan corresponded with similar changes in tone and themes that were found in Hollywood movies of the same time. When considering the popularity of both Ronald Reagan and the motion pictures that shared many of his messages, it is difficult to disassociate the two from each other. While Reagan may not have been the lone force behind such thematic changes in Hollywood narratives, much of his oratory and rhetoric introduced America to such themes. In closing, it can be said that many of the sentiments Ronald Wilson Reagan conveyed to the American public in his time as president were later mirrored by Hollywood productions of the same era. As Jeffords writes in her book, "By the end of the 1980s time seemed to have embraced the Reagan version of history with open arms, sanctioning its rewritten narrative of American prowess and progress with the defeat of communism . . . and the final placement of the United States as the lone superpower in the world" (*Hard Bodies* 78).

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Appendix A

Coding Sheet
(Speeches)

1. Date of Speech
   ??/??/19??

2. Who is the orator?
   1 Jimmy Carter
   2 Ronald Reagan

3. How is the American Economy presented?
(1 = Improving, 2 = No Change, 3 = Worsening, 0 = Not Mentioned)

4. How is Unemployment in the Unites States presented?
(1 = Improving, 2 = No Change, 3 = Worsening, 0 = Not Mentioned)

5. How is Poverty in the United States presented?
(1 = Improving, 2 = No Change, 3 = Worsening, 0 = Not Mentioned)

6. How is American Morale presented?
(1 = Improving, 2 = No Change, 3 = Worsening, 0 = Not Mentioned)

7. How are Relations with Middle East Nations portrayed?
(1 = Improving, 2 = No Change, 3 = Worsening, 0 = Not Mentioned)

8. How are Relations with Latin American Nations portrayed?
(1 = Improving, 2 = No Change, 3 = Worsening, 0 = Not Mentioned)

9. Is the United States portrayed as being at Peace with the rest of the world?
(1 = Yes, 2 = No, 3 = Somewhat, 0 = n/a)

10. At any time, does the orator cast the Soviet Union or a Soviet faction as an *enemy* or *adversary*?
   1 Yes
   0 No

11. At any time, does the orator cast a Latin American nation or faction as an *enemy* or *adversary*?
   1 Yes
   0 No

12. At any time, does the orator cast a Middle Eastern nation or faction as an *enemy* or *adversary*?

1 Yes
0 No

13. At any time, does the orator cast Libya as an *enemy* or *adversary*?

1 Yes
0 No

14. At any time, does the orator cast Communist ideology, nations, or groups as an *enemy* or *adversary*?

1 Yes
0 No

15. At any time, does the orator cast Terrorism or terrorist groups as an *enemy* or *adversary*?

1 Yes
0 No

16. How are American relations with the Soviet Union presented in the speech?

1 All or Mostly Hostile
2 All or Mostly Reconciliatory
3 Fairly Balanced
0 Not Mentioned

17. Does the speech at all mention (in any way) the war in Vietnam?

1 Yes
0 No

18. Are the keywords (or variations) *pride, heroes, courageous, brave,* or *sacrifice* ever used to describe the American Military?

1 Yes
0 No

19. At any time, does the orator speak of the United States facing a specific threat?

1 Yes
0 No

20. At any time, does the orator credit the American people in contributing to success?

1 Yes
0 No

21. At any time, does the orator talk of *new beginnings*, *better days*, or *America as being back*?

1 Yes
0 No

22. At any time, does the orator talk of an America in crisis, struggling, weakening, or experiencing hard times?

1 Yes
0 No

23. At anytime, does the orator speak of the *War on Drugs*, or any variation of drugs being a threat to the American public?

1 Yes
0 No

Coding Sheet
(Films)

1. Date of Release (??/??/19??)

2. Is the protagonist/hero American?
   1 Yes
   0 No

3. Is the protagonist/hero portrayed as a current or past member of the United States Military?
   1 Yes
   0 No

4. Is the protagonist/hero portrayed as poor or unemployed?
   1 Yes
   0 No

5. Is a reference made to the protagonist/hero having a relationship with his family?
   1 Yes
   0 No

6. Is one of the protagonist/hero's main goals to obtain wealth, riches, or treasure?
   1 Yes
   0 No

7. At any point in the film, does the protagonist/hero resort to violence?
   1 Yes
   0 No

8. Is the protagonist/hero the instigator of violence?
   1 Yes
   0 No

9. Is the protagonist/hero provoked before using violence?
   1 Yes
   0 No

10. Is the protagonist/hero fighting against a foreign threat?
    1 Yes
    0 No

11. Is the protagonist/hero fighting against drug dealers or organized crime?
    1 Yes
    0 No

12. Is the protagonist/hero in conflict with the "establishment"?
    1 Yes
    0 No

13. Is the primary antagonist/villain a Communist or Communist influence?
    1 Yes
    0 No

14. Is the antagonist/villain presented as poor or unemployed?
    1 Yes
    0 No

15. Is the antagonist/villain Soviet or connected with Soviet forces?
    1 Yes
    0 No

16. Is the antagonist/villain from or associated with a Middle Eastern or Latin American nation?
    1 Yes
    0 No

17. Is the antagonist/villain a crime lord or drug lord?
    1 Yes
    0 No

18. Does the antagonist/villain act resort to violence to reach a goal?
    1 Yes
    0 No

19. Does the antagonist/villain act as the instigator of the film's violence?
    1 Yes
    0 No

20. Does the film mention the Vietnam Conflict?
    1 Yes
    0 No

21. Does the film present an American Pride motif?
    1 Yes
    0 No

22. Does the film present an Anti-Communist motif?
    1 Yes
    0 No

23. Is the President of the United States ever mentioned, referenced, or portrayed?
    1 Yes
    0 No

24. Is American society depicted as mostly problematic or wrong?
    1 Yes
    0 No

25. Is American society depicted as mostly noble or good?
    1 Yes
    0 No

26. At any point, is the American flag shown in the film?
    1 Yes
    0 No

27. At any point, is a national symbol (other than the American flag) shown in the film?
    1 Yes
    0 No

Appendix B

Coding Protocol (Speeches)

GOAL OF STUDY:

The purpose of this protocol is to gauge and measure the ways in which Presidents Carter and Reagan presented the pressing issues of their respective tenures in Washington. The main goals of this portion of the study are to assess: 1) any differences in the rhetoric used by each president, 2) what issues were the most prevalent during the time period being studied (1977-1988).

DATE OF SPEECH:

Simply record the date on which the speech was given.

Ex.) July 23, 1983 → 7/23/83

WHO IS THE ORATOR?:

Jimmy Carter (1)
Ronald Reagan (2)

HOW ARE THE FOLLOWING DOMESTIC ISSUES PRESENTED?:

The following issues are to be gauged within each speech: *economy, unemployment, poverty, American morale*. Each topic is to be coded as <u>one</u> of four options: *improving, no change, worsening, not mentioned*. This step will reflect the importance of certain domestic issues through the passage of time, and the successes / failures each president was having in dealing with them.

HOW ARE THE FOLLOWING FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES PRESENTED?:

The following issues are to be gauged within each speech: *relations with the Soviet Union, relations with Middle East Nations, relations with Latin American Nations, America at Peace with the rest of the world* . Each topic is to be coded as <u>one</u> of four options: *improving, no change, worsening, not mentioned*. This step will reflect the importance of certain foreign policy issues through the passage of time, and the successes / failures each president was having in dealing with them.

WHO ARE CAST AS *ENEMIES* OR *ADVERSARIES* TO THE US AND/OR ITS PEOPLE?:

The purpose of this section is to observe what other nations, groups, or factions the sitting Administration viewed as a threat to America. Variables to be coded are: *Soviet Union, Latin America, Middle East, Libya, Communism, Terrorism*.

HOW ARE AMERICAN RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION PRESENTED IN THE SPEECH?:

Since all the speeches being coded were delivered during the Cold War, it is important to record the tone and manner in which Presidents Carter and Reagan spoke of the USSR. There are four possible coding options: *all or mostly hostile, all or mostly reconciliatory, fairly balanced, or not mentioned*.

DOES THE SPEECH AT ALL MENTION (IN ANY WAY) THE WAR IN VIETNAM?:
The Vietnam Conflict was still fresh in the minds of the American public in the decade following the war. One of the most unsuccessful military campaigns the US has ever seen, it is important to observe how each president spoke of the conflict in retrospect.

ARE THE KEYWORDS (OR VARIATIONS OF) *PRIDE, HEROES, COURAGEOUS, BRAVE,* or *SACRIFICE* **EVER USED TO DESCRIBE THE AMERICAN MILITARY?:**
Still reeling from the events of Vietnam, it is important to observe the manner in which both presidents framed the roles and duties of the United States Armed Forces. Of interest in the speeches are the use of five keywords that may be used to describe the American soldier: *pride, heroes, courageous, brave,* or *sacrifice* (or any variations of these words).

AT ANY TIME, DOES THE ORATOR CREDIT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WITH CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS?:
The purpose of measuring such a variable is to explore any links between the perceived success either president experienced and the roles everyday Americans may have felt they played in its happening. While we are not concerned if the American people actually played a role in such successes, we do care about the message each leader communicated to their countrymen.

AT ANY TIME, DOES THE ORATOR TALK OF *NEW BEGINNINGS, BETTER DAYS,* or *AMERICA AS BEING BACK?:*
Such rhetoric is used as a tool for communicating optimism and positive perspective on issues. Variations of the aforementioned forms of rhetoric qualify.

AT ANY TIME, DOES THE ORATOR TALK OF AN AMERICA IN CRISIS, STRUGGLING, OR WEAKENING?:
The use of such rhetoric by the leaders may be viewed as contributing to a national feeling of cynicism and pessimism. In addition, occasions in which this occurs will reveal information regarding the various challenges faced by our nation throughout the years.

AT ANY TIME, DOES THE ORATOR TALK OF THE *WAR ON DRUGS,* OR ANY VARIATION OF DRUGS BEING A THREAT TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC?:
For several decades, illicit drugs have been perceived by many as a primary threat to the American public. Beginning with the Vietnam years, drug use entered the forefront of the

American political arena. The importance of focusing on such an issue is to see how this perceived threat changed throughout time and ways in which the presidents communicated the problem to the American public.

Appendix C

Speeches

Jimmy Carter:
January 20, 1977 – Inaugural Address
January 19, 1978 – State of the Union Address
January 25, 1979 – State of the Union Address
January 23, 1980 – State of the Union Address
January 14, 1981 – Farewell Address to the Nation

Ronald Reagan:

January 20, 1981 – First Inaugural Address
January 26, 1982 – State of the Union Address
January 25, 1983 – State of the Union Address
January 25, 1984 – State of the Union Address
January 21, 1985 – Second Inaugural Address
February 6, 1985 – State of the Union Address
February 4, 1986 – State of the Union Address
January 27, 1987 – State of the Union Address
January 25, 1988 – State of the Union Address
January 11, 1989 – Farewell Address to the Nation

Filmography (Sample)

Apocalypse Now (1979)
Blue Thunder (1983)
Cobra (1986)
Coming Home (1978)
Deer Hunter (1978)
Die Hard (1988)
First Blood (1982)
For Your Eyes Only (1981)
Gauntlet, The (1977)
Karate Kid (1984)
Living Daylights, The (1987)
Never Say Never Again (1983)
Octopussy (1983)
Platoon (1986)
Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985)
Rambo III (1988)
Red Dawn (1984)
Rocky II (1979)
Rocky III (1982)
Rocky IV (1985)
Spy Who Loved Me, The (1977)
Sudden Impact (1983)
View to a Kill, A (1985)