American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy

The Fragmented Kaleidoscope

Thomas J. Cobb

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"The course of American foreign policy is never smooth—including in the movies. Thomas Cobb deftly takes us inside the films to show the tension between America's ideals and its quests for power, between the national and the international, and between American exceptionalism and a declaration of the universal for all of us."

—Professor Scott Lucas, *University of Birmingham*

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Preface

This book intends to offer reflections on American film's allegorisation of US foreign policy. It is designed for Film Studies, American Studies and International Relations scholars and is written with the purpose of addressing how examples of Hollywood cinema capture schismatic patterns of American statecraft. The "cultural diplomacy" of the title, a reference to Hollywood's role in furthering US hegemony and attracting overseas audiences, frequently hinges on films which purvey multifaceted representations of American power.

I contend that films as various as Spaghetti Westerns and War pictures have framed the elastic quality of the US national narrative and elicited an almost synesthetic approach to culture and politics. Much of my analysis is influenced by the elucidation of political allegory presented in Richard Slotkin's 1992 book *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* and contains similar observations on the synergetic aspects of Hollywood productions. My argument diverges from Slotkin's approach in its evaluation of the political dynamics of American film based on a combination of Film Studies and International Relations methodologies.

Ranging from the triangulations of the Clinton era to the identitarian nationalism of Trump's presidency, this exploration claims that Hollywood productions possess affinity with the International Relations theorist Walter Mead's idea of a 'kaleidoscopic' American foreign policy. It further argues that allegory has grown in importance when it comes to translating contradictions in American statecraft to the screen. This process became

catalysed by the trauma of the 9/11 attacks and the onset of the War on Terror.

All chapters focus on Hollywood films which evidence contradictory allegories of a key International Relations concept. From the challenges facing Joseph Nye Jr.'s theory of soft power in a cycle of post-9/11 productions to the vitiation of Wilsonianism in two late 2000s blockbusters, disjunction and changing reflections consistently manifest in US foreign policy's allegorisation. Although in some films these disjunctions and evolving representations are resolved and rationalised, in others they culminate in a dysphoric reflection of American statecraft and US society. Hence, allegories of diplomatic contradiction are tonally variable, differing in their response to the contemporary political scene.

Moreover, this book intends to foreground the kaleidoscopic nature of American society and politics through insight into the political chemistry contained in numerous examples of American film since the 1990s. It is written with the hope of engaging Film Studies, American Studies and International Relations scholars through showcasing how US cinema can be employed as a tool for understanding the mercurial facets of US diplomacy.

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CHAPTER 1

Shifting Kaleidoscopes: The Presence of Diplomatic Contradiction in Political and Allegorical American Film

Over the course of two feverish days in January 2017, a set of contrasting events in Washington D.C. encapsulate the divides of contemporary American political life. On January 20, at the traditional setting at the West Front of the United States Capitol Building, President-elect Donald J. Trump delivers a fiery inauguration speech, wrought with the vein of transgressive populism that had been central to the tenor of his presidential campaign. Despite having trailed Democratic rival Hillary Clinton by almost three million votes in the popular vote in the November 2016 presidential election, Trump (2017) asserts the mantle of majority rule, propounding that "we are transferring power from Washington, D.C., and giving it back to you, the American People". In additional grandiose remarks, he portrays disconnects between the experience of America's patriotic citizenry and its decadent elite. Trump blames a Washington that "flourished" while "the factories closed", a dissonance protracted by an establishment which "protected itself, but not the citizens of our country" (ibid.).

Seguing from the rhetoric of provincial resentment to language of blood and soil nationalism, the new Republican standard-bearer promises to halt an "American carnage" (ibid.). He substantiates this agenda with "an oath of allegiance to all Americans" before bemoaning a litany of policies maintained by Washington's implicitly erstwhile governing class: in protectionist overtones, Trump laments "enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry"; how American taxpayers have "subsidized

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the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military"; finally, and perhaps most important to the anti-immigration dimension of Trump's campaign, he cites the "ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs" (ibid.) as chief causes for vituperation.

The subsequent day of January 21 in Washington D.C. sees opposition to this message. A 'Women's March' pugnaciously repudiates President Trump, an animus of indignation echoed by emulative protests in capitals across the West. Whilst the march foregrounds anger over the 45th president's attitude to women, it encompasses a broader fear of white nationalism. The manifesto of the Women's March expresses belief in the importance of "immigrant and refugee rights regardless of origin" by rejecting "mass deportation, family detention" and "violations of due process" (San Diego Free Press 2017). Speeches delivered by major Hollywood celebrities signal this sense of cosmopolitan solidarity absent from Trump's address.

Film actress Ashley Judd (quoted in Sanchez 2017) chastises a plethora of attitudes given social license by Trump's presidential campaign, listing "racism, fraud, conflict of interest, homophobia, sexual assault, transphobia, white supremacy, misogyny, ignorance, white privilege" as flagrant signs of the new president's bigotry. Star of *The Avengers* Scarlett Johansson (quoted in Ruiz 2017) elicits fears of "a country that is moving backwards and not forwards". The documentary maker and political activist Michael Moore (quoted in Ruiz 2017) claims "here's the majority of America, right here. … We are here to vow to end the Trump campaign." The speeches by Hollywood icons are supplemented and substantiated by the civil rights activist Angela Davis (quoted in Reilly 2017), who reminds of a country "anchored in slavery and colonialism", containing a dual legacy of "immigration and enslavement". Elected politicians such as the liberal Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts vaunt the battle against this dimension of American history, which has been romanticised by the Trump-supporting movement of the Alt-right. Warren (quoted in Reilly 2017) champions a "vision to make sure that we fight harder, we fight tougher, and we fight more passionately than ever".

The two political scenes described might be said to underline a conventional polarity in the United States' perception of itself in the world, signifying a country divided between parochial Republican reaction and internationalist Democratic progressivism. Indeed, their hyperpartisanship might be seen as contrary to the earlier writing of International Relations

theorist Walter Russell Mead and his more multifaceted understandings of US political dynamics.

Mead's 2001 book *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* foregrounds foreign policy as connected to the diverse nature of the United States' pluralist democracy by putting forward four 'schools' which have dominated the schema of American diplomacy. It cites the 'Hamiltonian', a school orientated around the interests of the business class which takes its name from the 1790s Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton; the idealism of the 'Wilsonian', a philosophy of spreading democracy descended from a "missionary" tradition in the nineteenth century (Mead 2001, 151) and honed in World War One by President Woodrow Wilson; the 'Jeffersonian', a principled disinterest in global affairs based on the statecraft of the author of the Declaration of Independence, founding father and president, Thomas Jefferson; finally, the 'Jacksonian', a realism named after the populist antebellum president Andrew Jackson that caters to the nationalist sensibilities of America's heartlands.[1]

Foreign policy matched the "representative nature of American society", forging an equivalence "between the political strength of the given schools and their weight in the nation" (ibid., 95). In an interview with *The Economist*, Mead (quoted in *The Economist* editorial 2010) specified that "some of our greatest presidents—FDR for example—were able to move freely within all four of the foreign policy schools", illuminating the reductive tendencies behind hyperpartisan understandings of US diplomacy. In contrast to a rival nineteenth-century tradition of European "continental realism", American foreign policy has historically been "more like a kaleidoscope, whose images, patterns, and colors alter rapidly and apparently at random" (Mead 2001, 36).

The first premise of *American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy: The Fragmented Kaleidoscope* is that examples of American film from the 1990s to the 2010s convey similarly contradictory foreign policy dynamics, encompassing genres as various as the Western, war film and science fiction blockbuster. Analyses give primacy to the role of International Relations theories in Hollywood film, from the relevance of Bacevich's 'new American militarism' for a cycle of post-9/11 action pictures to the resonance of Niebuhr's warnings against idealism in the Revisionist Western *No Country for Old Men* (2007). By utilising this interdisciplinary methodology, *American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy* demonstrates that US film presents treatments of foreign policy analogous to the

concepts of Mead, illustrating sites of both political intersection and ideological friction.

The second premise of this book is that incidences of popular political allegory have encapsulated the spirit of Mead's theories by spearheading variegated approaches to ideology, juxtaposing clashes and arbitrating compromises between different philosophies and beliefs. From the eclectic war satire of *Three Kings* (1999) to the outrageous puppet comedy of *Team America: World Police* (2004), American filmmakers have evinced bold and unconventional ways of illuminating interplay of International Relations concepts. As will be evidenced in this book's third and fourth chapters, discussion surrounding realism and idealism is very much present in the former film while rivalries between 'hard' and 'soft' power are abundant in the latter.

The altering and fluid paradigms of this allegorical symbolism, testified in recent blockbusters like *Black Panther* (2018), indicate the mercurial role Mead's shifting kaleidoscope plays in American cinema, with musings on foreign policy finding new forms of expression. Beginning with the centrism of the Clinton era before moving to the changed political climate of the post-9/11 years and the sense of malaise fostered by the Great Recession, *American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy* traces how filmmakers have regularly recalibrated modes of political commentary in order to allegorise corresponding 'collisions' within International Relations. Examining and deconstructing Hollywood's 'liberalist' reputation reveals this level of nuance, a quality I elicit in the next section.

The Common Fallacy of Hyperpartisanship: Dispelling the Ubiquity of Hollywood's 'liberal' Animus

A broad spectrum of political opinion has frequently emphasised the liberalist outlook as central to modern Hollywood filmmaking, attributing a spirit of progressive dissent to America's most culturally potent industry. A clear foundation for this understanding is provided by the right-wing film critic Michael Medved. His 1993 book *Hollywood VS. America: Popular Culture And The War On Traditional Values* casts doubt on Hollywood's ability to reflect the ideological victories of the Reagan and George H.W. Bush years, excoriating a countercultural infiltration of the film industry that had become inherent from the late 1960s and

manifesting in work "separate from the domestic mainstream" (Medved 1993, 235).

Medved's analysis encompasses moody biographical dramas like Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) and Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992), films which exceed in influence comparative to patriotic blockbusters like *Top Gun* (1986) and *Die Hard* (1988). Prevailing shibboleths of modern American filmmaking are said to include "antipathy to the military" and "association of capitalists with criminality" (ibid., 219–221). Yet Medved, in an effort to avert accusations of indiscriminate extrapolation, emphasises positive exceptions in "Hollywood's Golden Age in the 1930s and '40s" such as Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and the 1933 George Cukor picture *Dinner at Eight*, which, in a stark aversion to the leftist bent inherent in modern productions, portrayed businessmen "in a highly sympathetic light" (ibid., 221).

The centrist political scientist Joseph Nye Jr., who originated the theory of 'soft power' in 2004, contrastingly highlights that liberalism in Hollywood films has functioned as a disseminator for democratic values, rarely framed in partisan hues. He also judges it as essential in currying favourability of America abroad, an appeal achieved through illustrations of hypocrisy and cognitive dissonance. Rather than bemoaning the absence of a patriotic identity like Medved, Nye (2004, 17) praises the internationalist role of American cinema, tangible in productions which purvey a "harsh portrait of American institutions". Nye uses the cynical courtroom drama *12 Angry Men* (1957) as a case study which signifies the potency of a "liberal society", where "government cannot and should not control the culture" (ibid.). The acquiescence of the Czech Communist government to the film, which was ostensibly allowed distribution because of anti-American content, backfired, fostering emulation amongst Czech dissidents of the United States' vibrant democracy. Nye quotes the Czech director Milos Forman (quoted in Nye Jr. 2004, 17), who observed "if that country can make this kind of thing, films about itself … that country must have a pride and must have an inner strength, and must be strong enough and must be free".

Nye admits how (2004, 15) Hollywood filmmakers can contravene these internationalist appeals in "movies that show scantily clad women with libertine attitudes or fundamentalist Christian groups that castigate Islam as an evil religion". Yet American pictures are also capable of promoting qualities "that are open, mobile, individualistic, anti-establishment, pluralistic, voluntaristic, populist, and free" (ibid., 47). Ultimately, films

with these maxims could signal the virtues and vices of American society, an openness which deflected stigmatisations of cultural propaganda or brazen radicalism.

Examples of allegory in iconographic genres, such as the Western, suggest that Hollywood filmmakers have garnered recognition by scholars for spreading distinct critiques of America's institutions and political maladies with oblique methods, a sensibility which can transcend production context and the exigencies of catering to certain audience demographics. George Stevens's *Giant* (1956), a Classical Hollywood Western which delineates the arc of a wealthy Texan family over the twentieth century, exemplifies this richness of subtext. On the surface, *Giant* is an epic portrayal of the American West, suffused with dramatic conventions of romance and generational conflict. The film's protagonist of Texan patriarch, Jordan Benedict, is forced to overcome a petty rivalry with local *nouveau riche* oil baron and former employee, Jett Rink, all the while facing problems and tragedies confronting his immediate family.

Giant's greater resonance, however, is in its allusions to a Texas plagued by contests between the expansionist dispositions of a historic white settlement and a newer, progressive standpoint. The former shibboleth is expounded upon in a brief scene where Benedict's East Coast wife, Leslie Lynton, refers to the nineteenth-century annexation of Texas as a theft while the latter outlook recurs in subplots involving the state's non-white citizens. Implicitly countering the Jim Crow racism prevalent in both the diegesis of Texas and the contemporaneous 1950s of *Giant's* release, Stevens draws attention to Lynton's efforts to educate impoverished Mexican children and an interracial relationship forged between a Latino woman and Benedict's son, Jordy. Monique James Baxter (2005, 161) notes *Giant's* significance in being "the first major motion picture to explore the effects of Jim Crow legislation on Mexicans in Texas". Its subtle political encoding, and a dramatic epilogue in which Benedict's interracial family are rejected from a diner, signals its "studies of miscegenation, paternalism and racism" (ibid., 171).

A different Western perhaps attests to the power of coded divides between a reactionary realism and a benevolent, anti-establishment idealism in regard to production context and cultural milieu. Produced under the freewheeling artistic ethos wrought by the "New Hollywood" studio system of the late 1960s, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) purveys a sensibility tonally oppositional to the grandeur of *Giant's* Manifest Destiny themes. George Roy Hill's picture presents a comparatively

bathetic portrait of two roguish bank robbers who eventually perish in Bolivia, an off-kilter journey heightened by a somewhat incongruous Burt Bacharach soundtrack. The late 1960 thaw in Hollywood filmmaking, begotten by the scrapping of the socially conservative 1930 Hayes Code, pervades a more radical subtext than the offbeat rhythm suggests. In being a product of an environment cited by Geoff King (2002, 41) as widening "the bounds of possible expression" and celebrating "moral ambiguity and complexity", *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* quietly comports several anti-Vietnam and anti-corporate allusions within its narrative, indicating an anti-establishment spirit.

The iconoclasm of the Revisionist Western, a sub-genre which emerged in Lyndon Johnson's second term and offered "critical reflections on the Western's status and relationship to contemporary culture" (Nelson 2015, 67), infuses this animus. Michael Coyne (1997, 148) interprets the populism of Cassidy and the Sundance Kid's robberies as symbolic of a revolt against the "increasing corporatism of American society". In foreign policy terms, the gaucheness of their deaths in Bolivia cemented an anti-imperialist critique of Vietnam's dubious foundations, encapsulating "adventurism in an alien culture Americans were ill-equipped to comprehend" (ibid., 148). In the duo's invocation of the anti-war/anti-establishment attitudes of the New Left and the sacrifice of American troops in Vietnam, they "formed innocents abroad, non-conformists, dropouts and casualties of military violence" (ibid., 148).

Yet despite these notable case studies, Nye's idea of a Hollywood which serves to underline American democratic openness discords with incidences of multifaceted political dynamics in films. Tony Shaw's *Hollywood's Cold War* (2009), which delineates the proximity between the ideological goals of American governments and popular Hollywood film, captures this diffuseness. Foreshadowing a scope which encompasses deceptively frivolous comedies with Cold War subject matter like *Ninotchka* (1939) and the overtly jingoistic blockbuster, *Red Dawn* (1984), the introduction to *Hollywood's Cold War* observes how "certain films sought bluntly to instill hatred of the enemy among the American people, while others tried in a more measured fashion to persuade Third World audiences of the virtues of Western-style democracy" (Shaw 2009, 5).

It is a plausible argument that several landmark Hollywood films manifest both these qualities of the Jacksonian and Wilsonian, revealing patterns which exclude simple interplays of racial and social liberalism with internationalism. D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a

production which both elicited the contradictory progressivism of Woodrow Wilson and sparked a revival of the Klu Klux Klan, relates to a context illustrative of this 'kaleidoscopic' nature.

Wilson is a president widely recognised as the progenitor of an American idealism in foreign policy. His outline of a democratic future for a post-war Europe in 1917 seemingly aimed to harness what Peter Wilson (2011, 332) defines as "an optimistic doctrine which seeks to transcend the international anarchy" in order to "create a more cosmopolitan and harmonious world order". Nonetheless, the idealist Wilson found affinity with the overtly white supremacist vision of *The Birth of a Nation*. Barely over two years before the president promised to "make the world safe for democracy" on the cusp of America's entry into the First World War, he became enthralled by a revisionist history which rhapsodised his own country's democracy at its most iniquitous. The narrative of *The Birth of a Nation*, which revolves around the relationship between a Northern and Southern family initially riven but eventually reconciled by the tumult of the Civil War and reconstruction, galvanised the Virginia-born Wilson. A possible reason for this galvanisation was its provoking of the 'Jacksonian' aspects of his persona, a nativism unveiled in Wilson's book *A History of the American People* (1902). Griffith's film borrows admiringly from this telling political text, using Wilson's language of vituperation against the "veritable overthrow of civilization in the South" and his stress on the need for "the Klu Klux Klan to redeem the South" (Ambrosius 2007, 690). Lloyd E. Ambrosius considers this mythology in light of Wilson's own legacy as a diplomatic idealist, an admixture that created a "nexus between liberalism and racism" (ibid., 689).

This blend was licensed by Wilson's own enthusiastic response to the screen dramatisation of his writing and the 'collisions' of his subsequent policy agenda. Mark E. Benbow corroborates Wilson's (quoted in Benbow 2010, 509) reaction to *The Birth of a Nation's* parodies of black enfranchisement during the 1870s and its explicit glorification of white nationalism, authenticating a remark by the president that the cinematic rendition of his earlier writing was "like writing history with lightning" and "terribly true". Against the fallout of the First World War and the arbitration of the Treaty of Versailles, the president pursued a combination of policies which expressed discord between this deep-seated emphasis on racial hierarchy and his lofty idealism. Peter Wilson (2011, 332) describes a "campaign to put national self-determination at the heart of the 1919 peace settlement", bound "by a common morality with its bedrock in basic human rights".

President Wilson exposed the selectiveness of this liberal internationalism, however, when he nullified independence requests from the colonial satrap of Vietnam, attesting to an idealism which sought democracy for white Europeans only.[2]

Despite the salience of this example, one does not need to solely examine connections between Hollywood films and the contradictions of political icons like Wilson to understand that veins of ideological dissonance have featured as a significant staple of American cinema. Even without reference to their surrounding political milieus, Hollywood productions have frequently displayed fissures analogous to those revealed by *The Birth of a Nation's* distribution. The author of the seminal cultural history *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (1992), Richard Slotkin, explicates these tropes. His research on the 'combat' and 'platoon' films released over the course of the Second World War arguably demonstrates a variation on the nexus of liberalism and racism so marked in Wilson.

Slotkin cites the complex dynamics of *Bataan* (1943), a war picture set on the titular province of the Philippines where US prisoners were forced on to a death march by the Japanese imperial army in 1943. The ethnic difference of the platoon showcased in *Bataan*, which encompasses both white and African American troops, meaningfully coincides with contemporaneous political developments at home and abroad. Slotkin (1992, 320) connects the integrationist ethos with the "emergence of a new African-American political movement which took a more militant stance on civil rights" and the "fundamental contradiction between racialism and the values of democracy" brought to light by the Axis powers.

He further writes of other discrepancies which speak to a concurrent relationship between America's progress on civil rights and scorched earth militarism abroad. *Bataan* claims a "moral victory for a melting pot America" and an "idealized America" (ibid., 326). But the evils of Japan's imperial army, who prove a "moral and ideological problem" and necessitate an America where "democracy is virile, not effete" (ibid., 326), juxtapose this solidarity with something more akin to Mead's idea of the Jacksonian, the hard-nosed realist school in *Special Providence's* schema of foreign policy philosophies.

Bataan both incorporates the provocative symbolism of 'Yankee Salazar', a Filipino scout who is lynched by the Japanese in an interpretable allegory of the American South's Jim Crow laws, together with a passionate endorsement of total war against the Axis Powers. This latter

perspective is conspicuous in the implied martyrdom of *Bataan's* climax, where Sergeant Bill Dane digs his own marked grave and engages Japanese troops in a battle to the death. Subsequent to a final shot of Dane firing and laughing directly at the camera, an onscreen coda eulogises "the heroes of Bataan", whose "sacrifice made possible our victories in the Coral and Bismarck Seas".

Perhaps *Bataan's* greatest novelty for the war genre, not to mention the spectre of political contradiction in American film, is in how it purveys this message alongside a subtle critique of US domestic bigotry. The sombre undercutting of the Jim Crow South implicit in Salazar's death and the progressive normalisation of black military integration fuses with a Jacksonian message of patriotism, offering a civic nationalist rendition of Mead's school which signifies the collective unity fostered by "honor, concern for reputation, and faith in military institutions" (Mead 2001, 244–245). Slotkin's 2001 article 'Ethnic Platoons and the Myths of American Nationality' stresses the reciprocity between a multiracial America and conservative values of Jacksonian nationalism in the war genre. He detects a synthesis tangible in platoon films as individually distinctive as "*Bataan* (1943), *A Walk in the Sun* (1946), *Fixed Bayonets* (1951), *All the Young Men* (1960), *The Dirty Dozen* (1965), *Platoon* (1986) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)" (Slotkin 2001, 469). Summating the motifs of these pictures, Slotkin notes how the "melting pot" invokes "the idealized self-image of a multiethnic, multiracial democracy, hospitable to difference but united by a common sense of national belonging" (ibid., 469).

Slotkin's list of platoon films, which sets the allusive war commentary of *The Dirty Dozen* and the bitter Vietnam drama *Platoon* alongside the reverential 'man on a mission' narrative of *Saving Private Ryan*, conveys that cognitively dissonant blends of interracial cooperation and Jacksonian realism have manifested in ways far from uniformly propagandistic. The ambivalence of allegory has been especially indicative in this regard, rendering political contradiction in a provocative and compellingly elliptical fashion. Problematic and unwieldy dichotomies have been connoted by allegorical pictures where partisan leanings and open standpoints are hard to identify, leading to narratives conditioned by ideological incoherence rather than reconciliation. A cycle of films which emerged from the 'Mexico Western' phenomenon of the late 1960s, a subcategory of Revisionist Western also explored thoroughly by Slotkin, display this ambiguity. In drawing on the chaos resultant from US involvement in

Vietnam and the multi-ethnic fraternity foregrounded by the platoon film, Mexico Westerns such as *Major Dundee* (1965) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969) purveyed a "disillusioned" mood, translating "the political and ideological paradoxes of the Vietnam War into mythic terms" (Slotkin 1992, 561).

Major Dundee follows the misadventures of a Union Calvary officer lured into Mexico by a rogue Apache leader, a revenge mission narrative which engenders alternations between the demands of savage war and the compulsions of Wilsonian idealism. Despite being set during the late stages of the American Civil War in 1864, director Sam Peckinpah renders this literal context peripheral through employment of several Vietnam alluding motifs. Dundee, who is initially stationed as the head of a POW camp for a tactical error at the Battle of Gettysburg, assembles an army redolent of the 1960s culture wars to hunt down the Apache leader Charriba. His cavalry is composed of white Confederate prisoners and manumitted African American slaves, an incongruity evocative of the nativist Alabama governor George Wallace and the dissent borne from the disproportionate conscription of African Americans in the US army.

The most salient 'collisions' of *Major Dundee's* storyline, however, come to light when the titular protagonist supports Mexico's citizenry against the colonialist designs of the French empire. This context references a real life historical backdrop marginal to the American Civil War, where French Emperor Napoleon III aided the proxy Mexican monarch Emperor Maximilian I in exchange for imperial influence. Yet this period milieu is less central than the interpretable allegory behind Dundee's decision to raid a village populated by rebels who recognise the exiled president Benito Juarez as Mexico's true leader, underlining imagery symbolic of America's conflicted role as modern hegemon. Dundee's sympathy for the rebels, further, elicits parallels with the United States' attempts at currying favour with nationalist movements over the course of the Cold War.

Shortly following the platoon's arrival in the village, Dundee's men cancel their raid and instead opt to share their dwindling rations with the Juarists in a fashion suggesting American benevolence in the third world. Trooper Tim Ryan, who sporadically narrates in voiceover, remarks, "We entered the village to take away their horses. … But instead gave away our own. … And they were never more thankful." The welfarist outlook celebrated here resonates with the foreign policy historian Walter McDougall's notion of "Global Meliorism". To McDougall (1997, 173), the Kennedy and Johnson administrations viewed the impoverished theatre of Southeast

Asia as a liberal opportunity to "feed the hungry and promote democracy abroad". The progressive agenda of the latter leader had its corollary in a statecraft which aimed to leave Vietnam with "schools and hospitals and dams" and "the international version of our domestic Great Society programs", ambitions nullified by the military violence of "pacified villages and body counts" (ibid., 190).

The instability of this combination, which recalls the aforementioned synthesis of the Wilsonian and Jacksonian schools, pervades several developments in Dundee's odyssey through Mexico. Dundee's welfarist approach to the Mexican rebels clashes with his identity as American soldier and chief obligation to kill Charriba, a tension heightened through his relationship with an Austrian widow formerly married to a Juarist doctor. Shortly after Dundee meets the widowed Teresa Santiago at a fiesta commemorating the American aid, former West Point rival and Confederate POW Benjamin Tyreen reminds Dundee of the discrepancy between his flirtation with liberal internationalism and the violence necessitated by his mission. Referencing earlier dialogue which mocked Dundee as a "tyrant" and "jailer", Tyreen interposes the euphoria of the Mexican village's emancipation with the judgement that Dundee lacks the "temperament to be a liberator".

This wrestling with the Wilsonian/Jacksonian dichotomy, encapsulated in *mise en scene* which shifts from the asceticism of Dundee's POW camp to the comparative Jeffersonian utopia of the Mexican village, speaks to a dilemma of American self-image replicated in the Vietnam conflict. In a false apotheosis foregrounded in the Austrian Teresa, Dundee's dalliance with the Mexican cause attempts to promote nation-building at its most ideal through aiding a group of villagers who happen to praise American hegemonic might. These mores, however, do not apply to the Apache, who instead meet the hypocrisy of savage war.

The dysphoric conclusion of *Major Dundee* evidences the failure of this flawed triangulation. Although Dundee's cavalry eventually succeeds in executing Charriba, French forces repel his army from Mexico, eliciting a configuration where the principles of Wilsonian self-determination and American empire are denied co-existence. If the prospect of defeat by French troops nullifies Dundee's efforts at disseminating Global Meliorist tenets to Mexico, the siren song of a captured American flag exhibits the humiliation of the tough-minded Jacksonianism which incurred his punitive expedition. Moved and appalled by the sight of an American flag possessed by France's army, Tyreen forgoes his Confederate allegiances by

wresting this patriotic symbol from the enemy, only to be shot in the stomach and forced to distract French troops in a final gesture of martyrdom. Fittingly, Dundee's return to an America grieving the assassinated Lincoln renders his revenge mission and support for Mexican independence bathetic, an anti-climax connotative of Vietnam's political incoherence.

Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), a narrative deemed in a 1999 article by the Film Studies theorist David Cook (quoted in Matheson 2013, 225) as expressive of the "issues of violence in American society and American foreign policy", fragments Mead's kaleidoscope further. Like *Major Dundee*, the first scenes of Peckinpah's iconic Mexico Western elucidate the spectre of a culture war. Peckinpah opens his picture in the vanishing desert spaces of 1911, introducing a landscape which bears the homogenising imprimatur of industrialisation and the forces of moral and cultural reaction. He additionally couples this subtext with coded references to an indiscriminate violence relevant to *The Wild Bunch's* 1969 release year. One of gang leader Pike Bishop's first sights upon his arrival in a small Texas frontier town is of a group of children enthralled by a battle between a scorpion and ant nest, a grotesque spectacle depicted in unflinching close-up shots. The fight between the ants and scorpion, which is later capped with a shot of the ant nest being immolated, invokes an aura of desensitisation deriving from American violence at home and abroad. The atmosphere of division resulting from this desensitised aura manifests in Bishop's robbery of a railroad office.

Bishop's robbery occurs against the backdrop of a temperance parade, a *mise en scene* which sees lawlessness quintessential of the late 1960s refracted by a conservative backlash synergetic with Middle America and Nixon's silent majority. This battle between agitation and authority materialises cathartically in a subsequent shootout, where the deaths of numerous civilians and various members of Bishop's own gang invite allegorical interpretation. Slotkin (1992, 598), who applies the resonance of the shootout on a holistic basis to US foreign and domestic policy, judges the carnage as emblematic of "the urban battles of Tet, and of Detroit and Newark".

The relevance of 'Tet', or more broadly the backdrop of Vietnam, increases throughout Peckinpah's film at the expense of its domestic allegory. Its narrative employment of Mexico returns to and heightens the collisions of foreign policy introduced by *Major Dundee*, playing on imagery symbolic of America's diplomatic schizophrenia. This is above all

foregrounded in the bunch's perceived affinity with the peasant family of Mexican gang member Angel. Bishop and his men come to sympathise with Angel's family and their village's plight at the hands of vicious Mexican general Mapache. Yet Angel's jealous killing of Mapache's girlfriend Teresa, a woman formerly romantically involved with him, precludes deliverance from this tyranny. This murder confines Bishop to a political triangulation analogous with Dundee's alternating military goals. His gang is compelled to steal American armaments for Mapache as compensation for the murder of Teresa, a Faustian pact which torments and depresses Angel. In an exchange of dialogue which follows a series of hedonistic rituals at Mapache's palace, Bishop contemplates using the money gained from the robberies as compensation for Mexico's benighted peasants, a compromise solution which bears resemblance to America's political contortions in Vietnam. Angel, who wholly rejects the idea, invokes the Viet Cong's repudiation of what Slotkin conceives as "a classically liberal solution, akin to the peace process offered by Lyndon Johnson in his Johns Hopkins address of April 1965, in which the North Vietnamese and VC were to give over their revolution in exchange for a massive program of American economic aid" (ibid., 602).

Johnson's flawed synthesis of Global Meliorist methodology alongside Jacksonian militarism has been interpreted in *The Wild Bunch's* climax, which, as in its opening sequence, deconstructs the caprice of American political life through a mass shootout. Peckinpah prefaces the allegorical power of this shootout with a plot development which emphasises the unwieldy synthesis of realism and idealism prevalent from the early stages of the Vietnam conflict, a cognitive dissonance which specifically applies to the United States' collusion with South Vietnam's pro-American dictatorship. After the completion of the weapons theft, Bishop and his men return to find Angel tortured and humiliated by Mapache as punishment for securing ammunition for his townspeople. A rapid succession of events associable with American diplomacy in Southeast Asia emerges when Angel has his throat cut by Mapache. In a perceivable allusion to the American-sponsored assassination of President Diem in 1963, the South Vietnamese dictator long supported by the Kennedy and Eisenhower administrations, Bishop shoots Mapache to avenge Angel and atone for the *de facto* dictator's abuses.

The *fin de regime* connotations of Mapache's death are not celebrated by the impoverished peasantry so familiar to Angel, reflecting a Viet Cong political sensibility which treasured sovereignty over Global Meliorism.

This repudiation of a paternalistic internationalism manifests in the village's acquiescence with the deaths of almost all of Bishop's gang, a tragedy allegoric of the false American belief that reform could coexist with militarism. Slotkin writes on the myopic thinking and naiveté implicit in the bunch's wipeout, an encapsulation of "the failure to understand the power and complexity of the political culture in the South no less than in the North" (ibid., 610). There is also a broader emphasis on a schizophrenic unity of Jacksonian violence and reformist Wilsonianism, ill-conceived and ill-applied by American policymakers abroad.

The films in *American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy* could be said to variously reinforce, observe and scrutinise the complex patterns of diplomacy cited in these case studies from the Classical and New Hollywood eras, alternately synchronising and disassembling relationships between Mead's schools. Much of this configuration of foreign policy, I argue, is dependent on the period of release.

The second chapter of this book, for example, assesses satirical and action-orientated films from the Clinton years, an epoch underpinned by a presidential administration which vaunted the fruits of American globalisation and political moderation. Films explored in this chapter tend to adhere to this outlook, finding attractive fashions of reconciliation and rapprochement. A decade later, select pictures encompass comparatively schismatic renditions of American statecraft, allegorising the imperial overstretch incurred as a result of American military expenditure in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapter 5 evaluates this contrasting *mise en scene* by using two Revisionist Westerns to gauge implications of 'collapsing scenery' surrounding the George W. Bush administration.

Much of these analyses are undergirded with contextualisation on corresponding developments within Hollywood's production context, touching on the accords and fallouts which occurred between studio heads and the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations. In this regard, *American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy* functions as a chronicle of the cultural and industrial changes that political tumult has wrought on American filmmakers over the past twenty-five years.

It is the interrogation of an amassing trend of political allegory, however, which forms the central part of my examination of this recent history. Spanning from the explicitness of gritty war pictures to the nebulous coding of independent productions, *American Cinema and Cultural Diplomacy* posits that the increasing presence of allegory has anchored a cinematic discourse adjusting to and broaching critique of American

foreign policy contradiction. The impact of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent War on Terror has commonly been attributed as a source of this acceleration of allegory, a shift explicated by a plethora of Film Studies academics.

To Frances Pheasant-Kelly (2013, 2–3), the hauntingly, seemingly ahistorical memory of the pre-9/11 world encouraged alternatively "oblique meditations of 9/11", with gradual commentary on "environmental catastrophes, and economic recession becoming discernible across a range of genres". Pheasant-Kelly substantiates this claim through detailed analysis of fantasy and comic book franchises such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003) and Christopher Nolan's cycle of Batman 'reboots', films which could be termed "dark and nihilistic and invariably espouse a subtext of death" (ibid., 7.) In a fashion similar to how "the noir films of the 1940s and 1950s emerged from the political instabilities of the Second World War and the Cold War", "the darkness of post-9/11 cinema … encapsulates the contemporary zeitgeist" (ibid., 7).

Terence McSweeney exemplifies this expansive reading of post-9/11 allegory's potential by comparing symbolic pictures from the 2000s with more literal-minded apprehensions of the War on Terror. Listing genre archetypes which range from the 'torture porn' horror of *Hostel* (2005) to historical drama in Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), he stresses allegory's ability to "function as a site of sustained and interrogative discourse on the era" and underline "vivid encapsulations of the prevailing ideological debates of the decade" (McSweeney 2014, 20–21). The achievements of allegorical filmmaking surpassed reverential dramatisations of recent history such as Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006) and the Jonathan Franzen adaptation *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011). These films' sole focus on the immediate drama of the September 11 attacks eliminated the imagination borne by political allusion through their attempt to "reify 9/11 as an almost ahistorical moment", "providing an elaborate erasure of political and historical context" (ibid., 20–21).

Douglas Kellner, like McSweeney, expresses approval of the possibilities of allegorical cinema, but he differs in viewing the encoding of political disquisition as a comprehensive phenomenon, capable of transcending confines of explicit narrative and subject matter. In *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era*, Kellner (2010, 27) interprets a "transcoding" of "the political discourses of the era" across a range of genres, including conservative films that echoed "Bush and Cheney discourses on foreign policy and militarism", liberal productions

that were "critical of Bush-Cheney foreign policy", and pictures that were noticeably unpartisan. Kellner views the third type as typified by more symbolic fare such as the Revisionist Western and literary adaptation *No Country for Old Men* (explored in Chap. 5), which formed an example of a picture "multilayered, and open to multiple readings" (ibid., 27).

It is in this space, one implicitly of ambivalence, where meaning and political debate proves most rife. Yet this novel category ranks lower in importance than Kellner's emphasis on an American cinema where contemporaneous partisan rivalries are reified, updating his and Michael Ryan's 1988 work *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. In that collaboration, the authors posit that films of the Reagan era as different as *E.T.* (1982) and *Salvador* (1986) act as "cultural forces at work in contradiction to the hegemonic conservative bloc" (Kellner and Ryan 1988, 12). Likewise, the overall picture painted by Kellner in *Cinema Wars* is one of a Hollywood environment consisting of a constructive hyperpartisanship. He describes a "contested terrain that reproduces existing social struggles" (Kellner 2010, 2). He also praises 2000s Hollywood cinema as "comparable to the so-called Hollywood Renaissance of the late 1960s and 1970s" (the New Hollywood period), owing to the "surprisingly many critical films that engage with the issues of the day" (ibid., 2).

Other scholars of cinematic allegory during the post-9/11 era, however, have been sceptical about its ideological intentions and the healthy combativeness Kellner purports as part of its cultural content. David Holloway posits that mainstream American films which address the War on Terror subordinate politics to the primacy of spectacle, resulting in a shallowness which merely rationalises American intervention abroad. Evaluating pictures as individually distinctive as Jonathan Demme's remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004) and Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005), he cites the prevalence of "an allegory lite", where "controversial issues can be safely addressed because they can be 'read off' stories by the viewer … the other attractions on offer are sufficiently compelling or diverse, that the viewer can enjoy the film without needing to engage at all" (Holloway 2008, 90). The allegorical quality therefore becomes nullified by the requisite spectacle provided by Hollywood filmmakers, neutralising dissent in favour of a marketable centrism.

Guy Westwell also perceives this centrism, but instead views it as integral to all forms of mainstream Hollywood engagement, irrespective of spectacle. Popular American film, whether allegorical or literal, seeks