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## Religion and Moral Injury in American Vietnam War Films

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## Religion and Moral Injury in American Vietnam War Films

### Abstract

This essay focuses on the representation of religion in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and Brian de Palma's *Casualties of War* (1989). It explores how religion intersects with the experience of moral trauma at an individual level, and how the films portray moral injury to be as damaging an aspect of war trauma for Vietnam veterans as grievous physical harm. Further, the essay considers how moral injury is a fundamental component of the collective trauma the nation experienced and, in turn, the culture wars that erupted during and after the war in Vietnam.

### Keywords

Religion, Moral Injury, Vietnam War, Full Metal Jacket, Born on the Fourth of July, Casualties of War

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### Author Notes

Dr. Mary F. Brewer is Senior Lecturer in English at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Loughborough University. Her research interests include religion and literature, war writing, and intersectionality and literature. She would like to express her gratitude to Professor Angela K. Smith and Professor Caroline Pipe-Kennedy for their critical comments on this article, as well as John C. Lyden and the reviewers selected by the journal for their feedback. Their observations greatly improved the quality of the work.

## INTRODUCTION

Many American films about the Vietnam War focus on the field experiences of soldiers that give rise to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or its impact on veterans' post-war lives. This essay focuses on the portrayal of religion and moral injury in three films: Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* [FMJ (1987)], Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* [BFJ (1989)], and Brian de Palma's *Casualties of War* [CW (1989)]. Where it is helpful to underscore a point, I refer also to the literary sources on which the films are based. The films were produced at a cultural moment during which the 'Myth of the War Experience' held less sway than at any other time in American history. As theorized by George L. Mosse, this pervasive cultural myth serves to legitimize war. It refashions the real horror of war into a sacred experience by representing soldiers as sainted heroes and martyrs, while battlefields and war monuments become symbolic sites of worship.<sup>1</sup> Mosse argues that the Vietnam War Memorial stands as a monument to the death of this cultural myth, "however provisional," as much as to those who died in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the myth would be resurrected during the Gulf War and inform later revisionist films about Vietnam, such as Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* (2002).<sup>3</sup>

Kubrick, Stone and de Palma portray unconstrained, visceral scenes of senseless violence and death, which are intended as indicative of conflict in Vietnam. Such representations subvert the idea of war as a sacred endeavour. Moreover, they leave the spectator with the impression that Vietnam was a bloodier and more destructive conflict compared to earlier wars, because many earlier American films about war provide more sanitized visions of conflict. Yet, those who served in WWII witnessed similar scenes of maimed and dead comrades, civilian casualties, and the destruction of environments by weaponry that seemed apocalyptic in its horror. Despite this, the response of WWII veterans to their combat experience differs significantly from that of Vietnam

veterans. The context of the war in Vietnam shares similarities with America's 'forgotten' war, the Korean conflict, but those who fought in Vietnam more often imagined warfare according to how WWII was represented in popular culture. In his war memoir, Claude Anshin Thomas recalls growing up listening to his father and his friends "tell stories that made war seem glorious, exciting and romantic." These personal narratives were reinforced by "endless movies that romanticize and glorify" WWII.<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey A. Smith notes the tradition of linking American war objectives to God's will in Hollywood films.<sup>5</sup> Yet, such accounts of glorious and righteous conflict bore little resemblance to Thomas's experience of fighting in Vietnam.

A comparative study of WWII and Vietnam veterans by Carrie Barnes and John H. Harvey finds self-reported trauma to be comparable across both groups, but the after-effects of trauma differ markedly. Twenty per cent of WWII veterans reported symptoms of PTSD, including difficulties in interpersonal relationships, substance abuse, startle response, or emotional flatness. In comparison, sixty-five per cent of Vietnam veterans experienced PTSD. The authors conclude that this disparity is linked to the legacy of "shame" that is attached to the Vietnam war.<sup>6</sup> One must also consider the perception of lost innocence among Vietnam veterans, disillusionment with American government and military leaders, and the impact of the anti-War movement.

The war in Vietnam was the first conflict in American history to provoke widespread and palpable opposition on the home front—while soldiers were still in the field—and where returning veterans participated in anti-War activities. Unlike those who fought in WWII, the sacrifice of Vietnam veterans was largely disregarded. Their service was often treated with disdain, while many who opposed the war typecast veterans as guilty of participating in a moral atrocity. Conversely, WWII veterans report feeling pride and patriotism for their service in what *Time* magazine labelled "the last good war."<sup>7</sup> The quasi-religious 'Myth of the War Experience' offered

some psychological armour to those who fought in American wars that were successfully framed within its discourse, by reinforcing the idea of sacrifice for the nation as a moral duty.

Kelly Denton-Borhaug describes language about the necessity of sacrifice “as an electrical conduit between the institutionalization of ‘war-culture’ and the understandings and practices of popular Christianity.” The hinge of sacrifice between nationalism and Christianity remains largely invisible to many if not most U.S. citizens, and the sacred sheen to war-culture contributed by sacrificial language and understandings goes unchallenged.<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle explain why Americans perceived the war in Vietnam as a failed sacrifice. The Vietnamese were not considered a convincing enemy. More than 58,000 Americans died in Vietnam; however, the deaths occurred over two decades, which reduced the sense of victimage. There was no formal declaration of war, which provides “an important ritual opportunity for groups to communicate to themselves their willingness to sacrifice their own.”<sup>9</sup>

The films chosen for discussion here foreground the legacy and impact of America’s reluctance to embrace the veterans of a failed ritual sacrifice in terms of moral injury. *FMJ*, *BFJ* and *CW* emerged at a time in American cinematic and cultural history where the idea that sacrifice for the nation is laudable and virtuous could be interrogated and even negated, without unduly compromising box office success.<sup>10</sup> This essay reads the films for the insights they offer into moral injury as a fundamental component of individual trauma among soldiers in Vietnam; further, I consider the collective trauma that the nation experienced and, in turn, the culture wars that erupted in the wake of Vietnam.

## **PTSD VERSUS MORAL INJURY**

PTSD emerged as the standard term for war trauma following the experiences of American soldiers in Vietnam. It refers to a wide range of physical and mental responses to war (and other trauma), including panic attacks, chronic pain, flashbacks, hallucinations, rage, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Another component of war trauma, moral injury, was conceptualized by Veterans Affairs psychiatrist Jonathan Shay: based on his work with Vietnam veterans, he identified symptoms that did not fit squarely within the accepted clinical definition of PTSD. Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon provides an overview of the two waves of clinical discourse on moral injury. The first wave, led by Shay, centres on the individual who sustains moral harm: specifically, a US veteran in the context of war.<sup>11</sup> According to Shay, moral trauma occurs by virtue of a betrayal of what is right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high stakes situation.<sup>12</sup> The second wave extends Shay's concept to include: 1) the combat environment, 2) the subjective perception of the environment, and 3) the idea that moral injury can occur because of transgressive actions by the individual as well as the actions of others against the individual.<sup>13</sup>

Soldiers who suffer moral injury are subject to feelings of guilt, shame and self-loathing for not living up to ideals of ethical behaviour. Historically, these ideals have been broadly encapsulated within Judeo-Christian discourse in American culture. Moral injury also produces feelings of self-alienation, as the experience of war fractures the sense of ethical identity constructed in the civilian sphere. Veterans may engage in acts of self-harm or suicide to atone for their perceived transgressions. Trusting others can become difficult when institutional authority places someone in an arena where it is virtually impossible not to transgress the moral norms that govern civilian life. The feeling of being betrayed by one's government, church, or the generation of one's parents can provoke fear and depression, but it can also lead to anger and destructive acts

toward others. And, of course, the effects of moral injury are often suffered in tandem with many of the debilitating physical symptoms of PTSD. As Shay puts it, “PTSD does a pretty good job of describing a kind of fear syndrome.” However, “as officially defined, [it] is rarely what wrecks veterans’ lives or crushes them to suicide.” Moral injury does both.<sup>14</sup>

PTSD is attributed primarily to the fear of being killed or injured in a combat situation; in contrast, a study to aid clinicians in treating psychologically traumatized veterans defines moral injury as the effect that “emerges from a service member’s transgressive acts of commission and omission, being affected by the moral violations of others, or bearing witness to events that severely contradict moral expectations.”<sup>15</sup> The most obvious wartime situations that combatants may experience as morally compromising relate to acts of violence and killing. In addition, actions that harm civilians or contravene legal protections for prisoners of war, witnessing such actions, or failing to protect one’s comrades, non-combatants, or prisoners may also precipitate moral harm. A comparison of the causes and effects of PTSD and moral injury published in *Clinical Psychology Review* finds that “prevailing theories of posttraumatic adaptation” explain the long-term phenomenology of individuals harmed by others. However, PTSD theory does not adequately consider the potential harm produced by perpetration (and moral transgressions) in traumatic contexts.”<sup>16</sup> Chris J. Antal and Kathy Winings identify the fundamental difference between moral injury and PTSD to be rooted in the core emotions: “moral injury is based in *shame* and *guilt* whereas PTSD is rooted in an overwhelming experience of fear.”<sup>17</sup> I suggest that there is another fundamental difference: PTSD is rooted within medico-psychological paradigms, whereas moral injury is located in religious/ethical discourse, while overlapping with clinical discourses.

The idea that soldiers should be spiritually as well as physically fit for combat is supported by the presence of military chaplains in all American wars, since the establishment of the American Chaplaincy Core in 1775. According to Jacqueline E. Whitt, formal character guidance programs in the military are “designed to build up the character and fighting effectiveness of American troops.”<sup>18</sup> In Vietnam, the programmes were backed up by the presence of military chaplains in the field.<sup>19</sup> The objective was to solidify the idea that religious beliefs were essential components of American identity that intersected with the value codes of civil society and military service.<sup>20</sup>

Kenneth I. Pargament and Patrick J. Sweeney provide an overview of research on spirituality among soldiers. Studies show that spiritual variables among Vietnam veterans with PTSD were predictive of longer-term survival in the community without rehospitalization.<sup>21</sup> Individuals who cannot resolve their spiritual struggles are “apt to experience declines in psychological, social, and physical functioning and even greater risk of mortality.”<sup>22</sup> As Zachary Moon points out, moral injury results from the transgression and violation of shared moral covenants within a social-relational world: those “who have been indoctrinated—ritually reformed—through recruit military training have through that process assumed multiple moral worlds, one corresponding to their civilian identity and one rooted in that military identity.”<sup>23</sup> For the majority of American soldiers in Vietnam, this shared moral covenant had its origins in Judeo-Christian teachings, and the wounds of moral injury were consequent to carrying out or witnessing actions that transgressed these tenets.

Given the crossing point of moral injury and religion, it is necessary to say something about the concept of religion that informs my discussion of the films, as what constitutes the religious in late modern Western culture is multiplicitous and a subject of debate. I employ a combination of a substantive and functional approach to religion. As explained by Grace Davie, a substantive



approach considers the beliefs and practices of churches and individuals in relation to a supernatural sphere, while a functional one concerns itself with the social influence of religion and how it binds people into collectives.<sup>24</sup> Within the context of war, how religion interfaces with nationalism proves key to understanding how substantive faith can be harnessed by secular institutions to inspire support for and participation in wars. Hence, I consider how the films reveal the intersection of personal faith and politico-religious rhetoric in the experience of moral injury, that is, how American civil religion contributed to a particularly fertile environment within which soldiers in Vietnam might sustain moral injuries.

### **MAKING SOLDIERS OUT OF CIVILIANS**

*FMJ* is based on Gustav Hasford's novel *The Short Timers* (1979). It follows a group of recruits from their arrival at Parris Island for boot camp through their deployment in Vietnam, and it is starkly divided into two acts: the men's military training and their combat experience. Following Hasford's lead, the first half of the film foregrounds how religion is harnessed to the war effort. Kubrick shows how the young men's training for war undermines the military's claim to value soldiers' spiritual wellbeing in favour of converting them to what Denton-Borhaug describes as an institutionalized 'war-culture' that pays lip-service to Christianity. The novel begins with drill Sergeant Gerheim's stark warning about the hard times ahead: "*If you ladies leave my island, if you survive recruit training, you will be a weapon, you will be a minister of death, praying for war. And proud.*"<sup>25</sup> The reference to ministers who seek battle illustrates how religious discourse is employed ironically to decivilize the young recruits. Gerheim works to desensitize them to the injunction 'thou shalt not kill' and to revalue killing as a worthy action that should elicit no feelings of remorse or shame.

Walter S. Griggs Jr. points out that one argument employed by churches in support of conscientious objectors is based on the need to uphold military morale, because the moral scruples that attach to authentic expressions of faith could prove “a disruptive influence and hazard” to a unit.<sup>26</sup> *FMJ* embraces the idea that religion threatens military order and success. The film exposes what Rita Nakashima-Brock and Gabriella Lettini identify as the contradiction at the heart of the US military’s character-building regimen; the Army recognizes as spiritually fit only soldiers “who can remain unaffected in any deep moral or emotional way”<sup>27</sup> when transgressing the Judeo-Christian code of morality as part of their service. Thus, Kubrick’s Drill Sergeant Hartman will not tolerate faith among the recruits. He considers it alongside anaemic femininity to be a sign of dangerous fragility. When Hartman forces the recruits to sing a mocking rendition of "Happy birthday, dear Jesus" at Christmas, it shows how the recruits must straddle the civilian world informed by Judeo-Christian ethics and the amoral world of the military.

Hartman displays little comprehension of and even less respect for Christianity. Religion aligns with authoritarianism and violence in his world view, as demonstrated when he berates Joker for disobedience: “You goddamn communist heathen, you had best sound off that you love the Virgin Mary, or I’m gonna stomp your guts out! Now you DO love the Virgin Mary, don’t you?” Hartman prefers presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald to Jesus. He takes pride in how Oswald learned to shoot in the Marines. Hartman instructs the recruits to "Be like Oswald" – who represents an exemplar of moral transgression within the social-relational world of American civilian society. In this way, Hartman creates a set of ideal conditions for the men to sustain moral injuries. The recruits must struggle to retain their humanity in an environment void of humane values or genuine spirituality; this puts them at risk of cognitive dissonance and a diminished ability to understand what is right. That Joker suffers such an internal fracture is evidenced when

he goes to Vietnam and displays a peace sign on his uniform, while 'Born to Kill' is blazoned across his helmet.

Jonathan H. Ebel calls attention to the American cultural and civil religious trope of the G.I. Messiah. This metaphor provides Americans, who have been deeply influenced by the narratives and symbols of Christianity, with a “generally intelligible conceptual language,” and it allows them to recognize and celebrate how soldiers literally and figuratively act to save the nation through their altruistic sacrifices.<sup>28</sup> Kubrick subverts this trope by presenting a group of young men who cannot save themselves from being irredeemably morally tarnished; therefore, they cannot serve as saviours of a nation that defines itself as Christian. Assessing anti-war activities among returning veterans, Ebel suggests that the theme of coercion was taken as gospel to explain their military experience. Recruits felt that they were coerced into service and turned into murderers by a corrupt government.<sup>29</sup> He cites one soldier's description of boot camp as “advanced genocide training” – a place where he was taught to “hate, hate, anything that wasn't like me,” and in the process, his moral worth was destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

Hartman defines human worth as the preserve of unreconstructed heterosexual masculinity, which is accessible only by means of faith in and abject allegiance to “the Corps.” This privileged masculinity is opposed to feminine and homosexual worthlessness (despite the homoerotic undertones of Hartman's regimen). Empathy based on shared humanity is anathema within the world of the military as framed by Kubrick. Hartman dissociates sex from sentiment. He harnesses sexual pleasure as a lure for the men to commit acts of violence and killing. He even forces the recruits to sleep with their rifles and recite love poems to them. In this way, the film illustrates how moral harm can develop within a military context through the process of gender shaming, which plays upon the young men's fear of figurative emasculation.

Hartman puts the recruits through a series of exacting physical and mental challenges designed to test their conventional masculinity, and both he and they view the failure to perform adequately in boot camp as a public failure of manhood. Kubrick accurately represents military gender politics in the Vietnam era, as evidenced by veteran accounts. For example, Robert Eisenhart describes how prescriptive masculinity was central to his Marine training:

‘The conscripts were constantly accused of being inadequate as men; they were women, girls or homosexuals.’ ‘You can’t hack it, you goddamned faggot’ was a favoured term of abuse.’

His drill sergeant was akin to Hartman, forcing Eisenhart and his fellow recruits to “place their penises in the breeches of their weapon as a censure for ineffectiveness.”<sup>31</sup>

In *FMJ*, the connection between masculinity and military performance is evidenced most explicitly through the character of private Leonard Lawrence. Hartman targets his sadistic practices at Lawrence, whom he re-names after the comedic TV character PFC Gomer Pyle. Through a programme of sustained physical and psychological abuse, Lawrence turns from an ‘ordinary,’ if hapless, young man into a psychotic murderer. No longer capable of human empathy, he can bond only with his weapon. Joker discovers Lawrence conducting a rifle drill in the barrack toilets. He alerts Hartman, who attempts to disarm him by verbal assault, a technique to which Lawrence has thus far proven susceptible. In this instance, it fails with tragic consequences. Shay observes that where leadership malpractice inflicts moral injury, the body codes it as physical attack, mobilizes for danger and counterattack, and lastingly imprints the physiology every bit as much as if it had been a physical attack.<sup>32</sup> Shay’s assessment provides a rationale for Lawrence’s somatic response to Hartman’s linguistic tirade, as he responds to what feels like overwhelming danger by assassinating Hartman before turning the gun on himself.

Lawrence's sustained decline in functionality supports the idea that character guidance within a military context can only ever be theatre. Lawrence arrives at boot camp as a friendly, trusting, and empathetic young man. These qualities, viewed as positive in civilian life, place him in greater danger of sustaining moral trauma in a military environment. Kubrick represents boot camp as an inherently traumatic space in which young men are made to submit to authority figures who routinely betray the moral principles that frame the social-relational world in which they grew up. Lawrence is made to feel ashamed and guilty about his lack of a militarized masculinity, and the trauma he sustains because of constant hazing by Hartman and his fellow recruits is so deep that it provokes him to murder and suicide. Lawrence's crimes are the ironic measure of Hartman's success at indoctrinating him into the military code that perverts religious discourse to refashion young men into killing machines. In this way, Kubrick gives material form to Lawrence's moral injury, for he is mortally wounded as much by his spiritual trauma as the literal bullet that he puts through his head.

### **ACTS OF COMMISSION**

*BFJ* exemplifies how shame and guilt related to combat activity can create debilitating moral trauma for a soldier. In the heat of battle, Marine Sergeant Ron Kovic mistakenly kills a young private in his unit, an act that plagues his conscience. Prior to shooting Private Wilson, Kovic's squad mistakenly opens fire on a group of civilians, and Kovic discovers women and children who are riddled with bullet wounds cowering in a small hut. These kinds of experiences, according to Denis O. Kiely and Lisa Swift, lie at the root of combat trauma: "The violent and morally ambiguous nature of combat forces soldiers to make spur-of-the-moment decisions and to observe horrific events that can sometimes haunt them for the rest of their lives and thwart their

reintegration into civilian life.”<sup>33</sup> The development of Kovic’s character follows this trajectory: back home, he attempts to deal with his moral trauma by turning to alcohol and drugs to suppress his combat memories, thereby further impairing his ability to function socially.

As my discussion of *FMJ* shows, the ideals enshrined in the military’s character guidance programs contradict the core lessons of recruit training for war. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman points out that the military overcomes societal injunctions against killing by training recruits to emotionally distance themselves from the enemy they will be fighting; cultural, social, moral distance plays as much of a role in enabling someone to forget, at least in the moment, that they are ending the life of another human being as physical or mechanical distance.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as Kovic’s story demonstrates, such training leaves soldiers with no psychological defence against the repercussions of ‘friendly fire’ or ‘collateral’ deaths.

*BFJ* suggests that reinforcing religion and military service in a combat zone could exacerbate a soldier’s chance of being morally traumatized rather than leading to greater moral resilience. Hal Hinson interprets the battle scene as the moment in which “all the moral underpinnings of Kovic’s life are destroyed.”<sup>35</sup> Roger Ebert also points to the crucial nature of this scene, for it shows the audience not only how but *why* Kovic makes the mistake of killing Wilson. Witnessing the devastation and death wrought upon the villagers produces “the loss of focus” in Kovic that led to Wilson’s death as well as Kovic’s own “crippling injury.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Kovic’s breakdown has deeper roots in his familial indoctrination into Cold war culture.

After WWII, Dianne Kirby argues that Communism was presented as a threat from within and without to the ‘American Way of Life.’ Americans took it for granted that Communism was by no means only a political, military, or economic challenge. The ideology also threatened the deepest spiritual foundations of human life.<sup>37</sup> Religion enjoyed tremendous cultural influence in

1950s America. Whitt records that between 1955-65, the membership of most religious denominations in America grew significantly.<sup>38</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower's administration (1953-61) harnessed this religiosity to American civic concerns. There was a growth in religious language and symbolism in American political discourse. A new phrase, 'One Nation Under God,' was added to the "Pledge of Allegiance." 'In God We Trust' was stamped onto the U.S. Dollar. T. Jeremy Gunn and Mounia Slighoua call attention to the Eisenhower Administration's "Back to God" programme, which promoted the belief that Christianity was the nation's greatest weapon against Communism. They note that this programme entailed little real interest in spirituality; rather, it harnessed faith for foreign policy actions and perceived political advantage.<sup>39</sup> Cold War ideologues capitalized on these developments to present the Vietnam war as a fight for religious freedom by Vietnamese Catholics against ungodly communists.

Stone presents the young Kovic within scenes of classic Americana, infused with Catholic symbology. On his birthday, his family take him to the town's July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations; held aloft on his father's shoulders, he is enthralled by the romanticism of a military parade, but he overlooks the veterans' injuries that foreshadow his own. His mother lectures him on American superiority and the evils of communist aggression. A teenage Ron is mesmerized by John F. Kennedy's inaugural address. Kennedy's speech lauds the sacrifice of veterans of foreign wars, juxtaposes the virtues of American values to its communist rivals, and enshrines American rights within the terms of a divine covenant. These familial and political factors combine to prep Kovic for fighting in Vietnam.

When Kovic arrives in Vietnam, he represents the quintessential American patriot whose worldview is shaped by his devout Catholic upbringing. The response of organized religion to the war in Vietnam differed between Catholics and Protestants, especially as the nature of the conflict

became more widely known via media reportage. Mitchell K. Hall contends that the Catholic Church in America “eagerly participated in the religious nationalism of the postwar years.”<sup>40</sup> The American Catholic hierarchy remained firmly supportive of the conflict longer than other denominations. Richard John Neuhaus singles out Cardinal Francis Spellman, Archbishop of New York, as representative of the establishment Catholic view. Spellman characterized Americans fighting in Vietnam as “soldiers of Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Kovic’s decision to enlist in the Marines is processed through a lens that aligns Catholicism to American civil religion, despite the roots of the latter in Protestantism.

*BFJ* illustrates how combat in Vietnam could strip soldiers of the moral camouflage provided by religious nationalism. For Kovic, the moral confusion and remorse that stem from his inability to reconcile the faith teachings of his childhood, the Commandment ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill,’ with killing in the national interest, drives his depression even more than his loss of bodily functions. Kovic returns from Vietnam physically and morally broken: a man without faith in God, his country, or himself. His crippling guilt and self-hatred lead to estrangement from his conservative family and community. His inability to reintegrate into civilian life is exacerbated by his family’s refusal to confront the morally dubious belief systems they have passed on to their children. Kovic’s experience in Vietnam is not unique. For many soldiers, the moral boundaries set out in Judeo-Christianity clashed frequently with the actions they carried out in the field. Veteran Philip K. Paulson explains that:

After my first month in Vietnam, I became an atheist. My former religion was Lutheran.... No compassionate God, I thought, would permit all this killing to happen. After witnessing the dead and wounded during my first “firefight,” I looked up and said, “You sadistic God! You’re not worthy of my worship!”<sup>42</sup>



Despite losing his faith, ironically, Kovic only begins to carve out a new path in life after he confesses his transgressive acts, albeit not to a priest. He confesses to his mother that he has the blood of women and children on his hands. He admits to Private Wilson's family that he killed their son. While no one can offer him absolution, his acts of remembrance, confession, and penitence enable him to survive his moral injury. Although Kovic dissociates himself from institutional religion, his personal redemption remains rooted in a spirit of religiosity that is infused with Christian ethics. In the introduction to the 2005 edition of his autobiography, on which Stone's film is based, Kovic writes:

I have been given an opportunity to move through that dark night of the soul to a new shore, to gain an understanding, a knowledge, an entirely different vision. I now believe I have suffered for a reason.... My life has been a blessing in disguise, even with the pain and great difficulty that my physical disability continues to bring. It is a blessing to be able to speak on behalf of peace....<sup>43</sup>

Thus, his pacifism stems from a newly acquired spiritual vision that allows him scope to atone for the moral transgressions he committed in Vietnam.

Most critical commentary on the film focuses on Stone's critique of Cold War politics, the mendacity of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, and how it romanticizes the youth counter-culture movement. Few detect the deep structural religiosity of the narrative that is borrowed from Kovic's autobiography, Pauline Kael being a notable exception. She characterizes the film's narrative structure "as a series of blackout episodes that suggest the Stations of the Cross; rising strings alert you to the heavy stuff. Then the finale—Resurrection—takes Ron into white light, and John Williams lays on the trumpets."<sup>44</sup> Kovic's renaissance suggests that overcoming moral trauma and the loss of faith it often summons, whether in self, society, or something that transcends the material, requires self-examination and establishing a new moral plane of emotional existence.

Kovic's story, especially the familial strands of the narrative, mirrors the ideological and generational divides that erupted in American society consequent to the Vietnam war. C.E. Tygart records that only a minority of Americans supported withdrawal from Vietnam in 1966. By mid-1971, approximately seventy-five per cent of college students and the general adult population favoured disengagement.<sup>45</sup> Concomitantly, as the war escalated and more indiscriminate bombing campaigns occurred, Protestant churches began to publicly question the morality of American involvement. Leading Civil Rights figures such as Dr Martin Luther King also intervened in the debate about the war's morality. Anti-war clergy formed CALCAV, Clergy and Layman Concerned About Vietnam, and they sometimes worked with the secular anti-war movement.<sup>46</sup>

David Settje's study of Christian reactions to US foreign policy during the Cold War identifies how churches came to mirror the spectrum of opinion that characterized secular attitudes.<sup>47</sup> Along with Americans who professed no faith, Christians altered their positions from mainly supportive of the war because of its Cold War context to condemnation of it by 1970.<sup>48</sup> A 1968 editorial from *Christian Century* explains the focus of anti-war activities on what Americans were doing instead of the North Vietnamese Army or Viet Cong: "Nowhere in the Christian tradition can we find a charter to repent for someone else; we have to concentrate on ways in which we are returning evil for evil. That we 'know' they started the war before we escalated it does not lessen the realisation that the absence of restraint on our methods of fighting that war is a blight on America, a blight open for the world to see and recoil from."<sup>49</sup> While supporters of the conflict pitched it as a fight for Vietnamese religious freedom, liberal Americans and many persons of faith viewed it as a battle for the soul of their fellow Americans and the national character.

As more churches announced opposition to the war, how service in Vietnam was understood by American soldiers shifted too. Religious opposition added to feelings of moral

confusion about the war itself and the duties that soldiers were expected to perform, and, thus, the chances of soldiers suffering moral injury increased. *BFJ* ends with Kovic waiting to take his place on stage at the Democratic National Convention, where he will make his plea for a world without war. The psycho-spiritual space that he has come to inhabit affords him the chance to tend the soul wounds that he suffered in the war. However, his healing is predicated on re-entering a progressive social space within which the nation might also heal the collective legacy of guilt and shame for its actions in Vietnam.

### **ACTS OF OMISSION**

Like *BFJ*, de Palma's *CW* reflects how those who served in Vietnam grew up in a society that educated them to believe that America fought defensive wars or fought altruistically for others' freedom. To subvert this idea, de Palma mobilizes one of the Vietnam War's more infamous episodes, known in military parlance as the 'Incident on Hill 192.' The film adapts Daniel Lang's account of a war crime that occurred in November 1966, and which gained notoriety when Lang's article appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1969. Lang's narrative follows the testimony of PFC Robert M. Storeby, renamed Sven Eriksson to protect his identity. Storeby testified against his sergeant and three other members of his Army reconnaissance squad that kidnapped, raped, and murdered a Vietnamese civilian, Phan Thi Mao.

The choice of Michael J. Fox to portray Eriksson is surprising given that the actor's profile was so closely associated with light comedic entertainment, such as *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis 1985).<sup>50</sup> Some critics consider Fox to have been "woefully miscast,"<sup>51</sup> whereas others view the director's choice as inspired. Alex von Tunzelmann calls Fox "perfect as Eriksson. The very fact that he comes across as a clean-cut, amiable, ordinary guy, completely out of his comfort

zone, is what makes the film so shocking.”<sup>52</sup> In a commentary on his film, de Palma portrays the war in Vietnam as “morally grey,” while Eriksson arrives in Vietnam with a clear understanding of moral boundaries. His description of Eriksson points to him suffering from PTSD.<sup>53</sup> However, Eriksson’s trauma is not rooted in his close encounter with death when he falls into an enemy tunnel or his involvement in firefights; rather, it stems from his inability to escape the moral quagmire of Vietnam despite trying to do the right thing.

The film presents Eriksson during and after his tour of combat. We first see him as a civilian after the war. Seated on a bus across from a young Vietnamese woman, he imagines her to be Mao; this triggers a lengthy flashback sequence. Through Eriksson’s eyes, we revisit Mao’s ordeal in gruesome detail. There is a strain of racist geographical mysticism in many Hollywood Vietnam War films that represent the country as a place of barbarism into which innocent young white soldiers are seduced: the character of Nick Chevotarevich in Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (1978) is a prime example.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, *CW* lapses into promoting this mythology through the way it treats Mao. The film marginalizes the Vietnamese. For an English-speaking audience, Mao and her family are silent. Mao serves mainly to demonstrate how the war has morally degraded ‘ordinary’ young American men.

Marzena Sokolowska-Paryz describes the script as rewriting a real event into a recognizable narrative blueprint – “the so-called descent into the beast theme popularized after the Great War.”<sup>55</sup> Lang’s account illustrates that Storeby too subscribes to the idea of Vietnamese primitivism when he refuses “to condemn the members of the patrol personally for their crime.” He accounts for their aberrant actions by virtue of their location in the Asian jungle.<sup>56</sup> *CW* echoes this strand of thinking whereby to serve in Vietnam equates to entering the proverbial ‘heart of

darkness.’ Thus, when Eriksson successfully resists pressure to participate in Mao’s rape and murder, he appears extraordinary.

Research demonstrates that failure to live up to a prescribed ideal of masculinist behaviour in the combat arena may lead to feelings of shame, especially if a soldier’s act of omission leads to another’s suffering. Moreover, the failure of others to live up to moral expectations, especially commanding officers, can produce feelings of alienation and a loss of faith in key societal institutions.<sup>57</sup> Eriksson epitomizes the fundamental nature of moral injury that is rooted in guilt and self-loathing due to acts of omission. He proves unable to protect Mao, and his trauma is compounded when military authorities turn a blind eye each time that he reports the crime.

As I allude to above, for many Americans the war in Vietnam represented an unwarranted and morally problematic conflict. In contrast, Eriksson shares with the young Kovic a cultural *naïveté* that informs his understanding of America’s purpose in Vietnam, and which renders him especially susceptible to moral trauma. In an attempt to win ‘hearts and minds,’ we watch Eriksson interact amiably with Vietnamese children and help a peasant to plough his rice field. He is surprised when his behaviour provokes only criticism and mockery from his comrades. Later, they attempt to murder him in revenge for reporting the war crime. His superiors also treat him as a problem soldier. Unlike Kovic, though, Eriksson does not become alienated from the military: this is signalled by his words to Meserve just before the rape occurs: “This ain’t the Army Sarge.”

de Palma aims to create a staunch anti-war narrative, but the portrayal of Eriksson’s character is not always consonant with this aim. It is unclear whether the spectator is meant to regard the crime as the work of immoral individuals or symbolic of the war itself as an immoral endeavour. John Trafton contends that *CW* revises “the ‘combat group’ to function as a subversive commentary on American society.” The idea is to “undermine our understanding of the combat

group as a cohesive embodiment of a mythologized American character, and to sharpen the focus on the issue of how war induces a shared experience of moral decline.”<sup>58</sup> Notwithstanding, Eriksson’s treatment of Vietnamese civilians, as well as his pained response to the crime, feeds a sense of altruism and mutuality, and this is enhanced by his position as the film’s moral hero. By implication, this lends moral polish to the wider American presence. Unlike Kovic’s story, Lang’s raw material affords little structural critique of American involvement in Vietnam in terms of economic or foreign policy interests.

*CW* is structured on a simple binary of good versus evil, where Eriksson represents the ‘good’ and Meserve, Clark and Hatcher symbolize the opposite. Early in the film, Eriksson is identified with Christian faith. When Brownie invites Eriksson to confide in him, he does so by invoking the trope of the confessional: “Think about me as your priest;” Eriksson reacts by displaying his dog tags that read Lutheran, and, as such, he has no priest. His assertion of Lutheran identity equates not only to an expression of personal faith, but also embeds him within American WASP discourse. Hence, his calls upon God in the field are to be heard both as expressions of genuine personal faith and references to American civil religion, with its denotations of moral exceptionalism.

The film departs from Storeby’s religious perspective as recounted by Lang, who quotes Storeby’s wife as saying: “Sven wasn’t raised church.”<sup>59</sup> Storeby moves unexpectedly from being nominally Christian to actively Christian because of his experience in Vietnam. By endowing Eriksson with a vein of religiosity from the start, de Palma qualifies him to act as the voice of Christian conscience for his squad members, as well as an American audience. For Eriksson, personal and national salvation requires Americans to fight a ‘clean’ war.

This goddamn thing is turning us on our heads.  
We're gettin' it backwards man.  
Just because each of us might at any second be blown away...  
...everybody's acting like we can do anything, man.  
And it don't matter what we do.  
But I'm thinking maybe it's the other way round.  
You know, maybe, the main thing is just the opposite.  
Because we might be dead in the next second...  
...maybe we gotta be extra careful what we do.  
Because maybe it matters more.  
Jesus, maybe it matters more than we even know.

His words signal how field actions have transcendent meaning and consequences for him. Meserve, as foil, represents the perversion of Christianity in the cause of personal aggression; this is exemplified when he misquotes Psalm 23: "Though I walk through the valley of evil, I shall fear no death; cause I'm the meanest motherfucker in the valley."

Among small outlying units, a feeling of being unmoored could precipitate a breakdown in military discipline. Soldiers could become disinterested in knowing whether they had killed an enemy, an ally, or civilian. In Vietnam, American military authority valued body counts as a measure of success, and this created the potential for war crimes to become normalized among some troops. Brownie, Meserve, Clark and Hatcher routinely try to 'educate' Eriksson and Díaz regarding the principles of warfare in Vietnam, which they consider to be divorced from civilian ethics. In a commentary on the film, Michael J. Fox describes it as an exploration of the extent to which morality depends on a comfortable existence; in other words, the film suggests that American morality may be a "luxury" that is not "transportable" to life and death situations.<sup>60</sup>

In one sense, what is done to Mao is personally motivated: it is revenge for Brownie's death. At the same time, it represents a profane instance of Meserve's morale building program, through which he shores up his men's masculine identity in a combat arena marked by fear and horror. For Meserve, this includes ensuring his men's access to sexual entertainment. Barred from

visiting a brothel because the Viet Cong are in town, raping Mao is meant to compensate his men for a loss of masculine sexual privilege to the enemy. Echoing the masculinist discourse of *FMJ*, Meserve grabs his genitals to indicate that his penis is his “weapon,” whereas his gun is “for fun.” Peter Travers argues that the film “shows how quickly the sexual instinct can become a killing instinct, how quickly both instincts can become a test of maleness and how quickly the unthinkable can become the inevitable.”<sup>61</sup> Eriksson reminds the men that “Jesus, we’re supposed to be here to help these people,” but for Meserve, all Vietnamese are ‘othered’ as the enemy. He represents Mao’s rape and murder as a part of combat operations; an acceptable extension of America’s fight in Vietnam. Moreover, Eriksson’s superiors try to coerce him into viewing the crime as understandable, if not justifiable, within the context of combat operations *in country*.

Díaz, who wears a rosary around his neck to display his Catholic faith, makes a pact with Eriksson not to participate in the rape; yet his faith fails to serve as a moral stabilizer. Like Hartman, Meserve plays upon his men’s fears of emasculation. He humiliates Díaz by suggesting he is homosexual; this provokes Díaz into committing rape. Navy Chaplain Nathan Solomon records that “there is a particular sort of injury to self that is greatly feared and talked about among male combatants: emasculation. Men fear losing sexual function far more than losing limbs. The dread of emasculation also includes being seen as “less than a man” in combat. The fear of physical emasculation mirrors the fear of social emasculation through failure to perform in the fight.”<sup>62</sup> Because Meserve casts the rape as part of the fight in Vietnam, those who participate in Mao’s degradation are motivated not only by a need to prove their manhood, but also by a need to prove their military fitness and loyalty to their immediate comrades. King describes this as “deviant cohesion,” whereby “small groups become so internally bonded that they ignore or subvert” their official obligations in the combat arena.<sup>63</sup>



Eriksson's faith proves a bulwark against Meserve's manipulations, but he comes to terms with what he witnesses only because he is supported by a representative of institutional Christianity. To blot out his memory of Mao, when he returns to base Eriksson gets drunk. He finds himself seated next to a military chaplain at the bar, whose uniform bears the insignia of the cross. The men bond through their shared Christianity. The Chaplain convinces him that "The answer's not in that can son." And this time, even though he is a Lutheran, Eriksson confesses. de Palma uses the conversation with the Chaplain to reaffirm the trigger point for Eriksson's trauma, as he concludes his story with a tearful, "And I failed, Sir, to stop them." His failure accounts for his ongoing feelings of remorse and shame.

The Chaplain's moral empathy proves the key factor in Eriksson's recuperation. Finally, he has met someone in the military who lives up to his standard of moral rectitude, as a close-up of the Chaplain reveals his shock and disgust at what happened to Mao. Immediately the camera cuts to the site of her murder, where Eriksson and his reluctant commanding officer watch military investigators take photos of Mao's body and retrieve evidence. The moral authority of religion embodied by the Chaplain overcomes the military's attempt to cover-up the atrocity in the interest of public relations, and this enables Eriksson to begin to deal more effectively with his trauma. Like *BFJ*, de Palma's film reveals how authentic spirituality can play a key role in healing the soul wounds of war. However, the positive representation of the Chaplain is another example of how de Palma's anti-war message is uneven; in essence, the film overlooks the role of religion in the institutionalization of American war-culture.

Although the resilience of Eriksson's faith may afford him victory over his superiors, the apparent resolution of his individual trauma further complicates the film's perspective on how the war reflected and affected the nation's moral condition. Are we meant to believe that the "bad

dream” of Vietnam is over for America, as well as Eriksson? Because Eriksson is the film’s figure of national conscience, when the young woman resembling Mao speaks with such care for him, it could be viewed as giving permission for America to let go of the memory of Vietnam. Vincent Canby believes that de Palma’s ending is “very questionable,” for it withholds “from the audience information about the ultimate disposition of the cases.” The film leaves the spectator with the erroneous belief that the ‘good guys’ win in the end.<sup>64</sup> The virtue of American justice seems confirmed as we watch each of the perpetrators brought to trial, convicted, and sentenced to prison time for their crimes. In fact, the men who raped and murdered Mao served relatively short prison terms, with subsequent military courts reducing the original sentences. The soldier represented by Díaz in the film served only 22 months, and the court overturned his dishonourable discharge on a technicality. By suppressing this, Canby argues, *CW* “undercuts its own stark pessimism,” and thereby, its anti-war credentials are substantially weakened.<sup>65</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Warren Kinghorn argues that the concept of moral injury is important in the study of war trauma because it demands a “critical analysis of the relationship between combat trauma and the moral agency of the acting soldier,”<sup>66</sup> and, I would argue, an analysis of the role of the military complex and the civilian order that supports it. For Kinghorn, moral trauma cannot ethically be considered without also critiquing war’s “moral justifiability and vice versa.”<sup>67</sup> The films explored here offer valuable artistic interventions in the debate about the moral justification of America’s actions in Vietnam.

*FMJ* focuses on the dangers of perverting religious faith to convince young recruits that killing is not merely acceptable, but is an act worthy of praise. *BFJ* highlights how weaponizing

religion to prosecute war for ideological ends can traumatize individuals, while de Palma's *CW* addresses how the American national self was morally compromised because of the Vietnam War. Although Eriksson may metaphorically awaken from the nightmare of war at the end of the film, de Palma leaves it open to question whether America will be able to re-establish a moral compass rooted in an enlightened understanding of Judeo-Christian principles.

The way in which the films depict moral trauma is consonant with current theory, notably Shay's idea that soldiers suffer moral injury when military authority violates ethical norms – best exemplified in the relationship between Hartman and Lawrence in *FMJ*. The psycho-spiritual impact of committing transgressive acts in war is emphasized in *BFJ*, whereas *CW* reveals the traumatic impact of a soldier failing to do the right thing when confronted with an immoral situation. Further, each film shows the spectator how individual moral injury relates to the specifics of the combat environment in Vietnam, as well as to how soldiers and/or the nation felt about the Vietnam War.

The films focus on aspects of the Vietnam War that support the narrative of shame surrounding the conflict, and this approach supports the idea that the moral trauma experienced by so many of its veterans stems from the war becoming uncoupled from the mythology of war as a sanctified ritual sacrifice. Each film underscores the fundamental contradiction between the concept of spiritual fitness and the actions that are characteristic of warfare. Therefore, as Kovic's redemption through his role as peacemaker demonstrates, for many soldiers the path toward recovery from moral trauma and reintegration into civilian life mandates discovering or recovering some sense of authentic spirituality.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memories of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 225.

<sup>3</sup> Randall Wallace, *We Were Soldiers* (Paramount, 2002), 2 hrs., 18 min.

<sup>4</sup> Claude Anshin Thomas, *At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey From War to Peace* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2004), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey A. Smith, "Hollywood Theology: The Commodification of Religion in Twentieth-Century Films," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 11, no. 2 (2001): 199.

<sup>6</sup> Carrie Barnes and John H. Harvey, "Comparison of Narratives of Loss Experiences of World War II and Vietnam Combat Veterans," *Journal of Personal and Interpersonal Loss* 5, no. 2-3 (2000): 171.

<sup>7</sup> Barnes and Harvey, "Comparison," 168, 175, 179.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-culture, Sacrifice and Salvation* (London: Routledge, 2014), 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Ritual and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90.

<sup>10</sup> Jon Pahl notes that the idea of sacrifice for the nation within the context of warfare has been a broad motif in American cinema, but it became unpopular following the Vietnam War, 477. Like 'The Myth of the War Experience' though, the motif of ritual sacrifice was resurrected as a popular theme in American film in the 1990s, for example in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon, "Mapping Moral Injury: Comparing Discourses of Moral Harm," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 44 (2019): 177.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Shay, "Moral Injury," *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31, no. 2 (2014): 183.

<sup>13</sup> Wiinikka-Lydon, "Mapping Moral Injury," 178.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Shay, "Moral Injury," *Intertexts*, 16, no. 1 (2012): 58.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer H. Wortmann et. al, "Spiritual Features of War Related Injury: A Primer for Clinicians," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 4, no. 4 (2017): 257.

<sup>16</sup> Brett T. Litz et. al, "Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review* 29 (2009): 699.

<sup>17</sup> Chris J. Antal and Kathy Winings, "Moral Injury, Soul Repair, and Creating a Place for Grace," *Religious Education* 110, no. 4 (2015), 384.

<sup>18</sup> Jacqueline E. Whitt, *Bringing God to Men: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam: 1962-1971* (Washington D.C: History and Museum Division Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1985), the Marine Corps' history of their involvement in the war compiled by Commander

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Herbert L Bergsma, records that the “conflict marked the heaviest concentration of Navy chaplains ever committed to shore combat in a single geographical area, eventually involving more than 700 chaplains over a nine-year period,” 4. These mainly Christian chaplains brought with them the accoutrements of their faith: crosses, candles, communion vessels. Bergsma describes them as the “reminders and stabilizers of their faith and that of the church and the home of the Marines’ youth, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Whitt, *Bringing God to Men*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth I. Pargament and Patrick J. Sweeney, “Building Spiritual Fitness in the Army: An Innovative Approach to a Vital Aspect of Human Development,” *American Psychologist* 66, no. 1 (2011): 60.

<sup>22</sup> Pargament and Sweeney, “Building Spiritual Fitness in the Army,” 61.

<sup>23</sup> Zachary Moon, “‘Turn Now, My Vindication is at Stake’: Military Moral Injury and Communities of Faith,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 68 (2019): 95.

<sup>24</sup> Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 19-20.

<sup>25</sup> Gustav Hasford, *The Short Timers* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Walter S. Griggs Jr., “The Selective Conscientious Objector: A Vietnam Legacy,” *Journal of Church and State* 21, no. 1 (January 1979): 106.

<sup>27</sup> Rita Nakashima-Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 101.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan H. Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs: Soldiering, War and American Civil Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 7, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs*, 17-18.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 71.

<sup>32</sup> Shay, “Moral Injury,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 185.

<sup>33</sup> Denis O. Kiely and Lisa Swift, “Casualties of War: Combat Trauma and the Return of the Combat Veteran,” *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 36, no. 4 (2009): 358.

<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 158.

<sup>35</sup> Hal Hinson, “‘Born on the Fourth:’ War, Hammered Home,” *The Washington Post*, January 1990. LexisNexis.

<sup>36</sup> Roger Ebert, “*Born on the Fourth of July*.” *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 1989, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/born-on-the-fourth-of-july-1989>

<sup>37</sup> Dianne Kirby, “Religion and the Cold War: An Introduction,” in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Whitt, *Bringing God to Men*, 41.

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- <sup>39</sup> T. Jeremy Gunn and Mounia Slighoua, "The Spiritual Factor: Eisenhower, Religion, and Foreign Policy," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 9, no. 4 (2011): 40.
- <sup>40</sup> Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 179.
- <sup>41</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, "The War, the Churches and Civil Religion," *The Annals of the Academy of American Political and Social Science* (1970): 130.
- <sup>42</sup> Philip K. Paulson, "I was an Atheist in a Foxhole," *The Humanist*, September/October, 1989, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/i-was-an-atheist-in-a-foxhole/>.
- <sup>43</sup> Ron Kovic, "Introduction," in *Born on the Fourth of July* (Brooklyn: Akashic Books, 2016), 27.
- <sup>44</sup> Pauline Kael, "*Born on the Fourth of July*: Potency," *The New Yorker*, January 22, 1990, accessed on April 15, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/czdcndra>.
- <sup>45</sup> C.E. Tygart, "Religiosity and University Student Anti-Vietnam War Attitudes: A Negative or Curvilinear Relationship?" *Sociological Analysis*, 32, no. 2 (1971): 127.
- <sup>46</sup> For a full history of CALCAV, see Hall's *Because of Their Faith*.
- <sup>47</sup> David E. Settje, *Faith and War: How Christians Debated the Cold and Vietnam Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 62.
- <sup>48</sup> Settje, *Faith and War*, 150-51.
- <sup>49</sup> Quoted in Settje, *Faith and War*, 74.
- <sup>50</sup> *Back to the Future*, Directed by Robert Zemeckis (Universal Pictures, 1985), 1 hr., 56 min.
- <sup>51</sup> Owen Gleiberman, "Casualties of War." *Entertainment*, March 1990, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://ew.com/article/1990/03/16/casualties-war-2/>.
- <sup>52</sup> Alex von Tunzelmann, "*Casualties of War*: In the Company of Military Men," *The Guardian*, April 2009, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/apr/21/casualties-of-war-sean-penn-michael-j-fox>.
- <sup>53</sup> Brian de Palma, "The Making of Casualties," interview by Laurent Bouzereau, in *Casualties of War* (Columbia Pictures, 1989), 31 min.
- <sup>54</sup> Michael Cimino, *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978), 3 hrs., 3 min.
- <sup>55</sup> Marzena Sokolowska-Paryz, "The Narration and Visualization of Rape and the Inadvertent Subversion of the Anti-War Message in Brian De Palma's *Redacted* and *Casualties of War*," *War, Literature & the Arts*, 24 (2010): 3.
- <sup>56</sup> Daniel Lang, *Casualties of War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 115.
- <sup>57</sup> Jennifer Wortmann, et. al., "Spiritual Features of War Related Injury: A Primer for Clinicians," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 4, no. 4 (2017): 250.
- <sup>58</sup> John Trafton, "The anti-war film and the anti-war-film: A reading of Brian De Palma's *Redacted* (2007) and *Casualties of War* (1989)," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 4, no. 1 (2011): 118.

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<sup>59</sup> Lang uses Storeby's pseudonym throughout the article; hence, this quote refers to the actual person rather than the film character.

<sup>60</sup> Laurent Bouzereau, "Eriksson's War: A Talk with Michael J. Fox," in *Casualties of War*, (Columbia Pictures, 1989), 19 min.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Travers, "Casualties of War," *Rolling Stone*, August 18, 1993, accessed April 15, 2021, [Casualties of War - Rolling Stone](#).

<sup>62</sup> Nathan Solomon, "'Only God Can Judge Me:' Faith, Trauma, and Combat," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69, no. 1 (2015): 65.

<sup>63</sup> King, *The Combat Soldier*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Canby, Vincent. "Casualties of War: Group Loyalty VS. Individual Conscience." *The New York Times*, August 1989, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Canby, "Casualties of War," 10.

<sup>66</sup> Warren Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation: A Theological Account of Moral Injury," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2012): 62.

<sup>67</sup> Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 63.

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