

# CLVI – More Anti-War Films

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By Butler Shaffer

My previous article — suggesting a number of anti-war films to be watched over the Memorial Day weekend — generated more responses than most of my previous articles. Most of those who e-mailed me had one or two movies of their own to supplement my list. I also realized — after the article appeared — that I had inadvertently omitted two of my favorite anti-war films. The combination of personal embarrassment for these oversights and the quality of the motion pictures recommended by readers, has led to this addendum. As with my previous article, these films are rated on a personal preference scale of \*, \*\*, or \*\*\*, although I regard each as a worthy criticism of the war system. Each rated film is one I have seen, some of them only after having been praised by readers.

First, let me make mention of the two films I failed to mention earlier. \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\* Why We Fight. A powerful documentary — in which Karen Kwiatkowski, Chalmers Johnson, and Gore Vidal carry most of the intellectual load — on the nature and history of the post-World War II American war-making system. It won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. **WARNING!** Do not confuse this with the pro-war series of the same name, produced during World War II by one of my un-favorite directors, Frank Capra.

\*\*\* Children of Men. A futuristic film set in an Orwellian England, where endless wars against endless enemies have become the norm. Throughout the world, most women have become infertile, threatening the extinction of the human species. A woman has become pregnant, and most of the film is taken up with trying to get her to a country that would harbor her and her unborn child. This is a very dark and violent film — someone is always in the process of killing others, bombing buildings, etc. What is \_\_\_\_\_ encouraging, however, is that none of the warring factions are presented as u201Cgoodu201D guys fighting the u201Cbadu201D guys. It is the anti-life nature of the war system itself — with mankind as the endangered species — that dominates the movie.

\*\*\* Breaker Morant. A couple readers couldn't understand why I didn't include this Australian film on my list. I must admit that I considered it but, perhaps because a similar theme had been presented in the Paths of Glory film I had recommended, I left it off the list. Upon reflection, I think the readers had better judgment than I on this one.

It is the story of Australian soldiers — during the Boer War – against \_\_\_\_\_ whom phony murder charges are made in order to facilitate the political machinations of bringing the war to an end. It illustrates, quite well, how soldiers —

treated by the state as nothing more than fungible resources for its exploitation — can be sacrificed both on and off the battlefield.

\* Three Kings. Set in the first Gulf War, there is an abundance of the blood-bath that defines every war. What is of particular interest in this film, however, is the impact war has on the non-combatant refugees. A very nice ending from their perspective.

\*\* Platoon and \*\* Full Metal Jacket. These are potent films providing a soldier's perspective on the dehumanizing, life-destroying nature of war. As one who believes that the gore and broken bodies of those killed in wars should be regularly shown on television — so that the Sean Hannity's, the Rush Limbaugh's, the Bill O'Reilly's, et al., can get a snootful of the system they so adore — these films provide a good secondary source. Platoon won an Oscar for u201Cbest film.u201D

\* Lord of War. This movie deals more with the underbelly of post-Cold War arms-trafficking than with wars themselves (although there is plenty of blood-letting for any pro-war vampires). Pay attention to the credits following the film. They inform us that the five largest nations involved in selling arms to the rest of the world, are also the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council!

\*\* A Very Long Engagement. Perhaps, as a motion picture production, this is artistically the best film of all I have recommended. While set in wartime (World War I), with plenty of battlefield insanity, it is essentially a love story involving a young woman intent on finding her fianc — is he alive or dead? — after the war. There is also a very interesting character; a prostitute bent on revenge against corrupt military officers.

\*\* The Battle of Algiers. A 1965 film done in a pseudo-documentary style, it dramatizes the decade-long struggle of Algerians against their French occupiers. This motion picture affords viewers insights into the current responses of Iraqis to their American occupiers.

\*\* Duck Soup. The Marx Brothers slapstick assault on the war system, with Groucho — as Freedonia's prime minister — declaring war on a neighboring country for no apparent reason. My favorite line in the film is when, in the course of battle, Groucho tells the others that they are fighting for (Margaret Dumont's) u201Chonor: which is probably more than she ever did.u201D

\*\* Hearts and Minds. Won an Oscar for best documentary. It deals with the events and machinations that led to the Vietnam War. No clearer example of the hypocrisy of the United States' alleged efforts to bring u201Cfreedomu201D to Southeast Asia is found than in the effort of the federal government to have this film formally censored so that Americans could not learn what their u201Crepresentativeu201D thugs had been up to.

\*\* Grand Illusion. A 1937 film by director Jean Renoir. I saw this motion picture so many years ago that it simply slipped my mind in

writing my first article. An anti-war film focusing on the futility of the war system. That the German government tried to destroy this film when it first came out, provides some evidence of its importance.

\*\* [Das Boot](#) and \*\* [Letters From Iwo Jima](#). Two films that address the horrors of warfare from the perspectives of those on the u201Cotheru201D side, the first Germans, the second Japanese. The latter is Clint Eastwood's highly-praised picture.

There are a number of other films readers recommended, some of which I have seen, some I have not. These include [The Lives of Others](#); [Downfall](#); [Kelly's Heroes](#); [The Ground Truth](#); [Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers](#); [When I Came Home](#); [Come and See](#); [No Man's Land](#); [Born on the Fourth of July](#); [The Razor's Edge](#) (1984 version); [Coming Home](#); and [A Midnight Clear](#). The latter film was [reviewed at length by Rick Gee](#).

There are two documentaries that have just recently appeared: from u201CBill Moyers Journalu201D [Buying the War](#). The other is titled [SPIN: The Art of Selling War](#). They each examine the role of the media in helping the state promote its war efforts. I have seen the former film, but not the latter.

Should you decide to conduct your own Anti-War Film Festival this forthcoming Memorial Day weekend, you might be interested in including a recitation of one of the most powerful anti-war poems: [Mark Twain's The War Prayer](#).

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