



Multicultural movie mush

by **James P. Pinkerton** || If art imitates life, do war movies imitate war? Sure they do, but they also reflect the country that makes those movies. And so over the last 50 years, American war films have traversed from patriotism to anti-patriotism and back to patriotism. But now two new trends could reshape the genre once again, creating a new style and stance: post-patriotism.

The first trend is globalization, which makes even-handed multiculturalism all the more profitable. The second might be called New World Order-ization, in which the anti-fascist, anti-communist—even anti-terrorist—clarity of most of the last half century is multilateralized out of existence.

Let's review a half-century at the movies. Films made during and immediately after World War II can be summed up in two words: John Wayne. Then came Vietnam. The Duke, a sexagenarian at the time, made one Vietnam movie, "The Green Berets" (1968), and then retreated back into his other oeuvre, Westerns. Indeed, throughout the Indochina conflict, the studios were reluctant to "do" the war, reasoning correctly that the movie-going market had been polarized and generation-gapped into unprofitable slivers. But the studios themselves became counter-cultured during the early 1970s, and so references to the ongoing carnage surfaced, albeit obliquely. "Little Big Man" (1970), for instance, repositioned Gen. Custer as Lt. Calley; "M*A*S*H," released the same year, was set in Korea, but the characters—Col. Blimpish-like martinets who deserved to be fragged and proto-hippieish underlings who just wanted to go home—were pure 'Nam.

Even the Good War was caught in ideological revisionism by the Nixon years. A few gung-ho films were made, such as "Patton" (1970) and "Midway"



BLACK HAWK UP: Patriotic fervor fills "Black Hawk Down," but many other "war" movies aim to please the international common denominator. They offend no one but keep the planetary cash flowing.

(1976). But cutting-edge filmmakers drifted to new styles of protest and irony, including "Catch-22" (1970) and "Slaughterhouse Five" (1972). Steven Spielberg played Pearl Harbor for laughs at America's expense in "1941" (1979). An even more conventional big-budget World War II movie, "A Bridge Too Far" (1977), showed an American defeat.

And once Americans were no longer dying in Vietnam, New Left-ed Hollywood moved in for the kill. An unabashedly pro-North Vietnamese film, "Hearts and Minds," won the Academy Award for best documentary in 1975. Bert Schneider, accepting the Oscar on national television, gleefully read aloud a telegram from the Viet Cong. "Coming Home" (1978), Jane Fonda's venture into Vietnam-related filmmaking, helped establish the pop-culture paradigm of the psycho Viet vet. And while "The Deer Hunter" (1978) showed the enemy

as awful, it showed the war as still more awful. And that was also the message of "Apocalypse Now" (1979), "Platoon" (1986), "Full Metal Jacket" (1987), "Born on the Fourth of July" (1989), and "Casualties of War" (1989)—Vietnam was a bad trip. Even Sylvester Stallone's initial Rambo movie, "First Blood," released in 1982, was a maudlin tale of a victimized Vietnam vet.

It was not until 1985, a full decade after the fall of Saigon, that Hollywood retreated from defeatism.

That was the year that the new muscles-bulging, guns-blazing, Vietnam-avenging Rambo appeared on scene and screen. And two decades after he mocked the Greatest Generation, Spielberg apotheosized it in "Saving Private Ryan" (1998). That film, along with another Spielberg effort for Home Box Office, "Band of Brothers" (2001), demonstrated that intense patriotism could be combined with equally intense realism.

So patriotic spirit is back, and America's got it. Even "Black Hawk Down," the story of the Pentagon's debacle in the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, in October 1993, was reworked after Sept. 11 into tragic triumphalism in time for its release in December 2001.

But the shift from patriotic nationalism to post-patriotic internationalism had already begun with the globalization trend. "The Thin Red Line" (1998) was a film for Greens worldwide—the first

environmentally correct war movie. And “Pearl Harbor” (2001) was pro-American; yet it was not anti-Japanese. The sneak-attackers were portrayed as simply playing for a different war-team; the film proved dissatisfying to Americans, but it played fine in Japan and in other places where Dec. 7 is just another un-infamous date. And perhaps that’s one reason Hollywood will be turning the terrorist bad guys in Tom Clancy’s novel *The Sum of All Fears* from Arabs into neo-Nazis.

Second, New World Order-ization. Films such as “Three Kings” (1999), “Rules of Engagement” (2000), and “Behind Enemy Lines” (2001) emphasized the quirky, quagmire-y reality of post-modern conflict, where brave Americans are damned, and sometimes doomed, by civilian commanders and overseers bearing law books, treaty documents, and TV cameras. In these movies, the conflict and combatants become befogged in quasi-war and nation-building.

To be sure, the terrorist attacks on our shores will unleash more America-adoring. But as Hollywood becomes ever more multinationalized, its product will likely become more multiculturalized, so that the minimum number of potential ticket-buyers, anywhere in the world, will take offense. That suggests more “war” movies such as “Gladiator” (2000), or even the forthcoming “Star Wars” installment, “Attack of the Clones.” Such films might not get American blood stirring, but they keep planetary cash flowing—with no risk of a backlash.

It would be a shame, of course, if Hollywood—with an eye to foreign audiences—continued to “diversify” history into a lowest-commercial-denominator goulash. If so, bottom-liners will have succeeded where the one-worlders failed. They will have turned the American City on a Hill into just another market-segment on the globe. ♦

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Why we were surprised by 9/11

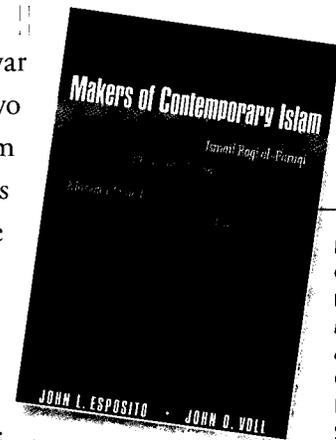
by **Jonathan Schanzer**

Militant Islam has been at war with America for more than two decades. Its attacks range from the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and the 1983 Beirut Marine barracks bombing to the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 and the 1998 twin embassy explosions in East Africa. Why, then, were Americans so surprised by the horrors of Sept. 11?

A broad survey of books published prior to the attacks, including both academic studies and journalistic accounts, could provide some answers. Many authors and scholars of Islam minimized the global threat or simply refused to face reality. Some asserted that the threat was an exaggeration. Others argued that militant Islam was a scapegoat, as America searched for new post-Cold War foes. Some claimed that Islamism, the political outgrowth of the movement, was a stepping-stone to democracy.

In other words, militant Islam has quietly spawned a new generation of apologists. Their motivations are quite varied.

Journalist Milton Viorst, who once challenged the fact that Saddam Hussein had used gas against the Kurds in Iraq, is an example of a journalist whose views have faithfully followed in the footsteps of the ultra-liberal academics and some of the liberal press. In his book, *In the Shadow of the Prophet: The Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (Westview, 2001), he calls terrorism “a symptom” of social ailments and rebukes the West for its shallow understanding of Islam.



MAKERS OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

by John L. Esposito and John O. Voll • Oxford University Press • 257 pp. • \$18.95

Some, like journalist Anthony Shadid, may have an agenda. Shadid’s book, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam*, (Westview, 2001) often toes the party line of autocratic Middle East regimes.

Others, like John Voll and John Esposito, authors of *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2001), are ideologically driven. Esposito and Voll head up the Arab-funded Center for Christian-Muslim Understanding at Georgetown University. Their quest to find common ground for Christians and Muslims goes so far as to excuse religiously motivated violence and to justify intolerance. This brand of thinking has broadly influenced America’s academicians and even the way American policymakers approach the Muslim world.

One theme common among many of today’s apologists is praise for Hasan Al-Turabi, the inspiration behind the 1989 Muslim Brotherhood coup d’état in Sudan. In his heyday, Turabi ranked among the top exporters of Islamic terror, with ties to al Qaeda, Egyptian terror groups, and the radical mullahs of