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# movies

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## • Apocalypse Now • Breaking Away

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• Francis Ford Coppola's long-awaited epic **APOCALYPSE NOW** has finally reached the screen, after two years of filming and an expenditure of \$30 million before advertising. It gave promise of being the ultimate cinematic word on Vietnam, which it is not. But it is tremendously impressive visually and auditorily; the photography is so studiously beautiful that it is often like a series of paintings. Every technical aspect of the film is done with tender loving care; Coppola has an unflinching sense for cinematic rendering.

Yet the film is a disappointment, chiefly because of its pretentiousness. It tries for deep meanings and profound significance, which it lacks—or if it's there, its import is never made clear, starting with the title itself. The film sets out to be about the Vietnam war, and the first half (much better than the second) gives us quite a bit of the sight and sound of war and what it feels like to be attacked; but then in the second half we switch course and center attention on the psychology of power in the form of an army colonel (Marlon Brando) who has apparently gone berserk and another officer (Martin Sheen) who has been sent from Saigon to "terminate" him. It is never quite clear whether the colonel wants to win the war for America in his own way, being opposed to the "officer-clowns" who are losing it for the US, or whether he is past all national allegiances and just wants to rule the lives of others for the thrill of exercising power.

There is a conscious analogy with the plot of Joseph Conrad's great story *Heart of Darkness*. In both cases someone goes up a winding jungle river to ferret out someone long since absent from civilization; in both cases the man sought is named Kurtz (hardly a coincidence); in both cases he has become a petty dictator with power of life and death over native people (and a power of garnering unquestioning allegiance, like Rev. Jones); and in both cases he dies with the same words on his lips, "The horror, the horror." But Conrad pursues this theme with subtlety and conviction and such masterly use of language that the reader feels the savagery of the jungle closing in on him, stifling him, choking him; whereas in Coppola the actors just go through the motions (it's not even clear in the film what "the horror" refers to).

The colonel (Brando) mouths lines of poetry that don't exactly fit into the context given and that he himself doesn't really seem to understand; Coppola is just beyond his depth here, and Brando doesn't help him. Perhaps we are supposed to be impressed just by the visual effects, the darkness with shifting patterns of light, the fog and the steaming jungle, the silent tragic faces; but beneath all these exquisitely wrought effects lies—nothing. Mystical gobbledygook is no substitute for genuine significance, although unprobing minds may easily mistake the first for the second. When the film takes the turn from the Vietnamese war itself to the pursuits of the renegade officer Kurtz—who was not really behaving much less insanely than the American lieutenant himself (brilliantly portrayed by Robert Duvall)—it makes its major mistake, from which it never recovers.

Comparisons with *The Deerhunter* are inevitable, since they are the two most ambitious films about Vietnam. *Deerhunter* comes off better in almost every way. *Deerhunter* is a tragedy in three acts: lives before the war, lives during the war, and lives later scarred by the war. There is not a wasted moment, not a sequence, however small it seems, that does not build up in its almost miraculously paced rhythms into something of savage intensity and impact. It really takes a second exposure to this remarkable film to realize how marvelously all this is done. *Apocalypse*, by contrast, staggers along, moving toward its conclusion like a lumbering hippopotamus, and disappointing when it comes (without even so much as a genuine confrontation after all the buildup). And *Deerhunter* achieves what it does without a trace of claptrap, cant, or mysticism. It is much more rewarding to see *Deerhunter* a second time than to see *Apocalypse* the first.

—John Hoppers

• Not many so-called comedies succeed in being funny. It isn't only that they try too hard to get laughs, and the strain shows; it's that they go in for gags and gimmickry, and the fun doesn't grow out of the character.

But it does in **BREAKING AWAY**, and for this reason this is one of the most heart-warming comedies of recent years.

The protagonists are recent high school graduates with no place to go and nothing to do; the University of Indiana at Bloomington, where the picture was filmed, has not admitted them. The plot-string on which the beads of incident hang is the tension between university students and "townies." This is the first film I know of that treats the subject in detail.

But that is the least of its virtues. There is much of the tragicomedy of growing up: when some mature and others don't and interests change and people aren't what they were before, does one sustain old friendships and pretend that time hasn't passed? A film of about a year ago, *Big Wednesday*, tried to deal with this question, with as total a lack of success as this one's positive success. The film is brimful of insight into human strengths and weaknesses, is funny without being contrived and moral without being preachy. Nor are the characters treated as heroes. They can hardly be said to be imbued with "the good old American spirit." They want the freedom but not the enterprise and won't accept a summer job unless all four are employed together, which they know is very unlikely. One of them does defect and get a job, but when he is a minute late and the employer says, "Punch the clock," he punches it so hard with his fist that it shatters and he roars away. Another consents to work in his father's used car lot chiefly by giving huge refunds for defective cars. But the way the father-son relation gradually changes from contempt to respect and finally to love is marvelously, and quite un sentimentally, done.

"How's the summer going?" asks a merchant of one of the June graduates who has no plans for college or anything else. "O.K.," he replies, "only we're a little worried about developments in the Middle East." Thanks to his public school education, he has about as much knowledge of the Middle East as a dog baying at the moon has of the sidereal universe, but this doesn't mean that he couldn't be tragically drawn into such things at a moment's notice.

That all these possibilities for tragedy lie shimmering just below the surface, unbeknownst to the very people who are involved in the action, may be one reason why in this film while one laughs there is a catch in one's throat. There is much in the world that is rich with possibilities for laughter and good feeling, but the film, like life itself, never quite lets us forget that no matter how hearty the laughter, if you keep your ear to the ground you will never entirely cease to hear the insistent throbbing beat of "the still sad music of humanity."

—J. H.

# books

## Cover-Up

By Bruce R. Bartlett.  
New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House.  
1978. 189 pp. \$8.95.

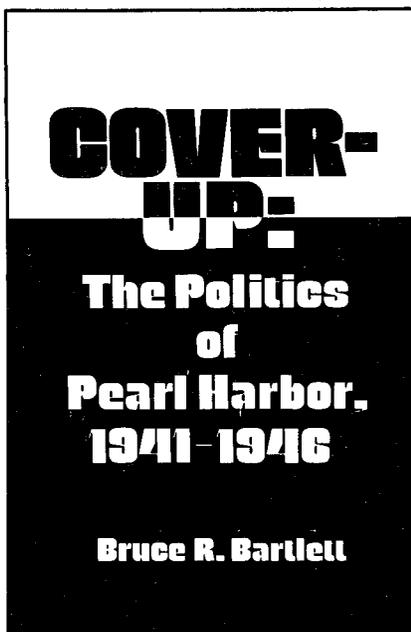
Reviewed by Jeffrey Rogers  
Hummel

Bruce Bartlett's *Cover-Up* is one of the few revisionist books on Pearl Harbor to appear in over two decades. Pearl Harbor revisionism got its start from that indomitable journalist John T. Flynn. In 1944, while World War II was still raging, Flynn published a small pamphlet, *The Truth about Pearl Harbor*. After the Japanese surrender in 1945 he issued a second, *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor*. Flynn's pathbreaking exposes were largely responsible for the joint congressional investigation into Pearl Harbor during late 1945 and early 1946.

The heyday of Pearl Harbor revisionism followed, marked by the classic works of Charles A. Beard, George Morgenstern, Harry Elmer Barnes, and Charles Callan Tansill. By the mid-'50s, unfortunately, revisionist scholarship on American entry into World War II had run its course. Only a few books, pamphlets, or articles—such as Barnes's final essay on the topic, posthumously published in *Left and Right*; or Bruce Russett's very brief *No Clear and Present Danger*—have emerged since them. Even New Left historians, with the notable exceptions of Lloyd C. Gardner and Robert F. Smith, have been relatively silent on the issue.

Despite its apparent decline, however, revisionism has had a major and lasting impact on the orthodox historical interpretation of Pearl Harbor. To fully gauge this impact, one must carefully distinguish among the various strands in revisionist thinking. There are four related but distinct charges that characterize revisionist writings; they are listed here in order of increasing severity. Revisionists, not surprisingly, disagree among themselves, some holding to the less severe charges without endorsing the others.

**Charge 1:** President Roosevelt, for whatever reason, wanted to lead the United States into World War II, despite significant isolationist and anti-interventionist opposition among the American people. In order to achieve this goal,



Roosevelt first attempted to provoke Germany into declaring war against the United States. When that failed, he used increasing economic sanctions against Japan to maneuver its government into firing the first shot at Pearl Harbor. At the same time, in order to sustain his popularity, Roosevelt lied to the American people about his intentions, disguising his steps toward war as measures to avoid conflict.

**Charge 2:** As a result of the success of U.S. military intelligence in breaking the most secret Japanese code, the Roosevelt administration was fully aware of the consequences of its policies upon the Japanese government. Prior to Pearl Harbor, the administration knew that war with Japan was imminent. Roosevelt anticipated a Japanese attack on December 7 or soon thereafter.

**Charge 3:** Through the deciphering of the Japanese code, the Roosevelt administration knew not only the exact *time* of the Japanese surprise attack but also had deduced the exact *location*. The administration, however, failed to warn adequately the commanders at Pearl Harbor of the impending attack. This black-out of Hawaii was deliberate because the administration suspected (correctly, as it turns out) that any signs of preparation for an attack on the part of U.S. forces would cause the Japanese to call off the strike, thus averting war.

**Charge 4:** Roosevelt set the fleet up for attack. Against the advice of his naval

commanders, he moved the Pacific Fleet from the West Coast of the United States to Hawaii, exposing it as a decoy to induce a Japanese attack.

Orthodox historians, while they refuse to admit it, have in effect almost totally incorporated the first of these four revisionist charges into their interpretations. Although some early court historians—Basil Rauch, for instance—endeavored to portray Roosevelt as sincerely interested in peace, most now agree that Roosevelt hoped to plunge the country into war at the earliest opportunity. The orthodox historians do not dispute the factual accuracy of the revisionist claim but rather argue that American intervention in World War II was a worthy goal—indeed, vital for national security. Many go so far as to criticize Roosevelt for not dragging the United States into the war fast enough!

Most of these historians also agree that Roosevelt was far from completely honest with the American people. Some, like Thomas Bailey, defend Roosevelt's duplicity as necessary. "If he was going to induce the people to move at all," writes Bailey about Roosevelt, "he would have to trick them into acting for their best interests. He was like the physician who must tell the patient lies for the patient's own good." Other historians, like Robert Divine, hold that Roosevelt's deviousness was merely a gratuitous personality quirk; Roosevelt could have drawn the United States into the war just as easily if he had been forthright with the public about the extreme peril they faced from Axis expansion.

Amazingly, orthodox historians have also largely accepted Charge 2. There is still considerable disagreement over whether naval intelligence actually received and distributed the famous "winds execute," but many other decoded messages whose reception and distribution is beyond doubt have established that Roosevelt and his advisors knew that war with Japan was rapidly approaching.

What remains an open question is not whether Roosevelt expected a Japanese attack but precisely where he expected that attack to occur. The primary, although not the only, evidence supporting Charge 3 consists of what are called the "bomb-plot" messages. These were instructions sent by Tokyo to the Japanese consulate in Honolulu and intercepted by Washington. They required the Japanese consulate to gather and send back elab-