

in the development of these “spectaculars” makes this work a must-read for Disney scholars and those interested in Disney. This is a well-written and -argued work that should appeal to scholars from a variety of disciplines examining 1950s America as well as appealing to the general reader.

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**Combat Death in Contemporary
American Culture: Popular Cultural
Conceptions of War since World War II**

Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet. Lexington Books,
2021.

There are currently two major motion pictures set during wartime being advertised to American audiences. J.D. Dillard’s film *Devotion*, based on a true story about the U.S. Navy’s most decorated fighter pilots—one African American, one white—during the Korean War, premiered on Thanksgiving eve. The other film, James Friend’s version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* from Netflix (October 2022), is out and already being considered both a masterpiece and Oscar contender. These films join the general category of enormously popular action films featuring war and combat death out in 2022, or due soon, including *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (Ryan Coogler), *Top Gun: Maverick* (Joseph Kosinski), *The Gray Man* (Joe and Anthony Russo), and very many others. In a sign of how little things have changed over nearly a century, should Friend’s film get the nod for Best Picture, it would be the second time an adaptation of Remarque’s novel will have won the award after Lewis Milestone’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* won it in 1930—a film for which Milestone won Best Director, too. Of course, Americans are treated to doses of real-life war in addition to these films as cable news networks and social media users beam images of Ukraine’s fight with Russia into our homes and anywhere we can access a screen on a near-constant basis. This is to say, Americans in 2022—just as in decades past—remain enveloped by real and manufactured images of war and combat death. Even more, our patterns of consumption suggest we strongly desire these images. And so it

is that Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet pulls no punches in *Combat Death in Contemporary American Culture*.

From the jump, Professor Soltysik Monnet asserts that, not only has America become “deeply militarized,” but that war, for Americans, has become both “chronic and banalized” (1). This is affirmed in a nod to historian Mary Dudziak—as Soltysik Monnet informs readers—that, in America, war is a “constant background activity” and not just a periodical event. And thus, naturally, Monnet recognizes this is reflected in the nation’s contemporary popular culture, and in particular, our nation’s cinema. *Combat Death in Contemporary American Culture* chronicles the depictions of war-related deaths, and imagery more generally, from films primarily about World War II and Vietnam, but includes filmic depictions of twenty-first-century conflicts like Clint Eastwood’s *American Sniper*. The resulting text is an impressive exploration of combat death in post-WWII American culture and war cinema.

The book’s seven chapters are built around three “modes” Soltysik Monnet has identified. These are melodrama (chapters 1–3), adventure (chapters 4–5), and horror (chapters 6–7), and each chapter investigates how the selected texts conform to, or diverge from, these modes. Chapter 1 analyzes the cultural politics of being killed in action and its depictions as melodramatic acts intended to elicit emotional responses in audiences conditioned to revere sacrificial death. The texts here are Joe Rosenthal’s iconic photograph of American servicemen raising the flag at Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima (1945), the John Wayne film, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), which commemorated the battle, the Marine Memorial statue at Arlington, and the historical battle for Iwo Jima itself. Soltysik Monnet argues that Rosenthal’s image resonates with Americans because it stands in for the backdrop of the mass death endured there. In this first chapter, Soltysik Monnet introduces John Wayne’s character, Sgt. John Stryker, from *Sands of Iwo Jima* as an enduring and, eventually, omnipresent trope in twentieth- and twenty-first century combat films.

Chapter 2 also centers on the Rosenthal photograph, though it considers two “disenchanted” and subversive adaptations of the image. The first, Delbert Mann’s *Outsider* (1961), is a biopic about Ira Hayes, a native American enlistee who experienced prejudice in the Marine Corps before he was pictured alongside his friend Jim Sorenson as they participated in the flag

raising on Iwo Jima. The second text is a multimedia art installation titled *Portable War Memorial* from Edward Kienholz (1968). Chapter 3 moves the reader to the twenty-first century with analyses of James Bradley's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2000) and Clint Eastwood's same-titled filmic adaptation from 2006. The first three chapters on Iwo Jima all investigate masculinity's relationship to melodrama.

In chapters 4 and 5, Soltysik Monnet moves to the adventure mode to explore the "aesthetic pleasures" one might experience when killing for their country. These chapters analyze the phenomenon of Robin Moore's book *The Green Berets* (1965), and the multiple popular culture artifacts it inspired. These chapters also include Michael Herr's canonical piece of New Journalism, *Dispatches* (1977), a documentary film featuring Herr titled *First Kill* (2001), and another Eastwood film, this time *American Sniper* (2014). In these chapters, Soltysik Monnet argues that, while in the melodrama mode death is sacred, in the adventure mode, pleasure and masculinity are linked to killing—and that for some, killing is uniquely pleasurable.

The final set of chapters on the horror mode contains a lucid and brilliant examination of Gustave Harford's whip-sharp and devastatingly bleak novella, *The Short-Timers* (1979), and Michael Herr and Stanley Kubrick's misguided collaboration on Kubrick's filmic adaptation, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). These chapters carry the John Wayne character from *Sands of Iwo Jima* to the jungles of Vietnam in analyzing the character Joker, who narrates/features in both texts and frequently imitates John Wayne's voice patterns, mannerisms, and one-liners. Harford's novel is a blistering critique of the conflict in Vietnam and unquestionably a firm example of the horror mode Soltysik Monnet identifies. In fact, Harford's use of this horror mode is essential to his critique of the Marine Corps, the war in Vietnam, and American culture of the mid-to-late twentieth century. The counter to this, however, is Kubrick's film, which, for Soltysik Monnet misses the mark and fully functions in the adventure mode despite Harford's obvious intentions. These culminating chapters are a satisfying lead into the book's "Coda" on the future of war and its cultural depictions. This clean and clearly arranged text will appeal to anyone interested in nuanced analyses of conceptions of combat death in American popular culture since the Second World War.

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Real Americans: National Identity, Violence, and the Constitution

Jared A. Goldstein. University Press of Kansas, 2022.

Real Americans: National Identity, Violence, and the Constitution is an important contribution to an expanding understanding of political messaging as a discursive force in the creation of different forms of American consciousness related to defending the Constitution. Finished in the wake of the attacks on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the work was begun much before that fateful day for understanding American respect for specific institutions against party affiliations and the cult of personality of Donald Trump. Looking at major political movements in American history, especially opposition movements that used the Constitution to defend unpopular ideologies, Jared Goldstein shows how the supreme law of the nation has functioned as political ammunition due to both forceful manipulation of political rhetoric and the very malleability of the original document. Goldstein specifically questions what it means in American history to "fight like hell" for the Constitution, and what populations have been able to shape that assertion for nefarious means.

After a stellar and transparent introduction allocating the Constitution as a mirror for diverse forms of American identity, the first chapter looks directly at race and the Constitution through the historical frame of Reconstruction. This section focuses on the rise of the KKK and pursues the Constitutional messaging of that paramilitary organization well into the major second iteration of the movement during the 1920s. The originalism of the KKK was apparent in their many public pronouncements, which tended to focus only on the Constitution of 1787, consistently denying the later restatements of the Reconstruction Amendments due to the attack those additions fomented on the supposed prominence of whiteness as a dominant political goal within persistently flexible American identity.

Through a general chronology that also includes modern linkages at the end of each chapter, *Real Americans* continues with a second section that focuses on the use of religious rhetoric as tied to forms of American Christianity at the end of the nineteenth century. This specific analysis looks directly at the rise of public discussion concerning the Christian Amendment, which would have codified the American nation