



- Play Celebrates Italian Legacy
- Alumna is Rhodes Scholar
- Basinger on Hollywood and War
- Taming Materialism



The commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral James Loy (right on inset) and two of his top associates, Vice Admiral Thomas Collins (center) and Rear Admiral Patrick Stillman were influenced by studies in Wesleyan's Graduate Liberal Studies program.

COAST GUARD BRASS

WHAT THEY LEARNED AT WESLEYAN

The commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard and his colleagues reminisce about an academic collaboration between Wesleyan and the Academy that changed the kind of education cadets received.

A quiet academic collaboration between the Coast Guard Academy and Wesleyan during the '60s and '70s has a remarkable postscript. Three of the highest-ranking Coast Guard officers,

including the commandant, hold graduate degrees from Wesleyan and say their encounter with liberal arts education had a significant impact on their outlook and their careers.

Wesleyan must have appeared to be an unlikely destination for young officers when the program began in 1965. The Academy was heavily oriented toward engineering, with a curriculum modeled after West Point and Annapolis. Academy officials had concluded, however, that Coast Guard officers would need a broader background throughout their careers. The faculty was staffed partly with officers who served a tour of duty teaching, and some of these young men needed to offer courses in history, English, and government—subjects they were ill-equipped to teach. A year-long immersion in liberal arts at Wesleyan would help prepare them, the Academy's officials reasoned.

Captain Ronald A. Wells, former head of the humanities department at

the Academy, recalls that the program began with cautious approval by Jim Cronin, then director of Wesleyan's Master of Arts in Teaching and Master of Arts in Liberal Studies programs. Wells assured Cronin that officers would be hand-picked with great care.

The first officer to participate, Lieutenant Dale Bennett, enrolled during the summer in both Humanities 101 and a course in nationalism taught by Hans Cohn, an internationally known visiting professor.

"Several months later," says Wells, "the Academy Dean, Captain Paul Foye, and I drove to meet with Jim Cronin and asked how our man had fared in his first two graduate courses. Dr. Cronin told us that Bennett indeed had earned an A in each course; and that was especially impressive because 'no one gets an A from Hans Cohn.'"

At first experimental, the program quickly became a success and enrolled three or four officers per year.

Among those was James M. Loy, now a five-star admiral and commandant of the Coast Guard, who arrived at Wesleyan in 1969. He had "had it" with engineering when he finished the Academy. "I took my slide rule," he says, "and threw it in the Thames River as far as I could chuck it." Several years later, back from a tour of duty in Vietnam, he was "consciously trading in the world of numbers for the world of ideas."

Admiral Loy and Vice Admiral Thomas H. Collins (vice commandant) recently shared recollections of the Wesleyan program in the commandant's office at Coast Guard headquarters, adjacent to Fort McNair by the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. Chief among their memories was hard work: the officers were taking undergraduate courses to fill gaps in their backgrounds at the same time they were pursuing graduate degrees. "We weren't

COURTESY OF COAST GUARD

One day Loy and his fellow Coast Guard officers came to class in uniform. “When the Wesleyan undergraduates found out that we were in the military and had actually gone to Vietnam, it was a striking moment,” he recounted in his office in Washington, D.C.

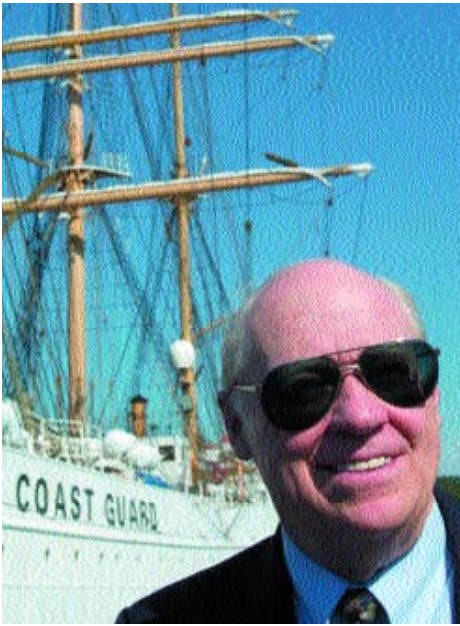
deeply grounded at the Academy in some of the courses that constitute the liberal arts,” Admiral Collins noted.

“That summer and fall,” added Admiral Loy, “were the most challenging times of my academic life. I have never worked so hard reading and attempting to stay abreast of what was happening in the classroom because of that double challenge.”

When Admiral Loy arrived, the Wesleyan campus was in an uproar over the Vietnam War. He and his fellow officer-students decided to avoid highlighting their Coast Guard affiliations, at least initially. Later, they opted to blow their cover by coming to class in uniform. “When the Wesleyan undergraduates found out that we were in the military and had actually gone to Vietnam, it was a striking moment,” he says. Some friends turned hostile overnight—but he was resolute about the value of his service.

Admiral Collins was refreshed by the energetic exchange of ideas at Wesleyan during his stay in 1971–72. “People were very willing to express an opinion,” he says. “Every notion was challenged. I carried away from Wesleyan the rich interchange of ideas.”

Assistant Commandant for Government Affairs Rear Admiral Patrick M. Stillman, who also taught in the humanities department of the Academy, recalls spending “endless hours in Olin Library reflecting on naval leadership.” He subsequently captained the Academy’s training vessel, the *Eagle*, and moored it off the English coast where Nelson had anchored the British fleet. Thoughts of his



Ronald Wells, who helped to start the Coast Guard/Wesleyan program, with the *Eagle*.

thesis for the late Professor of History Emeritus Will Wallace, a study of naval leadership during the great age of sail, came back to him.

“I remember a book, *Worlds Apart*, by Owen Barfield, that Professor Eugene Golub used in his course,” he adds. “There is a wonderful dialogue between physicists and humanists, the whole range of thinking that defines what we construe as our foundation of knowledge. I truly gained an appreciation that there are multiple ways to address issues. It’s absolutely critical, I think, that you develop the intellectual empathy to stand in another’s shoes.”

The program had an effect on the careers of its participants; Admiral Loy says that it and his teaching at the

Academy “made the difference to me at several key places in my career.” The program also had a significant impact on the Academy, according to Wells. “It was eminently clear to me that the teaching and intellectual fire of such Wesleyan faculty as Will Wallace, George Creeger, Ihab Hassan and others directly and profoundly influenced our young officers and were, consequently, infused into the Academy curriculum.” The officers introduced new courses. Admiral Loy, for instance, taught a course called Urban America, based on his studies at Wesleyan of urban economics, sociology, and government. Wesleyan faculty became visiting lecturers in his course.

In retrospect, the Wesleyan program assisted the Coast Guard while the Academy was undergoing a significant transition from an engineering school to one in which engineering still figures prominently but is part of a more multidimensional curriculum. Eventually, the Academy came to rely much more heavily on faculty trained with doctoral degrees, and the need for Wesleyan’s assistance vanished. The program, however, left a legacy of value for liberal arts education in the life of an officer, says Wells. Thanks to it, more than one cadet may have thought about Melville’s *Billy Budd* while scrambling up the rigging of the *Eagle*.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Students Relive Middletown’s Italian Past On Stage

Ron Jenkins, chair and artistic director of Wesleyan’s theater department, wrote the following story about the making of *Over There*, a play he directed at the CFA theater during Parents’ Weekend 2001.

In the fall of 2000, when the students in my documentary theater class began conducting oral history interviews with Sicilian-Americans in Middletown, none of them had ever met any of the residents of the town where they were spending their undergraduate years.

But by the time the project ended a year later with performances of a play based on those interviews, the Wesleyan student actors had artfully used the power of theater to build a bridge of intimate connections with the community that surrounds their university. They had shared the stage of the CFA theater with local school children who played out the life of Saint Sebastian in fragments from an early 20th-century manuscript written in Sicilian by an immigrant from the village of Melilli, where a substantial minority of Middletown’s population has family connections.

They had been serenaded by a tailor who repairs clothing on Liberty Street but moonlights as a mandolin player at a nearby pizza parlor, strumming the songs he sang as a teenager under the balconies of young girls in Melilli. They ate homemade *cudderune* (Sicilian white pizza) in their dressing rooms, a gift from a woman in the audience who wanted the students to taste the culture they were depicting on the stage. They had reenacted the building of the Saint Sebastian Church on Washington Street with the on-stage assistance of a 97-year-old resident who is the last surviving member of the committee that raised the money to build it during the Depression.

They witnessed the mayor of Middletown stop the show every night to interrupt her daughter (who was a member of the cast) and jump on the stage to tell the story of her first meeting with the mayor of Melilli at the Feast of Saint Sebastian before either of them had been elected. After a comically touching encounter with her daughter, the mayor suggested, only half-jokingly, that her ascension to public office might owe something to the saint’s assistance, and a few days after the show closed she was reelected to her third term.

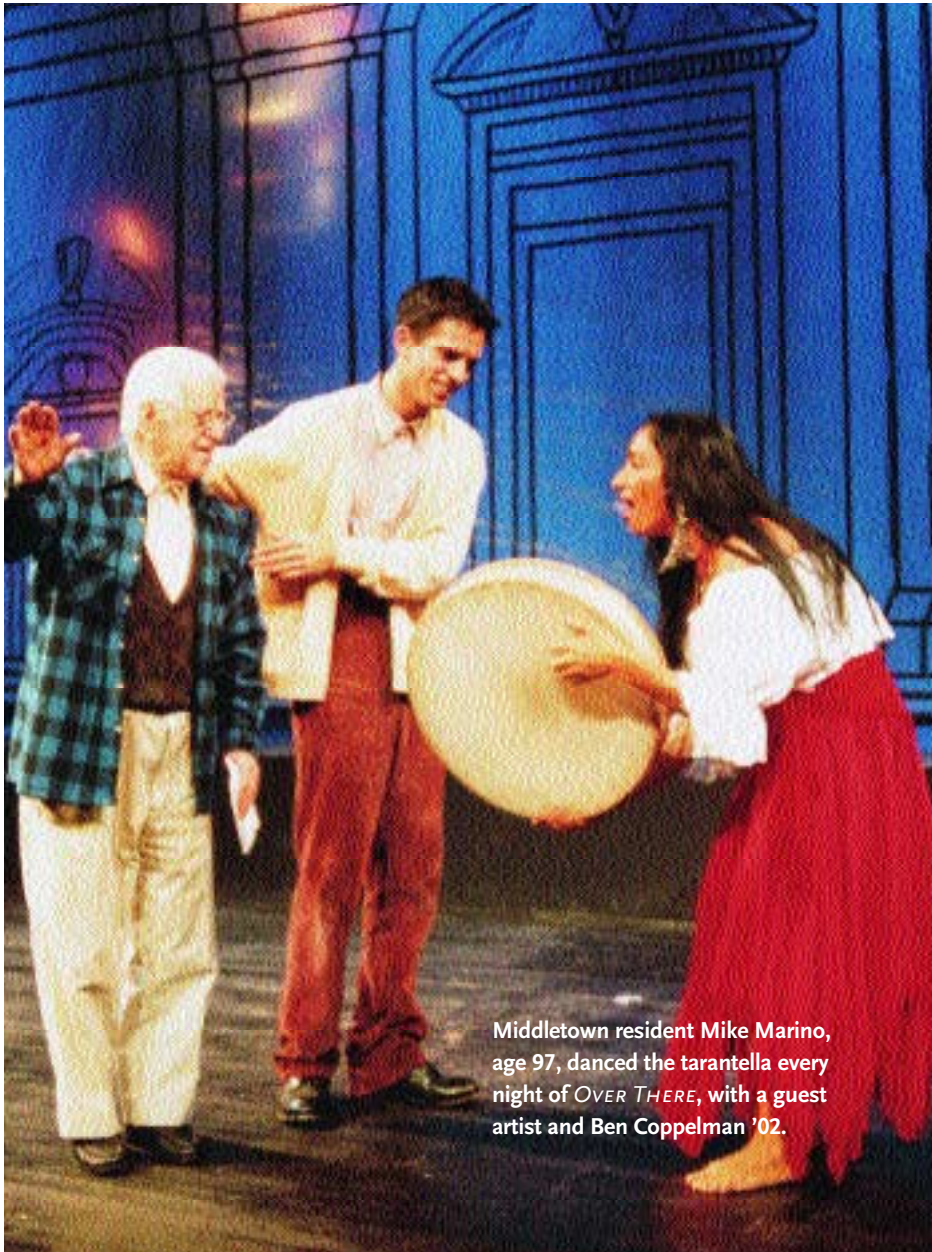
The dialogue between the students and the community that culminated in the play *Over There*, began with tape-recorded interviews but ended up taking forms that no one could have predicted. The Italian playwright and Nobel Laureate Dario Fo talked with students about creating documentary theater during a September 2000 visit to

the campus. A local woman whose stories were recounted in the play was so inspired by seeing her words on stage that she has decided to write a musical comedy about her childhood experiences working in a family drugstore in Middletown and plans to stage it next year at the local high school auditorium.

The relatives of Frank Lentini, the three-legged man (who settled in Middletown in the 1890s after being brought to America by P.T. Barnum as an attraction in his circus) lent us rare photographs of their extra-limbed ancestor that were projected on stage during the performance of a three-legged dance choreographed by a student in

tribute to the humor and spirit of one of Middletown’s first Sicilian residents.

Many audience members thanked the cast for telling the story of Sicilian immigrants in a way that validated their heritage. One woman was particularly moved by the story of an immigrant who was in such a hurry to get on the boat to America that she refused her relatives’ invitation to spend the night in the port of Messina. The next morning there was an earthquake in Messina that killed thousands of people. “That was my grandmother,” said the audience member. “We’ve told our children that story since they were babies, but now that they are seeing it on a big stage with hundreds of people



Middletown resident Mike Marino, age 97, danced the tarantella every night of *OVER THERE*, with a guest artist and Ben Coppelman ’02.

WESONLINE

President Bennet Takes Leadership Role In Higher Education Consortium

President Douglas J. Bennet has been elected chairman of the Board of Directors of the Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE). The organization, comprising many of the nation’s leading colleges and universities, conducts research on a variety of topics related to the administration of higher education.

ALEXIS KEELER ’02 WINS ACADEMIC ALL-AMERICAN HONORS

Volleyball star Alexis Keeler ’02 has been named a Verizon College Division III Academic All-American. A national panel of sports information directors selects the All-American teams from players who have a minimum GPA of 3.2. Keeler, also elected to Phi Beta Kappa, led her team to a 30-6 record and a first-ever appearance in the NCAA Division III championship.

PSYCHOLOGISTS RECEIVE GRANT TO STUDY ADOLESCENT DEPRESSION

Professor of Psychology Ruth Striegel-Moore and Visiting Scholar in Psychology Debra Franko have received a \$275,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for a study titled “Depression in Black and White Adolescent Girls.” The goals of the study are to determine how rates of depression vary by ethnicity, to test a model of risk for depression in this group, and to examine outcomes of adolescent depression. Striegel-Moore is a nationally recognized expert in eating disorders.

FILM STUDENTS TREATED TO VISIT FROM JOSS WHEDON ’87

Film writer, director and producer Joss Whedon ’87 visited campus Nov. 29 to meet with Professor Jeanine Basinger’s class on musicals. He conducted a spe-



cial showing of a musical episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and later joined the film majors for conversation and dinner at the Cinema Archive. “Everything we do [in an episode of *Buffy*] comes from human emotion and experience,” he told the film studies students. “Every story has to have a reason, emotionally, to be told.”

COHAN DISCUSSES NATURE’S BIOTERRORISM

Writing an op-ed in the *Hartford Courant*, Professor of Biology Fred Cohan discussed the resurgence of antibiotic-resistant pathogens and the ways natural organisms become more dangerous by exchanging genetic material. Noting that terrorists can imitate nature in designing biological weapons, he cited “the urgent need for research on infectious diseases.”

WESLEYAN PRESS CITED FOR NEW SCIENCE FICTION SERIES

The Chronicle of Higher Education (12/21) cited Wesleyan University Press for its role in reviving early works of science fiction through its new series: “Wesleyan Early Classics of Science Fiction.” The Press will publish a new translation of Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island* (1874), and the *Chronicle* quoted one critic who praised the aesthetic quality of Verne’s inventions, which are “artistically rendered, in a way that electronic circuits usually aren’t.”

KIT REED PAPERBACK NAMED “NEW & NOTEWORTHY” IN NEW YORK TIMES

@expectations, by Adjunct Professor of English Kit Reed, appeared Nov. 25 on *The New York Times* “New & Noteworthy Paperbacks” list. The novel explores “that fascinating feeling one can get when leav-

ing a mundane life to recreate the self in an alternative reality,” says the *Times*.

LENSING
DISCUSSES
AUSTRIA'S STOLEN
KLIMT ART

Professor of German Studies Leo Lensing was mentioned in a *Los Angeles Times* Sunday Magazine article (12/16) about a dispute over stolen art in Austria. Lensing wrote an essay, which appeared earlier this year in the *Times Literary Supplement*, that discussed the politics behind an exhibition of works by the portrait artist Gustav Klimt in Vienna, as well as the Austrian government's controversial refusal to restore stolen Klimt portraits to the family of the original owner.

WORLD IS UNPREPARED FOR RAPID
CLIMATE CHANGE

The *Boston Globe* turned to Professor of Economics Gary Yohe for comment on a new report from the National Research Council warning that rapid changes in global climate have happened before and could happen again. Yohe, who helped review the report, said that international policy assumes “smooth climate change.”

COLLINS JUDGES NATIONAL HIGH
SCHOOL SCIENCE COMPETITION

Associate Professor of Mathematics Karen Collins participated on a panel with nine distinguished mathematicians and scientists judging the national Siemens Westinghouse Science & Technology Competition, held Dec. 1–2 in Washington, D.C. The judges gave the \$100,000 first prize for individuals to Ryan Patterson of Grand Junction, Colo., for “The American Sign Language Translator.”

GOLDSMAN '83 WRITES SCRIPT FOR A
BEAUTIFUL MIND

Akiva Goldsman '83 won a Golden Globe

award for the screenplay of *A Beautiful Mind*, one of the season's highly praised films. It's based on the life of John Nash, a mathematical genius whose meteoric career was derailed by three decades of schizophrenic delusions before, almost miraculously, a remission restored his health.

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT COMES IN
SECOND IN NEW YORK ESSAY
CONTEST

Rebecca Back '05, of Guilderland, N.Y., has won second place in the New York State Council for the Humanities Young Scholars Essay Contest. Her essay, “Cracks in the Wall: The *Machitzah* and Jewish Tradition,” focuses on the *Mechitzah*, the partition between men and women in Orthodox synagogues, and the physical and figurative barriers it creates. Her topic was inspired, in part, by a trip to the Western Wall in Israel.

VISITING LECTURER IS PRODUCER OF
NOVA “BIOTERROR” SHOW

Visiting Lecturer in Film Studies Rocky Collins '80 was the writer and producer of “Bioterror,” a special 90-minute episode of *NOVA* broadcast Nov. 13. The film followed three *New York Times* reporters as they delved into the history of bioweapons research and examined the current threat of anthrax.

LACKEY IS COACH OF THE YEAR

Head women's volleyball coach Gale Lackey, whose team had a best-ever 30-6 record and a berth in the NCAA Division III tournament, was named NESCAC coach of the year as determined by a vote of the conference coaches.

WHEDON TO CREATE NEW SERIES

Looking to build upon his success with TV series *Buffy* and *Angel*, Joss Whedon '87 has signed a deal with Fox Broadcasting

OUR 46TH YEAR

WESLEYAN
WRITERS
CONFERENCE
JUNE 16–21

NOVEL
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BILL BURKHART

“COMMITMENT TO HUMANITY”

Alumna Wins
Rhodes Scholarship

“I was shocked when I found out,” says Kim-Marie Spence '00. “I’m overwhelmed and overjoyed!”

Her reaction is understandable. After all, being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship is the kind of honor most people only dream of.

Spence, a government and economics major as well as a member of the university's track team, is a resident of Kingston, Jamaica, and one of 18 international winners this year of the Rhodes Scholarship. She also spends time in Israel, where she works for Women Against Violence, a Palestinian women's organization located in Nazareth. The organization operates shelters and half-way houses and helps victims of gender-based violence.

“My experience at Wesleyan definitely helped me in getting the Rhodes,”

“The selectors commented on my strong commitment to humanity and strong belief system. These qualities were honed at Wesleyan.”

she says. “The selectors commented on my strong commitment to humanity and strong belief system. These qualities were honed at Wesleyan.”

The humanitarian work she has become involved in was not Spence's first career after graduating. She quickly landed a job as an analyst at the prestigious Lehman Brothers firm on Wall Street. But despite good pay and opportunities for rapid advancement, her heart wasn't in the work and after several months she decided she had to leave

“a cushy, yet personally unsatisfying job to do what I feel committed to: women's rights, human rights, and develop-

ment.”

Spence has returned to Israel to continue her work with Palestinian women. She plans to matriculate in the Developmental Studies Program at Oxford next year. She is the third Wesleyan graduate to receive a Rhodes scholarship since 1987.

PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF
RELIGION

David Swift

Professor Emeritus of Religion David Swift, 87, died Oct. 14, in Kennett Square, Pa. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Yale University in 1936, he also earned his doctoral degree in divinity from Yale in 1939.

He was a conscientious objector during World War II and performed alternative service in the Civilian Public Service, first in forest work and then at Philadelphia State Hospital. He also established a personnel initiative in the Selective Service that enabled CPS forest workers to perform volunteer service in mental hospitals throughout the eastern United States.

In 1955, he joined the faculty of the Department of Religion at Wesleyan. During his nearly 30-year career at the university, he was instrumental in persuading Wesleyan to admit more African American students. He is perhaps best known, however, for his 1961 *Freedom Ride* with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He and his companions were arrested in Birmingham, Ala., and the resulting legal case went to the U.S. Supreme Court before they were acquitted.

Swift's life-long interest in racial justice was reflected in two books: *Joseph John Gurney: Banker, Reformer & Quaker* (Wesleyan University Press, 1962), a biography of an English banker who opposed slavery in the 19th century; and *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

Predeceased by his first wife, Jane (Nichols) Swift, he is survived by his second wife, Dorothy Jones; four children and their spouses; a stepdaughter; three grandchildren; and five stepgrand-

CAMPAIGN NEWS BRIEFS

THE
WESLEYAN
CAMPAIGN



LUCILLE M. STRITTER
HONORS HER STEPFATHER,
EDWARD ERNEST MATTHEWS,
CLASS OF 1889.

Lucille Stritter had fond memories of visiting the Wesleyan campus as a young woman with her stepfather, The Reverend Edward Ernest Matthews, class of 1889. In honor of his memory, Miss Stritter has left the university more than \$5 million through a trust and a bequest. The Reverend Matthews was an Episcopal priest who led a church in Westchester, N.Y., and always spoke highly of his years at Wesleyan. In recognition of Miss Stritter's generosity, Wesleyan will name a scholarship in honor of Reverend Matthews and will permanently commemorate both Edward Matthews and Lucille Stritter in Memorial Chapel as soon as the current restoration project is completed.

ADVERTISING COLLEAGUES
MAKE CAMPAIGN
COMMITMENTS

After graduating from Wesleyan, Bradley Karsh '87 and Jonathan Turitz '86 joined Chicago-based Leo Burnett Company, one of the world's leading advertising agencies. Brad is a vice president for recruiting and Jon is a vice president/creative director and has served as a chair of the Wesleyan Chicago Club. This past fall, both made generous campaign commitments through the Annual Fund that include 1:1 matching gifts from their employer. Brad made his gift in honor of his upcoming 15th Reunion and has directed it to support financial aid through the Wesleyan Annual Fund. Jon's gift is an unrestricted WAF commitment. Both have more than doubled their annual giving and are delighted to join their fellow alumni in a growing trend of providing generous support for Wesleyan.

ANNOUNCING THE JANINA
MONTERO SCHOLARSHIP

A generous group of alumni have made gifts and pledges totaling more than \$300,000 to endow a scholarship in honor of Janina Montero. Currently vice president of campus life and student services at Brown University, Janina came to Wesleyan in 1973 as a professor of Spanish literature and later served as dean of the college. During her 20 years on campus, Dean Montero was a persistent student advocate. She made her students' success her own priority and was an effective mentor and a powerful role model, particularly for students of color.

Dean Montero's dedication touched the lives of countless students, and, in honor of her legacy, 34 alumni have made scholarship endowment gifts. Fundraising continues for the Montero Scholarship as alumni leaders seek the additional contributions needed to increase this endowed

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How Hollywood Adapts to War

The Office of War Information admonished WWII filmmakers not to mislead young people with propaganda.

In the days immediately following September 11, the words “Like Pearl Harbor...” seemed to be on everyone’s lips, as last spring’s highly publicized film had brought that historical event to the forefront. Soon, though, the differences between the movie, World War II, and the country’s new crisis became evident. The striking similarities between actual events and

recent action films, however, left most with a question: How will Hollywood adapt its films to fit this changed mood in our country? For a historical and intellectual perspective on the industry during war, *Wesleyan* spoke to Corwin-Fuller Professor of Film Studies and Curator of the Cinema Archives Jeanine Basinger. She is the author of *Anatomy of a Genre: World War II Combat Films*, and after the September attacks was sought out by numerous national publications.

Q: Are the movies produced during World War II indicative of what we’ll be seeing in our theaters in the upcoming year when we are at war?

A: Since September 11, many people have asked me about what types of movies followed the event of Pearl Harbor. But the World Trade Center attack is not the same thing. It is terrorism, with an unknown enemy hiding from us, not an attack of war by a specific foreign nation. We’re in a different situation.

Q: What are the trends in current movies, television, and video rentals?

A: It is historical fact that people always turn to entertainment more in times of stress. More parlor games are sold; more playing cards and books are sold; more people go out to the movies and watch TV and sports at home. But it’s hard to predict film trends because production has a long advance period. So far, now nearly two months past September 11, we can note that the reality shows on TV are being cancelled, but the old forms of comedy are popular. People are responding to new TV shows that have a family unit in them, something familiar and reassuring. And *Black Hawk Down*, a brutal film, is both a critical and commercial hit.

To help me answer all the questions from interviewers, I did some research

People who went to movies during World War II were not afraid to face harsh realities, and Jeanine Basinger believes that audiences will be no different in facing terrorism.

BILL BURKHART

on video rentals after September 11th. Stores around the country said nothing had changed. People were still renting *Die Hard* and *Towering Inferno* and movies with images of exploding buildings.

Q: Many people, referring to the news images of September 11, said, “It was like a movie.” How would you respond?

A: Of course, for a movie person, that is a deeply offensive comment. It wasn’t like a movie at all. It wasn’t well cut, it wasn’t well shot, and the scale was wrong. None of us saw it as a movie. We saw it as a moving photograph of a truly horrifying real event.

Q: How did the film industry react to Pearl Harbor?

A: You have to remember that when World War II broke out, we were the only major power without a propaganda agency. Pearl Harbor freed President Roosevelt to deal with that. He appointed Lowell Mellett to oversee the government’s war-related films, and Mellett established a liaison with Hollywood to be sure the studios would implement the overall war effort. The ultimate organization, The Office of War Information, had no censorship power over Hollywood, but the business cooperated. The OWI asked filmmakers to consider a list of seven questions for all films ... and the most interesting one today is the famous “number seven”: “Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda?”

By the way, Frank Capra became the head of OWI as “Colonel Frank Capra.” We have all his papers regarding that important mission right here at Wesleyan in our Archives. Capra produced the famous “propaganda” series called *Why We Fight*. Originally, these films were to be shown only to soldiers to prepare them for their jobs in the war. Roosevelt, after seeing them, decided the entire American population should have the chance to see them, as their quality was excellent. Capra and all the Hollywood personnel who worked

on these films did so as military men, however, not as civilians.

Q: Is there a similar informative role the film industry might be asked to play today?

A: Again, remember, during WWII, the American public could not see images of war quickly. To see the war as it really looked, they had magazines and newspaper photos, not moving images, and they had to wait for newsreel coverage, usually nearly ten days old. And they had to leave home and go out to the movies. Today, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, you can turn on your TV for immediate “as it happens” coverage. Film will presumably play a larger role in created, or narrative, images—storytelling—as a result.

I’d like to say something here. People frequently act as if Hollywood is a foreign country...which, I suppose, in a way it is. However, the people who live and work there are citizens just like us. They vote, they are parents, they share our feelings of civic responsibility. In fact, Hollywood has an honorable history in being the first to entertain troops, to raise money for war bonds, to make the kinds of sacrifices people are asked to make in wartime. Hollywood really rose to the occasion during WWII.

Q: What were the most popular films during WWII?

A: Approximately 30 percent of the movies released then were either combat films or directly about the war. The other 70 percent were what are often called “escapist” films. But that’s deceptive. For instance, let’s take *Tarzan Triumphs* made in 1943, the depths of the war. In this movie, Tarzan triumphs all right ... but over the Nazis. Nazi paratroopers drop into the jungle!

However “escapist” the movies were, they were often directly connected to war. There was no real escaping from the war. People going to the movies and making the movies had sons, husbands, brothers, friends, sisters, aunts, uncles in combat or in the war effort. You couldn’t suggest to such an audience that the war wasn’t happening. It would

be insulting. What people wanted from the movies were two things: a better understanding of what was happening; and a little relief from war’s sadness, death, and pressure from time to time. Not escape. Relief. Those are two different things. As a result, you had comedies, musicals, period pieces, animations, that did not deal directly with war.

Q: Wasn’t it difficult for filmgoers to watch heroes die in combat films when real soldiers were dying?

A: Of course, but the audience knew that’s what could happen. Movies didn’t deny that the war was difficult and lives would be lost. Instead, they stressed the idea that our cause was just and that we were fighting honorably. People today imagine that all these films always said, “We will win. The hero will never die. There will be no sacrifice.” It’s not true. The hero of *Story of GI Joe* (Robert Mitchum) ends up very dead, his body slung over a mule like a sack of flour.

Q: How do these observations apply to the Vietnam War?

A: Vietnam is very different. During the Vietnam War itself, we had almost no movies set there, no Vietnam combat films. We didn’t want to go there, because we didn’t need to go there. We had actual combat footage every night on our TV sets. So during those years, other genres stood in for Vietnam, such as the Western. (My colleague, Richard Slotkin, is a genius on this topic and could tell you all about it.)

America produced a lot of very violent Westerns during Vietnam, in which groups such as Mexicans and Native Americans stood in for the Vietnamese. After the war was resolved, combat films set in Vietnam began to appear, but it has yet to become a really popular setting for combat films. World War II is our favorite setting for them. It will be interesting to see what happens now. Several Vietnam films are currently being prepared for release, but the majority of the war films in the works are set in World War II.

Q: How will comedy figure in the upcoming productions?

A: The first wave of interviewers wanted me to say that we’ll never smile again: no more comedy. In the second wave, it was just the opposite: will we ever again want anything *except* comedy? they asked. There’s an old saying about the film business: nobody knows anything. And it’s true. Who knows? No one. All we know is that we *will* want entertainment. We will want comedy and escape. Ultimately, however, we will want intelligent and mature stories about what happened on September 11, because that’s how it always happens historically. We want story-telling versions of disastrous events so people can relive them safely and try to understand them.

We will someday see a movie about a group of key characters who start out to work in the Trade Center on the morning of September 11th. Some will get there. Some won’t. Some who get there will live. Some won’t. That’s what storytelling is about, that’s what it’s for, and visual storytelling is the most powerful form of storytelling there is. And it’s also our way of storytelling. It’s the way of the 21st century.



Since September 11, many people have asked me what types of movies followed the event of Pearl Harbor? But the World Trade Center attack is not the same kind of thing.