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From Book to Screen: Comparing *We Were Soldiers* (2002) to *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* (1992)

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Abstract

In today's modern era, the majority of individuals shape their understanding of history through the captivating medium of films, influenced by the notion that films offer a more accessible and time-efficient means of learning. This paper evaluates the accuracy of the film *We Were Soldiers* in depicting the historical events of the Ia Drang Battle during the Vietnam War. Through comparing the film *We Were Soldiers*, directed by Randall Wallace, to its original source, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam*, we seek to resolve the discrepancy between cinema and history by answering whether the movie faithfully depicts the story of Hal Moore and his troops and showing how films can deviate from historical accuracy. The comparison is based on the arguments of historians and on New Historicism as a theoretical framework. The paper reveals that, despite being well-received by the public, the film *We Were Soldiers* does not accurately depict the events of the battle as the book. It highlights the limitations of relying solely on films for historical information.

Key Words: *We Were Soldiers*, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam*, Vietnam War, History, Cinema.

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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this work and our entire efforts to those who were with us during this learning journey.

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General Introduction

History films, whether factual or fictitious, realistic or spectacular, influence how people think and remember their past. The Vietnam War remains a watershed point in American history, affecting not only the country's foreign policy but also its cultural and national image. The conflict began to pervade American society in various ways as it continued, particularly through the medium of cinema. As a result, many authors and filmmakers have tried to capture the spirit of the conflict in their work. Few people nowadays have time to learn about history through traditional means. More than ever before, today Film helps people learn about the past. In short, people are increasingly learning facts through fiction.

Films are especially essential since many viewers' only knowledge of Vietnam and the Vietnamese is what they have seen on screen. In the May, 2000 Perspectives, the monthly newsletter of the American Historical Association, a study of over one thousand Americans representing a cross-section of the population found that over forty percent of the participants cited movies and TV programs among the most cited means of connecting with the past (qtd. In Weinstein 27) .

The war in Vietnam has since been depicted in numerous films, but only few have captured the intensity and brutality of conflicts such as the Battle of Ia Drang. This battle, which took place in November 1965, marked the first engagement between the United States Army and the People's Army of Vietnam, and it became the subject of the critically acclaimed book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam*.

Wars appear to be rooted in the human condition. According to Plato, "only the dead have seen the end of war." As long as humans exist, there will be conflicts, and hence

individuals to narrate the stories of the wars and battles that have shaped history. The vast shadow of war is frequently documented in clean and impersonal narration dealing with politics, plans, and logic to explain how and why conflicts occur. Such tales are frequently produced by historians who had not been there at the war or watched it from a safe distance.

The book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang- the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam* is among the books that depicts the infantry fighting in Vietnam. First and foremost, it was written by two people who were present in the Ia Drang Valley for the first significant engagement between North Vietnamese forces and the men of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Harold Moore, the commanding officer at the time, and Joe Galloway, a well-known war correspondent, the powerful and empathetic stories mentioned in the book show the horror of wars and the human toll it exacts on those who fight it. This book was later adapted into a film titled *We Were Soldiers*, directed by Randall Wallace and starring Mel Gibson as Lt. Gen. Moore.

The film received critical acclaim for its portrayal of the battle, sparking a debate among historians about the role of cinema in shaping our understanding of history. Some argued that the film sacrificed accuracy for the sake of entertainment, as the Professor of history Paul B. Weinstein states “Films made for commercial release and popular consumption has no obligation to present a true portrait of the past. Facts can be twisted, timelines conflated, endings revised for perceived audience satisfaction. The bottom line in the film business is not accuracy but profit” (28), while others praised it for its ability to capture the essence of the battle and the soldiers who fought in it. This controversial was the fuel to a non-stop debate among historians and academics on whether films can be a reliable source of historical information. On the one hand, cinema has the power to bring historical events and historical figures to life again and make them accessible to a wider audience, potentially increasing interest in and understanding of the past. On the other hand,

films are often criticized for taking too much creative liberties with history that leads to a distortion of what really happened.

Background of the Study

Filmmakers have been making historical films based on books of history since the beginning of cinema. In fact, a book may be adapted for many other Medias, including television shows, plays, audios, and of course cinema. The majority of films are based on popular or well- known books often are more successful than the original scripts, generating 53% more income (£68 million) globally (Rothwell). And According to Frontier Economics, 70% of the world's top 20 grossing films are based on books. While filmmakers have been creating historical films since the beginning of cinema, the level of accuracy and attention to detail varied.

Early films were often short and lacked recorded sound and color, and frequently had a single recorded shot from a steady camera. But, as the film industry developed, historical filmmaking also did. With new technologies like artificial lighting, fire effects, and low-key lighting, filmmakers are capable to create more detailed and nuanced portrayals of historical events. As the film industry expanded globally, more countries began producing historical films based on their own cultural and national histories. With the introduction of sound in film, historical accuracy became important, but sometimes it is sacrificed for dramatic effect.

Research that involved comparing books and films or exploring the relationship between different media can be traced back to the fields of comparative literature and film studies. The growth of the latter as an academic discipline, and as the availability of digital archives and online resources has increased, researchers have been able to access a wider range of historical sources and compare them directly with their cinematic adaptations. In

Recent years, scholars take an increasingly critical approach to the relationship between history and storytelling in film.

The Review of literature

Hollywood has produced numerous films depicting US wars, with thematic and cinematic presentations of the US military varying according to the decade of release. In his 2002 article, "The Hollywood War Machine", published in *New Political Science*, Tom Pollard analyses, the production of films within the studio system that depict the glories of US military action. He focuses on the "good wars" that the film industry has strongly favored, especially during the 1990s. The author explains that "the Hollywood War machine refers to the production of studio films that depict and glorify war time heroic exploits while embellishing the military experience itself from revolutionary period to present". He mentions that "The motion picture industry has from its inception been fascinated with combat as a vital part of the American patriotic legacy" (121). He reveals an increasing emphasis on the World War II experience as the quintessential "good war" that brings American audiences back to the uninstalled benevolence of the US military through its various patriotic and heroic exploits.

Pollard states that "Hollywood filmmaking was not always oriented toward glorification of American patriotism and militarism. When the popular mood of the country seemed to favor pacifism or isolationism, as during the years immediately preceding both World Wars films tended either to avoid war altogether or to reject a certain abhorrence of military conflict itself"(121). Pollard said "The events of September 11, 2001 could well mark the end of certain trends in the production of combat films and the beginning of a new phase in the consolidation of the Hollywood War Machine" (138). He adds "Combat films serve as dramatic historical artifacts that reveal changing attitudes and beliefs about both

history and war; they represent barometers of patriotic sentiment. Of 20th century combat experiences, only World War II has been consistently defined as a good war, rekindling strong memories of patriot-ism, glory, and victory while validating a sense of national mission. This has become a crucial dimension of the Hollywood War Machine” (138). This thought-provoking article’s contribution to the field is its analysis of the role of the film industry in shaping public perceptions of military action and the impact of this on American culture.

The article's strengths include its comprehensive analysis of the film industry's portrayal of military action and its impact on American audiences but it focuses mainly on the 1990s and does not provide a more recent analysis of the Hollywood War Machine. The relevance of this article to our research question is that it provides insight into the relationship between the film industry and the US military and how it has evolved over time. It also addresses the impact of the film industry on American culture and public perceptions of military action. The article does not address any gaps in the literature, but it does provide implications for future research on the Hollywood War Machine.

Humanity can remember portions of its history, some recall it vividly, while others cannot recall anything from their past. Memories are like snapshots or images that are saved in your brain. The article “Last Stand at the Ia Drang Valley: Memory, Mission, and the Shape of Victory in *We Were Soldiers*” by Armando José Prats published in *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 2006 , examines the role of the film *We Were Soldiers* in shaping cultural memory and perceptions of the Vietnam War. Prats argue that Hollywood’s accounts of past events tend to be more concerned with advancing cultural memory than with historical accuracy. He states “History of that sort that Hollywood tends to prefer advances not so much an understanding proffer and peddle advance of the past as it does the efficacy and authority of cultural memory” (99). In this

quote, the author is arguing that Hollywood tends to prioritize the power and influence of cultural memory over a nuanced understanding of the past. The author suggests that Hollywood often focus on promoting and selling a particular version of history, rather than presenting a more complex and accurate portrayal of historical events.

He adds “However importunate about its fidelity to history, Hollywood yet tenders it accounts of past events to the unhistorical, its remembrances to the forgetful”. That is to say, Hollywood is creating a shared understanding of the past that is influenced by cultural values and beliefs. The article cites an example of a college student who confesses to Ted Koppel that *Apocalypse Now* is where he sees Vietnam from. The author argues that films like *We Were Soldiers* can shape public perceptions of the past and influence how people remember historical events. In other words, Hollywood's depiction of history is not about providing an accurate understanding of the past. Instead, it attempts to influence cultural memory of an audience that may not have a strong historical background or may have a tendency to forget or overlook historical details. The article provides an interesting analysis on the role of *We Were Soldiers* in shaping cultural memory, but Prats does not directly compare the film to the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*. This omission restricts the examination of how accurately the film represents the events and characters described in the book.

Valtteri Väyrynen examines the portrayal of the Vietnam War in Randall Wallace’s 2002 film *We Were Soldiers* by comparing it to earlier trends of American Vietnam War cinema. In his master thesis *The Portrayal of the Vietnam War in Randall Wallace’s We Were Soldiers* published in 2019, he argues that *We Were Soldiers* portrays the American troops and war effort in Vietnam in an exceptionally positive light, leaning more towards the “revisionist” tradition which emerged in the 1980s. He focused on the film’s narrative, characters and dialogue which mean the film’s content rather than its form or style, it is a thematic analysis. He stated that the character of Hal Moore is established from the start as an

exceptionally capable combat leader as well as a caring father figure, both to his children and the soldiers under his command. He also examined the construction of the character of Lieutenant John “Jack” Geoghegan, stating that the foregrounding of his noble and admirable qualities serves to instil in the viewer’s mind a positive conception of “the typical young American who fought in Vietnam.” Väyrynen reached the conclusion that *We Were Soldiers* depicts U.S. troops and the U.S. military in general in a more positive light than most post-war Vietnam films have. The film clearly utilizes the revisionist strategy of likening Vietnam veterans to WWII heroes. Vietnam films include a couple of instances of scapegoating and a reminder at the very end of the film about how returning troops were often treated with indifference.

In his thesis entitled *Glorifying Vietnam: The Influence of 9/11 on the Glorification of War and Nationhood in Full Metal Jacket and We Were Soldiers* published in 2018, Milan Lobik discusses the differences in glorification of war and nationhood in the American military movies about the Vietnam War in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *We Were Soldiers* (2002). According to him these movies, one being released before and one after the 9/11 attacks, show different kinds of glorification due to the impact of 9/11 on this particular genre of film. Specifically, Lobik examines how *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers* both reflect and shape American cultural narratives surrounding the Vietnam War, and how these narratives have been influenced by the events of 9/11. Lobik analyzes the films' use of imagery, narrative structure, and characterization to illustrate how they contribute to the glorification of war and nationhood combining film analysis with an American Studies-point of view. Therefore, a combination of analytical and explanatory methodology. Results showed the influence of historical moments on the presence of glorification in film.

In Charles Mihelich's article "We Were Soldiers: Re-envisioning American Patriotism," he examines the film portrayal of American patriotism in the wake of the

September 11th attacks. Mihelich argues that the film represents a new breed of American patriotism that emphasizes the heroism and sacrifice of American soldiers, rather than the politics of the war. The author notes that the film's depiction of the battle of Ia Drang presents a non-critical view of American military engagements, while still capturing the heartbreak that follows the loss of human life. The soldiers in the film are portrayed as a unified front, each with their own individual motivations to contribute to the collective effort based on shared values of duty, honor, and country. The article concludes that *We Were Soldiers* represents a shift in American patriotism from a focus on political ideology to a focus on individual sacrifice and heroism.

The book chapter “Transformation of Trauma Without Rehabilitating Failure: The Dual Attempt at Reshaping America's Memory of the War in Viet Nam in Mel Gibson's *We Were Soldiers*” (2002) by R. C. Lutz published in 2004 explores how the film *We Were Soldiers* (2002) attempts to recover a traumatic part of American history and re-valorize selected aspects of its historical subject. Lutz argues that the film aims to transform cultural attitudes among its domestic audience, while also acknowledging America's overall historical failure and massive disruption of civic consensus and political order. The article suggests that the film reflects the most current transformation of America's collective memory of a traumatic war experience. Lutz states that *We Were Soldiers* “Certainly does not fall squarely in any of the sub-categories of the genre that saw its first commercial mega-hit with Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979)” (165). This book chapter provides an analysis of the film's attempt to reshape America's collective memory of the war which make it relevant to our topic, however , it does not analyze the cultural and political contexts in which the film was produced, which could be an important factor in understanding the film's success and limitations.

The articles cited provide valuable insights into the portrayal of the Vietnam War in *We Were Soldiers* but they do not directly address our research questions of whether the film *We Were Soldiers* accurately depicts all the events and all characters described in the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*, and if cinema effectively conveys the complexity and nuance of historical events and characters, as depicted in the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*. The specific gap in literature that we are addressing in our dissertation is the lack of research that directly examines the accuracy of the film adaptation and the effectiveness of cinema in conveying historical events and characters as depicted in the book. By filling this gap, our research aims to shed light on the relationship between films and books in presenting historical narratives and contribute to the understanding of the capability of cinema in teaching history in the same way that history books do. By comparing the film and book versions of a particular historical event and evaluating how well each medium teaches history, this would allow us to contribute to the ongoing debate about the role of cinema and history.

We hypothesize that *We Were Soldiers* film does not completely and accurately depict the events and characters in the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* and it takes certain creative liberties and simplifies some of the complex events and characters from the book. Therefore, it is important to approach the movie and book as separate entities and not rely solely on the movie for an accurate representation of the events and characters depicted in the book. Cinema may recreate past events without being completely accurate and films that belong to the genre of historical films such as *We Were Soldiers* are criticized for being praised more for their visual and aesthetic elements. That is to say, these films are not praised for their historical accuracy but rather for their spectacles, costumes and stars, therefore it cannot represent history in an accurate manner.

Research Method

In order to achieve the objectives of this research work, the presentation of the Ia Drang battle will be carried out in order to understand this historical event. Then, we will compare *We Were Soldiers* film it to the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang- the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam* (1992) in an attempt to determine the position of this film regarding its faithfulness to its original source. Thus, the comparison will be conducted by shedding light on the theory of new historicism which argues that a movie, like any other form of art, reflects broader cultural, political, and social problems of the time period in which it was produced thus it influences the way people remember past events.

This research provides a comparative analysis and the representation of history in different media, which can inform future researchers on the relationship between cinema and history books as a means of portraying history. It can also give insight into the impact of artistic license and creative interpretation on the representation of history, which can help us better understand the shaping of historical narratives; furthermore, evaluating the strengths and limitations of using cinema as a tool for historical education and representation, which can inform decisions on the use of cinema in historical research and education. And finally, it highlights the role of each medium in conveying the complexity and nuance of historical events and characters, which can help us better, understand the role of media in shaping historical narratives. This research can help further our understanding of the relationship between cinema and history books as a means of representing history, and of the strengths and limitations of each medium.

This paper will be divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, we will first provide an overview of the Vietnam War, its reasons and consequences, and the presentation of Vietnam

War in Hollywood cinema during and after the war. Then, we will attempt to understand the position of most historians concerning the historical accuracy of Hollywood historical and combat films genre, in addition to New Historicism theory. The second chapter will revolve around an overview of the battle of Ia Drang, as well as an introduction to the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young-Ia Drang the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam*.

Furthermore, the film synopsis of *We Were Soldiers* by director Randal Wallace will be presented to understand a brief retelling of the film's plot, introducing the basics of the story to the readers who have not seen the film themselves, and making it easier for them to follow the other parts of the comparison. This chapter will encapsulate the analysis of *We Were Soldiers*, comparing it to its original book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang- the battle that changed the War in Vietnam*.

Chapter I

The Vietnam War: A Transformative Event in American History

Introduction

Throughout history humans have participated in warfare against one another. The United States is not an exception to this tendency; in fact, America has a long heritage of conflicts fought both within and outside its borders. America, as historian Geoffrey Perret puts it is “a country made by war.” “War” in American history, he argues, “is a factor as important as geography, immigration, the growth of business, the separation of powers, the inventiveness of its people, or anything else that contributes strongly to its unique identity among the nations of the earth.”(qtd. In Wetta and Novelli 862). If war is this important to the founding of American culture and its perception of America's uniqueness, as well as its cult of endless victories, then Hollywood's war stories take on added significance, because up until Vietnam, the first "television war," almost everything Americans knew about war came from the films. The historical events of Vietnam serve as a document for evaluating America's nature, its social and cultural beliefs, different points of view, and foreign policy. There was no official start, no acknowledged finish with street parties, and no heroes. Rather, there was guilt, responsibility and accountability.

The origins and consequences of US involvement in Vietnam have been extensively studied by researchers. The portrayal of this war in cinema has been a hot topic for many discussions. The public debate about the accuracy of historical films has been a crucial part of understanding how the film industry influence people's understanding and remembering this sorrowful war. In this chapter, we will look to the Vietnam War's roots, reasons, and consequences, as well as its portrayal in American cinema. We will also explore the public

debate about the past. Finally, we will introduce New Historicism, a critical lens that can be used to understand literature and film in their historical context.

1 – The Vietnam War: Origins, Reasons and Consequences.

The Vietnam War is an unforgettable tragedy in US history. In contrast to the World Wars, the Vietnam War left a profound scar on the soul of the American people; it was regarded as one of the most terrible conflicts America had ever fought, as well as the country's first defeat in combat. From the first shots that occurred in 1960s to the final withdrawal from the Asian land, the Vietnam War was marked by tragedy, sacrifices and controversy. The defeat was an embarrassment to the military industrial complex, and it exposed the country to its false idea of limitless invincibility. In this general overview, we will explore the origins of the US-Vietnam war, causes, and lasting impacts of this conflict. During our investigation, we will put an emphasis on the United States' ongoing participation in the war and its role in defining the conflict's outcome.

The Vietnam War was fought between North and South Vietnam from 1955 to 1975, with the North entering support from communist abettors analogous as China and the Soviet Union, and the South entering support from the West, including the United States. The origins of this War can be traced back to World War II, historians differ over when the US- Vietnam War began, but the majority of scholars suggest that it was in the 1940s when President Truman supplied financial and military support to the French war in Indochina and established non-communist parties in Southern Vietnam. The Cold War, communism, and US credibility all play a part in the US conflict in Vietnam. The Vietnam conflict arose as a result of the nonstop ideological battle between the United States and the Soviet Union. The history of Vietnam easily demonstrates the fight between capitalism and communism.

During the Cold War, The United States felt obliged to prove its ability to stop the spread of communism and support democratic countries against the communist Soviet Union that was seen as a threat for the Americans. In 1950, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security" called NSC-68 was completed by the U.S. Department of State's Policy Planning Staff. It was a top-secret report that expressed fear of the Soviet Union and argued that its target is "to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world." It means that if the United States does not intervene to stop it, the Soviets will take over Eurasia, leaving the united state marooned and cut off from the allies and resources it needed to fend off further Soviet encroachments. Therefore NSC-68 urged for a massive build-up of both conventional and nuclear arms to be able to protect the United States and its allies from the Soviet and their attacks. But the program was refused and criticized by numbers of US officials.

President John F. Kennedy believed that the United States had a moral obligation to assist governments and political movements fighting communist insurgencies. This idea was expressed in his 1956 speech concerning Vietnam and he said that Americans are "volunteer fire department" for the world; this metaphor indicates that the United States perceives itself as a selfless helper, similar to a fire brigade that rushes to a fire scene to provide assistance. In this context, Kennedy thought that the United States owed it to other countries to help them combat communism, just as a volunteer fire department owes it to help put out fires, and continues explaining "Whenever and wherever fire breaks out – in Indo-China, in the Middle East, in Guatemala, in Cyprus, in the Formosan Straits – our firemen rush in, wheeling up all their heavy equipment, and resorting to every known method of containing and extinguishing the blaze"(Kennedy 1956). Although he said that all nations fighting communism deserve US aid, but he believed that "Vietnam would in all likelihood be receiving more attention from their Congress and Administration, and greater assistance under their aid programs". He saw

Vietnam as the most important strategic geographical area in the Southeast Asia. And it represents "the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia"(Kennedy 1956). Suggesting that the fall of Vietnam will lead eventually to the fall of other countries in the area.

He announced his support for the liberal national and said "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty"(Kennedy 1956). Kennedy reflects his strong belief in freedom and democracy and the willingness of the United States to take bold action to defend those values.

The American credibility and its image as fighting communism and supporting democracy, wasn't only Kennedy's concern, but it was the concern of all American presidents and politicians. Despite his refusal to declare a state of emergency and expand US troops in Vietnam, Lyndon B. Johnson, who took over the presidency when John F. Kennedy died, thought that the South Vietnamese should fight for themselves with US assistance and advise. He was obliged to act against his will in order to keep US credibility, as he thought Vietnam was a victim of communism, and if the US fails to help South Vietnam, it will send a message to the rest of the world that the U.S. is not serious in her fight against communism.

Johnson and most US presidents including Dwight D. Eisenhower, Henry Truman, John Kennedy believed in the domino theory. An idea that ex- president Eisenhower came with to demonstrate the dangerous consequences of spreading communism in Vietnam. Eisenhower explained the principle of this theory by saying: "You have a row of dominoes setup, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly," he added: "So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences." In other words, Vietnam falling under the

Communist control will lead to the fall of the neighboring countries under the communist control and the consequences of that will be Unimaginable.

Johnson was not the only one who believed in that theory and considered it a justification to escalate the number of troops in Vietnam. Truman likewise believed in this idea and provided covert military and financial aid to the French, and would also give aid to Greece and Turkey during the late 1940s to help contain communism in Europe and the Middle East. Using the same logic, Kennedy illustrated the importance of Vietnam by saying that it is "the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the Red Tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam." The fear of Losing Vietnam will lead to losing its Influence and resources in south Asia. Therefore, failing to prevent communism in Vietnam will cause the US to lose its credibility and the image they gained upon winning the WWII as a leading power of the World and a rejecter of the communist control.

The United States was compelled to increase its support and presence in nations fighting against communism, such as Vietnam. The escalation was justified through concepts such as the domino theory, and by persuading the public that it was the moral duty of the US to assist these nations, despite the fact that it was unnecessary. Many historians argue that what was happening in Vietnam had nothing to do with the US and even criticized the presence of American troops in Asian territories.

Over the next decade, American troops faced difficulties adapting to guerrilla tactics and were unable to gain an advantage against communist forces. Vietnam ended the war the way America was afraid of. It had lost the war and its troops came back to America and their faces full of shame. The agony of Vietnam was costly for both Vietnam and the US, by the

End of the War more than 3 million people were killed including over 58000 Americans. And more than half of the dead were Vietnamese civilians in addition to some economical losses and some political changes. Unlike any other war the agony of Vietnam touched the Americans deeply and exposed US policies.

The war resulted in a divided American public and a loss of national pride, as the world's most powerful military suffered defeat at the hands of a less advanced agrarian population. "The wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world made a maximum military effort, with everything short of atomic bombs to defeat a small nationalist movement in a tiny peasant country-and failed. When the United States fought in Vietnam, it was organized modern technology versus organized human beings and the human beings won" (Zinn 347). The real impact of this defeat was on the country's social fabric.

After the war, the US was obliged to admit that the decision to go to Vietnam was wrong. According to American journalist and historian Stanley Karnow by the mid-'60s, most Americans thought that involving in Vietnam was a mistake, Even Former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who served under both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, admitted to being haunted by the government's mistakes and convoluted role in Vietnam, he said "People don't want to admit they've made mistakes. We were wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why." (Osnos) Because of that the American society became cynical and distrustful of their institutions, especially of the government, mostly the young generation.

Karl Marlantes in an article expressing his experience about the war mentioned the same idea that unlike old generations who were trusting the government and believing that it's always right and would never lie to its people, the young generation sees that all politicians lie. Even Jimmy Carter agreed on that and admitted that the Vietnam War had produced a

"Crisis of confidence" (Harrison 31). As a result, the younger generation has become more skeptical and demanding of transparency.

The Vietnam War was not the first time the public was misled, but the credibility gap contributed to the alienation of a substantial portion of the American population. Morris Dickstein defined the war's influence on so many people as a crossover. The Crossing of the Rubicon which means in other words, passing a point of no return "Vietnam made us sick, made us feel like exiles, robbed us of an image of this nation that we desperately needed. By marching we tried to purge ourselves of the least trace of inner complicity with the war; we stepped outside the national consensus and reached for solidarity with others who shared an alternative idea of America"(qtd. In Harrison 30). The author is suggesting that the Vietnam War had very deep impact on their sense of identity and belonging.

The idea of America as a superpower was left in doubt, and the legacy of the Vietnam War continues to impact American culture and foreign policy to this day. Before the war, the American society believed that they are invincible and that no matter what the US do, it's always right and will be supported by people. But the impact of this blind trust was as Ex- president Jimmy Carter said "We were taught that our armies were always invincible and our causes were always just, only to suffer the agony of Vietnam"(qtd. in Harrison 31). All this confidence shattered as the people learned that the government was lying about everything that was going on in Vietnam. The American society became alienated as they started to believe that communism was not necessarily bad, and that Vietnam was not a part of a communist plan to seize the globe. The Americans were no more connected with the idea "better dead than red" and "my country, right or wrong". A Gallup Poll found that 53 percent of those surveyed believe that the war was "a well intentioned mistake," while 43 percent believe it was "fundamentally wrong and immoral." The survey revealed that all people agreed on the fact that Vietnam was a mistake while disagreeing to what extent it was wrong.

2- The Vietnam War in Cinema

Every conflict has winners and losers, and the winners typically have the capacity to shape the historical narrative. The Vietnam War appears to be an exception in what is called “history is written by the victors”, because despite Vietnam's victory, the United States maintained control of the historical war narrative through Hollywood films and “History is temporarily twisted by people who’re going to profit from it in the short term.” The Vietnamese may have won the actual war, but the Americans won the symbolic battle. Being one of the most important businesses generating war narratives, Hollywood impacts popular understanding of the past not just in the United States, but also all over the world. Popular films, unlike literature, have a considerably more direct influence on and form public memory, and should thus be taken seriously.

During World War II, Hollywood produced several movies that helped to create and maintain the necessary support for the war. On the opposite, during the Vietnam War, few movies were made while the war was still ongoing. This was due to many reasons. One major reason was a psychological one, as the United States had always achieved unquestionable victory in its previous international confrontations; the lack of success in Vietnam undermined the country's self-confidence in victory. The second and most important reason was the division of public opinion. Television had replaced the role that movies played during World War II and Korea, and daily TV coverage showed harsh images of the realities of the war, creating a moral debate and ideological confusion among audiences. The studios were not ready to present on the screen films that would address a part of the audience that disagreed with the point of view depicted in the film. In addition to this, during the 1960s and early 1970s, young people were the majority of moviegoers, and it was among this younger generation that the anti-war sentiment was established.

Vietnam War was the most controversial issue of the 1960s and 1970s but, in a surprising turn of events, Hollywood didn't consider it until the late 70s. While many movies of the late '60s and early '70s expressed the war's bitter aftertaste, the conflict itself was notably missing from the screen. Hollywood struggled to cope with the grim and distressing legacy of a lost and troubling war, as did the nation as a whole. During the war, only one film that dealt with Vietnam, *The Green Berets* starring John Wayne, was produced by Hollywood. The movie followed a similar pattern to World War II combat epics like *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and earlier John Wayne westerns like *The Alamo*, and depicted American soldiers defending a besieged Laotian border outpost called Dodge City.

Movies produced while the conflict was still going on, had a common characteristic: they would never show the war as a central theme. According to Jose Enrique Monterde, "the main idea was, more than explaining or justifying what Americans were doing there, to diminish the importance of the conflict... to locate the war in a ground of fog, of a present but at the same time, distant nightmare"(qtd. In Eusebio and Llàcer). This approach aimed to create a sense of detachment and distance from the harsh realities of the war potentially making it easier for the public to accept the ongoing military engagement. America's active military participation in Vietnam ended in 1973, yet the controversy surrounding the war persisted long after the last shot was fired. Much of the controversy revolved around the treatment of returning veterans. Upon returning home to the United States, veterans were dismayed by the unfriendly reception they received. With the painfully present reality of the war, thousands of ex-soldiers wanting to heal their wounds, faced insult and rejection instead of the promised welcome, the notion of forgetfulness became impossible. Marginal filmmakers approached it with a nonviolent message: everyone in the war was a winner as well as a loser. They focused on the impact of the conflict on those who returned, avoiding deeper investigation into the motives for the United States' engagement.

The New York Times argued that “most Vietnam veterans soon learned to keep their war experiences to themselves, and a barrier of silence grew up between them and other Americans”, Many People only know the military via television and movies because many Americans have not served in the military, as well as the defense drawdown, a substantial section of the populace does not know a single military service person, forcing them to obtain their impressions about the military from other sources such as films. If the movies portray the military as terrible, untrustworthy, and warmongering, a huge section of the population will certainly hold the same opinion.

It is critical to understand what influences public perception and how it influences recruiting, retention, and even public support through defense spending. As a result, the majority of the Vietnam films made during this time would be set in the United States rather than the Vietnamese jungle. In these conditions, Hollywood chooses to establish its position and, in Monterde's words, “to exploit commercially the Vietnamese rich seam at the same time turning the losers into martyrs heroically sacrificed for the fatherland”(qtd. In Eusebio and Llàcer). In these circumstances, named by M. Bayles as “healing process” were filmed *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Coming Home* (1978). Even though many critics have remarked that the soldiers tried to address the moral component of war itself, “to combine emotional catharsis with moral analysis” both of them skirt over the actual war, concentrating on the problematic re-adaptation of the ex-soldiers (qtd. In Eusebio and Llàcer). Means that instead directly delving into the details of the war itself they focused on providing emotional release for those affected by the war and examining the moral implications of the conflict.

In the movie *First Blood* (1982), John Rambo, a former Green Beret and a Vietnam War veteran passing through a small town, gets into a conflict with the local sheriff. Part of Rambo's monologue towards the end of the film reveals the trauma he faced as a soldier in the Vietnam War and the treatment he received from the people back home after returning from

the war. Sylvester Stallone, states “you say I am the Jane Fonda of the Right? Listen, I’m not the right wing. I’m not the left wing. I love my country. I stand for ordinary Americans, losers a lot of them. They don’t understand big, international politics. Their country tells them to fight in Vietnam? They fight... The men who fought for us in Vietnam got a raw deal. Their country told them to fight. They did their best! They come home and they’re scorned. People spit at them... It left scars, that period, and I’m glad we’ve come out of it.”(qtd in Carvalho 951). Stallone defends the veterans who fought in Vietnam and criticizes the way they were treated by the American people after returning home from the war.

According to J. David Slocum, it was not until the fall of Saigon in 1975 that filmmakers attempted to "mediate the meaning" of the war, and once they did, they treated Vietnam as a disaster of international and domestic proportions, Jonathan Katzman explains that between 1967 and 1990, there were various stages of Vietnam veteran films.

Katzman's themes are certainly obvious and worth exploring in-depth. The film that best embodies Katzman's first phase is Martin Scorsese's Oscar-nominated *Taxi Driver* (1976). The most notable Vietnam War film made previously to this was John Wayne's contentious film *The Green Berets* (1968). Adair describes the film as "repugnant" because its makers were determined to reduce Vietnam to simple-minded Manichean antitheses: good guys versus bad guys, cowboys versus Indians, white men versus “natives.” Its poor reception can also be used to explain Hollywood's apparent reluctance to venture into the Vietnam war; they did not want to risk another critical controversy. According to David Rabe, in *War Hurts: Vietnam Movies and the Memory of a Lost War*, is quoted saying, "The phase now is to make up a tolerable explanation for Vietnam. Our appetite is for a substitute answer, not the real answer. We'll save ourselves." Hollywood tends to seek a comforting, simplified explanation for the war rather than confronting the complexities and difficult truths of the

conflict. Rabe suggests that this desire for a substitute answer is a way to soothe or "salve" their discomfort with the trauma of war.

3- Historians and the Public Debate about the Past

Historical films are becoming very essential tools in understanding how nations and individuals remember their history, providing access into different eras and allowing us to experience the lives of those who came before us. Despite that, the accuracy of historical films is still a subject to debate among historians, with some arguing that they are a distortion of the truth, and others believing that they can successfully convey historical facts and promote critical thinking.

Robert Rosenstone, an American historian states that "Today the chief source of historical knowledge for the bulk of the population outside of the much despised textbook must surely be the visual media, a set of institutions which lies almost wholly outside the control of those of us who devote our lives to history"(22). In this quote, Rosenstone asserts that most people who are not academics or students learn about history primarily through visual media such as movies and television shows. He believes that these media outlets have surpassed traditional textbooks, which are frequently criticized. Films, according to Giroux are "seen by 10,000,000 people in theatres [in the US] and millions more when it is aired on cable and exported to foreign markets" (qtd. In McCrisken and Pepper 12) it is a proof of the dominance of American marketing and distribution network.

Rosenstone also claims that historians have little control over the information presented in visual media, which is dominated by the entertainment industry rather than the academic community. According to him historical films trouble and disturb (most) professional historians, because they think that "films are inaccurate. They distort the past. They fictionalize, trivialize, and romanticize important people, events, and movements. They

falsify History”(50). That is to say, fictionalized and romanticized portrayals of historical films can lead to a misinformed understanding of history.

Historical films have been part of cinema since the early 1890s, but it wasn't until the 1970s that historians began to recognize Hollywood films as valuable sources of information and powerful tools for teaching and interpreting history. However, Hollywood has often been under scrutiny and its filmmakers have faced accusations for distorting historical facts. One such is Oliver Stone, who was the filmmaker that historians were waiting for a chance to attack him for "factual errors", "distorting the historical records", And "manipulating evidences"(Toplin 3).

Some historians have stayed attached to the classical method and have argued that films can never reach the level of historical books. Robert Brent Toplin, who expresses the opinions of historians that strongly oppose the use of films in the process of learning history, states, "To learn about history, go to a book, not a movie"(6). In his opinion the filmmakers tend to simplify the historical record and try to give a single explanation of historical events that have complex causes, whereas "Scholarship aims to discover truth through complex understanding; filmmakers are far more interested in portraying the past simplistically in order to entertain audiences, make money, and advance their personal agendas,"(6). Similarly Kinder went on to say that in order to create a more realistic portrayal of war scenes the producers of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) prioritize improving production values such as special effects and visuals over accurately portraying the emotional experiences of those involved in the conflict and that Vietnam films such as *Apocalypse Now* tended to ignore the suffering endured by the Vietnamese. It is True that the audience sees long shots of a Vietnamese village on fire, however, these images are not presented to help the audience empathize with Vietnamese people; rather, they are used "for production value in the war scenes to make

them more authentic” and it is obvious that “the main characters and the director aren’t interested in their misery” (14).

History is filled with notable people and events that are ready for the screenplay’s attention and perfectly lend it to the big screen, resulting in huge successful movies of all time. The phrase "based on a true story" seems to have powerful effect on audiences, capturing their attention like nothing else. But, even if they do their best efforts, filmmakers who try to present historical events and figures on the silver screen often fall short of the mark, failing to satisfy their harshest critics. And we’re not just talking about professional movie reviewers, historians can be even more critical and meticulous in their analysis, and

No matter how serious or honest the filmmaker, and no matter how deeply committed they are to rendering the subject faithfully, the history that finally appears on the screen can never fully satisfy the historian as historian (though it may satisfy the historian as film-goer). Something happens on the way from the page to the screen that changes the meaning of the past as it is understood by those of us who work in words (Rosenstone 20).

Jane McGrath believes that taking creative liberties with history in films can serve a purpose. “A film allows us to boil down history into something more easily digestible and ethically black and white” (McGrath). Historical events and people are often complex, unclear, and morally ambiguous, but movies can simplify and clarify them to make them easier for audiences to understand. Sometimes, filmmakers use historical events as a way to address modern issues or to evoke patriotic feelings by referencing similar events from the past. In doing so, they may need to alter details or take creative license with history to make their point effectively

The film industry, being the second largest income generator in the US, is controlled by capital corporations and businesses whose primary aim is to make money and propagate certain ideologies, while distorting others. We can't deny the fact that the entertainment industry in the US, as Giroux notes is "the second largest export - second only to military aircraft" and he added that the film industry is "controlled by a very limited number of corporations that exercise enormous power in all major factors of movie-making-production, distribution and circulation in the United States and abroad" (qtd. In McCrisken and Pepper 12). Therefore, the historical accuracy was never a target for this cooperation's.

The most successful films belong to the genre of historical films are criticized for being praised more for their visual and aesthetic elements. That is to say, these films are not praised for their historical accuracy but rather for their spectacles, costumes and stars, which is what Monk suggests as he argues that the public often find the *mise en scène* - the hairstyles and costumes, speech and dialogue - more interesting (qtd. In Kiss 4). Filmmakers primarily justify their claims of authenticity by arguing that they authentically recreate historical costumes and surroundings. Directors think primarily in visual terms; According to Carnes, film directors are visual thinkers. And they back up their assertions that their films are authentic by authentically recreating the appearance of the past with historically accurate costumes and sets. To them, and to millions of spectators, if a film appears to be from the past, it is (Carnes). Meaning that for them the look is more important than facts.

Davis And Stubbs Hughes-Warrington have a similar point of view and claim that the most authentic way to write historical films is not by presenting their historical accuracy but rather by the accuracy of the *mise en scène* and the period (qtd. In Kiss 4). Therefore, those films can never truly be considered as historical, but rather just pure entertainment. As a matter of fact, Hollywood films have been accused of favoring "action and drama over historical accuracy", and that these films are only historical in the sense of period and they

fail to interpret historical events. Similarly, Rosenstone argues that what is on the screen is not the past but an imitation of it (5).

History films always been criticized for approaching their subject subjectively and willing to dramatize the events changing the history to make the film more appealing to the audience. This makes it a failure in the terms of representing the past. Instead of dealing with the major events back then, they tend to follow the stories of individual characters. According to McCrisken and Pepper, the western has tended to set the limits of Hollywood engagement with history through the mythologized exploits of a single, heroic figure to narrate the growing pains of the nation. Similarly, Slotkin writes, “when history is translated into myth; the complexities of social and historical experiences are simplified and compressed into the actions of representative individuals or heroes” (qtd. In McCrisken and Pepper 19). Furthermore, history films seem to be trapped in the present as they fail to interpret the past. Many movies are interested in projecting present-day stories and values onto past events, rather than accurately representing them. Stubbs argues that many historical films tell a story about the present using the past (qtd. In kiss 4).

4-New Historicism: A Critical Lens for Understanding Literature and Film in Historical Context

The interpretation of a literary work has been a subject of debate among critics. Some argue that the form and structure of the text are crucial, as emphasized by the Formalists; others focus on the social and political context of the work, like the Marxists. Meanwhile, the Structuralists categorize literary works into specific structures. However, it is widely known that the historical context of any literary work is very important for its interpretation and understanding.

Understanding a text's historical context can illuminate the social, political, and cultural forces that shaped its creation and reception. This is the foundation of the New Historicism theory, which emerged in the late 20th century, primarily through the works of the English critic Stephen Greenblatt, this theory is considered new because it was different from former methods and perspectives.

New Historicism is a literary approach, it contends that literature should be analyzed and interpreted in the context of both the author's and the critic's history. Based on Stephen Greenblatt's literary criticism and influenced by Michel Foucault's philosophy, New Historicism recognizes that a work of literature is not just influenced by its author's dates and circumstances, but also by the critic's environment, beliefs, and prejudices. A New Historicist examines literature in a broader historical framework, looking at how the writer's times influenced the work as well as how the work represents the writer's periods, while also acknowledging that current cultural factors distort the critic's views.

New Historicism is a literary theory that aims to comprehend a literary work by taking into account its historical context as well as the prevalent beliefs and assumptions of the period. New Historicism is concerned with the political role of literature and the notion of power, and it focuses on exposing the historically particular model of truth and authority mirrored in a given work. The notion holds that literary works, rather than being a mere chronicle of facts and occurrences, teach us about prevalent ways of thinking at the time, such as social organization, biases, and taboos. The New Historicists believe that ideology reveals itself in literary creations and speech, and they are concerned in the interpretative constructions that members of a community or culture apply to their experiences (Delahoyde).

In recent years, this theory has been a popular method for analyzing films, documentaries, and television series. Film analysis is viewed as an opportunity by new

historicism to investigate crucial aspects in a film that indicate underlying cultural, social, and historical settings of the time period in which the film was created. Robert Kolker explicitly states that “American film, from its beginning has attempted to hide itself, to make invisible the telling of its stories and to downplay or deny the ways in which it supports, reinforces, and even Sometimes subverts the major cultural, political and social attitudes that surround and penetrate it”(qtd. in McCrisken and Pepper 8). This means that American films often have messages about politics, culture, and society in them. However those messages are not obvious or clear to see.

The story of the film, its visual structure, and the historical environment in which it was made are all considered in the new historicist analysis of films. The purpose and the attention are to discover how the film's plot reflects broader cultural, political, and social problems of the time period in which it was produced. This involves examining issues such as ideology, representation, and power structures within the film. According to McCrisken and Pepper “this task of seeing through films is especially important since the ideological commitments and preoccupations of Hollywood films in general achieve their power because they are often invisible. Viewers do not immediately recognise the ways in which they are being positioned by particular modes of representation”(8). Similarly Ryan and Kellner observe that,

the formal conventions- narrative closure, image continuity, nonreflexive camera, voyeuristic observation, sequential editing, causal logic, dramatic motivation; shot centering, frame balance, realistic intelligibility etc- help to instill ideology by creating an illusion what happens on the screen is a neutral recording of the objective events, rather than a construct operation from a certain point of view (qtd. in McCrisken and Pepper 8).

Ryan and Kellner are talking about how films formal conventions which means different methods and techniques like narrative closure, image continuity, camera positioning, and framing and the way shots are centered and edited together, to make it seem like what's happening on the screen, is just a neutral recording of what really happened. The way the movie is put together is actually a construction that wants to show things from a specific point of view, and can be used to influence people's thinking.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Vietnam War was a complicated historical event that had a significant influence on American culture. We have seen how popular culture may impact and reflect larger social sentiments regarding the Vietnam War through an examination of its socio-historical setting and depiction in film. We have also looked at how film represents history and how scholars and the general public argue on the veracity of cinematic portrayal of historical events. Furthermore, this chapter introduced New Historicism, a theoretical framework that merges history and culture in the analysis of literary and cultural sources. In the next chapter, we will study these concepts and methodology in the film *We Were Soldiers*. Simultaneously, the completion of this chapter will serve as a transition to the next, which will provide a full study of the selected work. This will allow us to investigate how the concepts of New Historicism might be applied to a specific case study, shedding light on our knowledge of the Vietnam War and its cultural representations.

Chapter II

Revisiting the Vietnam War in the Context of 9/11: Comparing the Book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* to its Film Adaptation *We Were soldiers*

Introduction

The second chapter of this dissertation seeks to provide an overview of the Battle of Ia Drang, Hal Moore's *We Were Soldiers once and young book*, and Randall Wallace's "We Were Soldiers" film. It will be divided into two parts, part one will be dedicated to the battle of Ia Drang, the book and the film adaptation and the second part will be dedicated to the comparison between the two.

After the tragedy of September 11th, 2001, the United States launched military operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the War on Terror which was seen as the second Vietnam War in the 21st century. This context gave us relevant and essential background for our understanding of *We Were Soldiers*, a story that was set during the Vietnam War but released in the early 2000s. The connection between the war against terrorism and the war against communism, the ways in which they were framed and communicated to the American public are very significant to be explored in our comparison.

In addition to our major goal which is comparing the film to the book, this chapter will also draw on New Historicism to examine the ways in which history is constructed and represented. By examining *We Were Soldiers* this way, we hope to shed light on how cultural artifacts can shape our understanding of historical events and how they are remembered.

1. The Battle of Ia Drang : November 14, 1965.

The conflict in Vietnam spurred on by the Gulf of Tonkin incident, small numbers of advisors became tens of thousands of fighting men as the American nation continued to

expand its involvement in a war few Americans understood. The US intended to remain in Vietnam just long enough for the South Vietnamese government to organize and train its own military forces to stand under its own power, but as tensions mounted president Lyndon B Johnson and his administration struggled to find the right level of involvement hoping to contain the communist threat coming down from North Vietnam.

The Vietnam War officially started on November 14, 1965. The first significant fight between the US Army and the North Vietnamese took place along the drawn river known as the Battle of Ia Drang. This conflict occurred in the Ia Drang Valley between November 14 and November 18, 1965 at two landing zones northwest of Plei Me in the central Highlands of South Vietnam. The battle derives its name from the Drang River which runs through the valley northwest of Plei Me, in which the engagement took place. "Ia" means "river" in the local Montagnard language.

On November 14, 1965, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment (Regt), 1st Air Cavalry Division was sent on a search and destroy mission deep into the jungles of a plateau in the Central Highlands in the Ia Drang River Valley, 37 miles west of Pleiku in the Gia Lai Province, Republic of South Vietnam (RVN). They encountered the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)'s 32nd, 33rd, and 66th Regiments. Since the French withdrawal in 1954, the US had fought against local Vietnamese Communist (Viet Cong) forces in small skirmishes; however, in the Ia Drang Valley, it was the first time US soldiers faced off against trained North Vietnamese regulars in a combat that has become synonymous with the start of full-scale US participation in the RVN. While the Battle of Ia Drang lasted about a month, the two major battles took place at Landing Zones (LZ) X-Ray and Albany.

The previous month, in mid-October, the 32nd Regt encircled and attacked the American Special Forces base at Plei Me, seventeen miles to the east. The 32nd Regt stopped

short of demolishing the camp, hoping to lead Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces into an ambush set up by the 33rd PAVN Regt. The United States entered the conflict at the request of ARVN troops, severely wounding the 33rd PAVN Regt. Both PAVN regiments disappeared westward into the Ia Drang Valley, which bordered Cambodia along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The United States Military chose to send the 7th Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division, headed by LTC Harold G. Moore, to examine the Ia Drang Valley. Contact with the adversary had been minimal up until that moment. Moore discovered no enemies as he landed with the soldiers in the first wave of sixteen helicopters at LZ X-Ray near the base of the Chu Pong Massif. Moore was cautious with only 90 men on the ground and the next ninety at least an hour away (34 miles to Plei Me and back), he was operating lightly in a region largely unexplored and that American Intelligence had suggested could be filled with a regiment of enemy forces.

Moore's troops apprehended an enemy private, a kid, within the first hour. He informed Moore that two PAVN regiments on the mountain adjacent to them "wanted very much to kill Americans but have not been able to find any." In fact, there were three. Moore realized at that time that he would be fighting for his life rather than initiating a first attack. His predictions were realized when his soldiers encountered hostile fire around 90 minutes after landing. Moore's 1st Bn, and subsequently 2nd Bn replacement, struggled for survival against a numerically superior force at LZ X-Ray for three days and two nights.

On the seventeenth, the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cav (2-5), the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cav (2-7), and one company of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cav (1-5) will march out of LZ X-Ray. Soon after, the 2-7 and 1-5 split out toward LZ Albany. These battalions paused at one point, strung out across a narrow road, to question two captured prisoners. Unbeknownst to them, the opposing commander, Lt. Col. Nguyen Hu An's 66th PAVN Regt, was sleeping among US men in the bush. The PAVN Regt attacked with mortar and sniper fire while the battle-weary Americans

slept. Over the next six hours, 155 American men were killed and 120 were injured in a fierce battle.

Over the course of four days, 234 men were killed and over 250 were wounded in the battles at LZ X-Ray and LZ Albany. 545 Americans were killed during the 43-day Ia Drang campaign. An estimated 3,561 enemy soldiers have died. At the time, it was the most American lives lost in the Vietnam War, which hinted at how determined the adversary was.

2. Introduction to the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: La Drang – The Battle that Changed Vietnam* and its Authors.

Hal Moore:

Harold Gregory Moore (February 13, 1922 – February 10, 2017) was a Lieutenant General in the United States Army and author. He was born on February 13, 1922, in Bardstown, Kentucky. He began a 32-year military career at the United States Military Academy in 1942. He went on occupation duty in Japan After graduating in 1945. He tested parachutes, surviving a number of mishaps, including getting hooked up and hauled behind a jet. He was deployed to the Korean War in 1952 and led an infantry rifle and heavy mortar company in the 7th Infantry Division, earning two Bronze Stars.

Hal assumed command of the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry. In 1965, the regiment was renamed the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry (Custer's previous unit) and was sent to Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division. He is most remembered for his command in the first major fight between the United States and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), which took place in November 1965 in the isolated Ia Drang Valley in the Central Highlands.

Hal received the Distinguished Service Cross, the American nation's second-highest decoration for heroism, later he took command of the 1st Cavalry Division's 3rd Brigade and

led it through three key missions in 1966, winning another Bronze Star Medal for Heroism for bringing injured soldiers to safety amid "withering small and automatic weapons fire." Hal received his first star in 1968 and oversaw the Army's departure from Vietnam.

Joseph L. Galloway

"Joseph Lee "Joe" Galloway (born November 13, 1941) is a newspaper correspondent and columnist in the United States. Galloway was born in Refugio, Texas. He was a writer for McClatchy Newspapers and a former military affairs consultant for the Knight-Ridder newspaper network. Beginning in early 1965, Galloway worked as a correspondent for UPI (United Press International) throughout the Vietnam War. He was awarded the Bronze Star 35 years later for his assistance in rescuing injured American soldiers under fire during the assault at Landing Zone X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley.

We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang The Battle That Changed the War In Vietnam (1992)

We Were Soldiers Once...And Young is a 1992 historical biography written by retired Lieutenant General Hal Moore and UPI Reporter Joe Galloway that recalls the events of the first major battle of the Vietnam War. The battle is recounted in great details, Moore draws on additional sources for his book, including statements and information from previously published combat reports written by the soldiers who engaged in the conflict. In this moment by moment description of the tide of the engagement, General Moore inserts the reader in the middle of the action, explaining in minute detail the duties and, in many cases, deaths of the soldiers who fought there.

The book is divided into various sections. There are three main sections following the prologue and a brief history of the Vietnam War to date: LZ X-Ray: The first combat in Ia

Drang. LZ Albany :The second significant fight ,and the Aftermath: A summary of the fights as related by media and military personnel, as well as thoughts from survivors and accounts from the widows of those killed in combat.The cover of the book features Lt. Rick Rescorla, a British-American Vietnam War veteran who served for both countries during the war.

3- We Were Soldiers (2002): A Film by Randal Wallace.

Film Synopsis

We Were Soldiers is a 2002 war drama film written and directed by Randall Wallace and starring Mel Gibson in addition to a strong supporting cast including Sam Elliot and Barry Pepper. It is distributed by major studio Paramount Pictures with \$75 million budget and reached a box-office gross of \$115.4 million. The story of the film follows Lieutenant Harold Moore who is given the responsibility to train young recruits in the US 1st Air Cavalry Division to defend South Vietnam, which is facing communist insurgency. Despite President Johnson's decision not to increase the number of troops, Moore leads his men, along with combat and medical evacuation helicopter crews, to conquer a mountain in Ia Drang, where they face a highly-skilled enemy. The battle becomes a nightmare, but Moore's leadership and his men's sense of brotherhood and heroism inspire them to persevere. A war reporter from a military family documents the events of the battle. Director Wallace said that his motive in making *We Were Soldiers* was to “help heal the wounds” left by the Vietnam War.

4- A Comparative Analysis

The film *We Were Soldiers* claims to depict the events narrated by Hal Moore and Joe Galloway, opening with Joe narrating, “These are the true events of November 1965 in the Ia Drang Valley of Vietnam”(00:00:39). Randal Wallace successfully presents the story of the besieged platoon and their four-day struggle for survival, gaining public approval, particularly due to its release during a time of war. However, when compared to Hal Moore’s original

story, the film's popularity does not necessarily make it an accurate depiction. Without the film explicitly stating the battle's subject and the soldiers' names, it would be challenging to recognize it as a portrayal of the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*.

Simplicity Versus Complexity

Upon reading the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* and watching its film adaptation, a clear distinction emerges between the complex historical representation presented in the book and the simplified depiction offered in the film. Randall Wallace opts for a simplified version of history which is evident in the narrative style employed to convey the story in the film.

Wallace employs a classic hero's journey narrative, following the protagonist's journey to overcome obstacles and emerge victorious. The film focuses on Lt. Hal Moore, who arrives at Fort Benning with his family and is appointed to lead the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, to Vietnam for the X-Ray mission. Throughout the film, Moore faces numerous challenges, such as losing a significant portion of his troops just before deployment and defying orders to withdraw. "Right before the army sends us to the fight. They take away a third of my men. The most experienced third. "(00:29) but he continues to fight against the numerically superior Vietnamese forces, driven by his loyalty to his comrades, ultimately winning the battle and reuniting with his family. This classic narrative structure captures the audience's attention. Additionally, while the film predominantly revolves around Moore, other characters, including his wife Julia, Plumpy, Jack Goughaghan, and a few others, receive some attention.

The book takes an entirely different approach. It ensures that not only Moore but also all the soldiers involved in the battle are given focus. For instance, the book reveals that the 1st Battalion of the 7th Cavalry consists of four companies: Alpha, led by Tony Nadal; Bravo,

led by John Herren; Delta, led by Ray Lefebvre; and Charlie company led by Bob Edwards. "In addition, the battalion had a combat support company, Delta Company, consisting of a reconnaissance platoon, a mortar platoon, and an antitank platoon. We converted the unneeded antitank Platoon into a machinegun Platoon for Vietnam duty. Delta Company was authorized five officers and 118 enlisted men" (Moore 22). The book extensively draws upon their memories, experiences, and interactions with their platoon members. On the contrary, the film narrows its focus to a handful of soldiers and is narrated by Joe Galloway.

This seemingly inconsequential difference takes on a significant meaning within the context of historical discourse. Simplifying the course of the battle depicted in the film results in a completely different history. In the book, the battle is assisted by another company's attempt to reach the cut-off Lt. Henry's 2nd platoon of Bravo Company. Even the end of the battle requires assistance from the 2nd Battalion. The film, however, depicts immediate fighting as soon as they reach the battlefield, while the book shows a gradual development, taking nearly half a day to engage with the Vietnamese.

The film hardly inspired the concept of a trapped platoon and the struggle to help it. And even the end looks more like the end of the battle of LZ Albany. The LZ X-Ray Battle ended on the second day; 16th Nov 1965. After an instinctive decision from Charlie Hastings to call out Broken Arrow Hastings made an immediate, instinctive decision: "I used the code-word 'broken arrow' which meant American unit in contact and in danger of being overrun- and we received all available aircraft in South Vietnam for close air support. We had aircraft stacked at 1000-foot intervals from 7000 feet to 35000 feet, each waiting to receive a target and deliver their ordnance" (175). And after two major napalm strikes that almost killed Moore. And with the help of Colonel Tully's battalion McDade's 5th Cavalry and the help of Bravo Company 2nd Battalion. They succeeded to make the Vietnamese withdraw and

penetrating their defence and helping the cut of company led by Lt Savage at that time. But in the film the code broken arrow used to eliminate the North Vietnamese under the intensive air assault in a classical war movie close up of the war.

The film ends in a way that suggests that the Americans won the Battle while the book showed the fighting at X-Ray continued even after Moore left. Furthermore, the battle of X-Ray was just a setup for what is coming. The battle did end at that moment as Moore represented Colonel An understanding of the situation by saying " As far as colonel An was concerned, the fight with the Americans that has begun on November 14, in Landing Zone X- ray, wasn't over. It was simply moving to a new location a short distance away" (269). Indeed shortly after Moore left with his battalion, Colonel McDade got trapped on the way to Albany and in contrast from the classical heroic and patriotic ending scene in the film that showed the Americans as they won the Battle. The end of Albany represents the real disaster. "It was 1:15 P.M., Wednesday, November 17. By the time the battle ended, in the predawn darkness the next morning, 155 American soldiers would be dead and another 124 wounded. Those who survived would never forget the savagery, the brutality, the butchery of those sixteen hours" (268). While the book portrayed the hellish battle from the beginning to the end in X-Ray and Albany the film seems to be interested only with the first part. As it shows the Americans as victorious and it serves more the classical hero journey narrative that the film follows. Giving that LZ Albany was fought by another battalion. Randall omitted it though it is the result of X-Ray.

The film includes and adds certain concepts and scenarios to the story while neglecting other events related to the battle and the overall narrative. Examples of this include manipulating the end of the battle and introducing dramatic layers to the soldiers, as seen later in the film. By doing so, Randall completely shifts the perspective and trajectory of the battle. This can only be justified by firstly simplifying the complexities of historical narratives,

making them more comprehensive for the audience. Secondly, Wallace wants to represent historical events in a manner that aligns with the audience's desired expectations. Undoubtedly, during the period following the Vietnam War, there was significant public criticism directed at the army and their intervention in Vietnam. Hence, the film provides the audience with an alternative and revised scenario of the war, depicting the army as victorious. Additionally, the soldiers are portrayed as similar to any other American citizen, emphasizing their familial and social connections as fathers, husbands, and friends who receive support from their families and trust in their cause.

The movie presents a complete absence of objections towards the soldiers, as exemplified by a scene where a black woman defends her husband, saying, "I know what my husband's fighting for, and that's why I can smile" (00:20). This indicates that families have no doubts regarding the soldiers' cause in Vietnam. Employing such scenarios aims to eventually restore public trust in the army and soldiers, particularly considering the film's release during a time of war when public trust was crucial. Additionally, it is important to note that simplifying the battle is not the only element that was altered to enhance understanding and meet certain expectations.

In the book, Moore and Galloway gave credit to the North Vietnamese. Presenting and giving information about them. Ho chi minh and Colonel An and Phuong are among the Characters that Moore focused on, telling their stories and presenting their audacious strategies. "Now his goal was to draw Americans into battles. To learn how they fought and to reach his man how to kill them" (Moore 4). And their plan was to control the route 19. As Moore expressed An's plan "Whoever controls Route 19 controls the Central Highlands, and whoever controls the Highlands controls Vietnam" (13). He describes their goal

The North Vietnamese wanted their foot soldiers to taste the sting of those

weapons and find ways to neutralize them .Their orders were to draw the newly arrived Americans into battle and search for the flaws in their thinking that would allow a Third World army of peasant soldiers who traveled by foot and fought at the distant end of a two-month-long supply line of porters not only to survive and preserve but ultimately to prevailing the war which was for them entering a new phase (30).

The film portrayed them only as courageous enemy without identity, with only a few shots dedicated to them, which is again avoiding the ideological aspect of the Vietnam war; the communist versus democratic in order to win the audience, therefore making more money.

In *We Were Soldiers*, only two PAVN soldiers garner attention from among the massive onslaught of PAVN troops. The first and more developed Vietnamese character is Moore's counterpart, Vietnamese Colonel An. Aligning Moore and An in the film serves to accentuate their leadership skills and militarily strategic prowess. The first scene where Lieutenant Nguyen Huu An appears is when the French soldiers unit is ambushed and defeated by the Viet Minh. At the end of the short battle, the French soldiers that are left alive, lying on the ground, are held at gunpoint by the Vietnamese. A Vietnamese soldier then asks his commanding officer, Lieutenant Nguyen Huu An, whether they shall take the French as prisoners. "No," An replies, "If we kill them all, they won't send more" (00:03:18).

The film's second Vietnamese character is a silent, seemingly sensitive soldier, designated as such via costume and props. He wears eyeglasses, writes in a diary, and carries a picture of his wife. Thus the film attempts to humanize America's former foes if only fleetingly, compared to the development of American characters. Yet the PAVN soldier plays a further role in the film when he tries to kill Moore, but Moore killed him at the very last possible moment (01:30:47). The scene doesn't exist in the book but casts Moore as a

reluctant warrior, one who takes action only to defend himself and others, and only when necessary.

The film depicts the Vietnamese soldiers as faceless, nameless enemies who are easily cut down by American firepower. This difference in portrayal is significant, as it contributes to the overall message of the film. By depicting the Vietnamese soldiers as inferior and the American soldiers as heroic, the film reinforces the dominant ideology of American exceptionalism and the belief in the superiority of American military power. This message was particularly appealing in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror, as it provided a sense of reassurance and comfort to Americans who were grappling with the uncertainty and fear of the time. Dehumanizing the Vietnamese and reducing them to mere obstacle to be overcome is consistent with the dominant political climate in the United States at the time, which portrayed the "War on Terror" as a binary struggle between good and evil.

The portrayal of the American soldiers differs in the film and the book. The film focuses on portraying the soldiers as archetypes rather than individuals. They are depicted as friends, fathers, and husbands, categorizing them into these roles. One of the final scenes, where Joe narrates, "In the end, they fought not for their country or their flag. They fought for each other" (02:09), along with the chapel scene and the conversation between Moore and Jack (00:22:27), the relationship between Plumly and Savage, exemplify these archetypes. Jack Geoghegan and Hal Moore represent the roles of husbands and fathers, while Savage embodies the role of a brother and friend.

In contrast, the book presents the soldiers as individuals. Each time Moore introduces a character, he provides information about them, including their name, age, place of residence, and even their interests. Pages 21 to 25 present the division commanders and battalion officers; serve as perfect examples of this individual characterization. However, the

film does not focus on these elements, even with the main characters. Although Lieutenant Henry Herrick, for instance, is the one who leads 2nd Platoon into a trapped situation and the entire battle revolves around helping his platoon, it is only when he gets shot and lies on the ground, with the camera framing a top-down shot, that we can read his name on his vest (00:51). This lack of emphasis on individual characterization applies to all the characters, including Moore.

Moore, as depicted in the book, emerges as a soldier with a deep affinity for the army, sharing the story of Lieutenant General James M Gavin and his visionary pursuit of helicopter development. In the book, Moore conveys his passion, expressing that "Jim Gavin's dream was that someday bigger, faster, and better helicopters would carry the infantry into battle. Forever freeing it of the tyranny of terrain and permitting war to proceed at a pace considerably faster than that of man walking" (Moore 10). This passion is something Moore takes pride in. He even compares himself to Custer, highlighting that the only difference between them is his access to a substantial air force. Moore also recounts the story of how he obtained his position, showcasing his strong personality. Additionally, he considers soldiers like Plumly as treasures, expressing his gratitude for having such valuable assets under his command, saying, "I thanked my lucky stars that I had inherited such a treasure" (20). Similarly, when discussing the battalion companies, Moore refers to them as his manoeuvre elements (22). However, in the film, intentional changes are made to Moore's character, evident in the church scene where he is seen praying with Jack and saying, "You use me as your instrument in this awful hell of war to watch over them" (00:24). These alterations significantly alter Moore's personality.

This reduction of the American soldiers into archetypes can be seen as a reflection of the patriotic and nationalistic mood in the United States following the September 11th Terrorist attacks, as well as the country's engagement in military operations in Afghanistan.

The film was released during a time of war on terror, where the audience desired to see portrayals of husbands, fathers, and friends rather than a man who simply had a deep fondness for the army. In the 2000s, people sought narratives of individuals fighting for their loved ones, emphasizing familial and personal connections, rather than a character that was primarily driven by his passion for the military.

Vietnam itself was portrayed in a simplified manner in the film. The initial shots of landing in the battlefield depict it as a clear green plain, and this is the only image of Vietnam presented in the film (00:47:34). In contrast, the book dedicates passages to describe Vietnam in more detail. For example, when they arrived in Vietnam, Moore described their living conditions "We lived rough: pup tents, C-rations, and showers only when it rained. The battalions took turns manning the picket line of outposts well out from the barrier and running patrols to keep the Viet Cong off guard. My battalion lost two men by drowning on patrol crossings of the Song Ba river during that first month" (30). The book portrays the harsh living conditions, including the need to take malaria pills and sleep in mosquito nets regardless of the circumstances. Furthermore, Moore mentions that they started losing men to malaria within a few weeks, with fifty-six troopers from his battalion alone being evacuated to hospitals due to serious cases of malaria within six weeks (30-31). Even before the battle, they had to clean the area due to the dense jungle, and terms like "elephant grass" were used consistently throughout the battle. Moore notes,

Before our air assault on the target area, Captain Matt Dillon and I flew a brief, high-altitude helicopter recon mission, selecting landing zones and forming the operation plan. During the flight we spotted a small Jarai Montagnard village, and I made a note to warn the troops that there were civilians, either friendly or at least neutral, in the area. And I decided to forgo using artillery or tactical air-prep fires before landing. Most of the

clearings in that area were Montagnard slash-and-burn farm fields. Bad enough we had to land helicopters and men to trample through their pitiful yam and cassava patches; we didn't need to plow them up with the heavy stuffor cause civilian casualties (35).

In the book, Moor describes his reconnaissance mission before the air assault on the target area. During the mission, Moore and Captain Matt Dillon spotted a small Jarai Montagnard village, and he warned the troops that there were civilians in the area. He also decided to forgo using artillery or tactical air-prep fires before landing to avoid damaging the Montagnards' farm fields and causing civilian casualties. The quote shows that there were civilians in the area and wanted to minimize the impact of the military operation on their lives. In contrast the film showed Vietnam as a land that is empty of civilians focusing onlyon the military actions and did not show the concern for civilian welfare that was present inthe book. The portrayal of Vietnam as empty of Vietnamese civilians serves to downplay the impact of the war on it. It could be seen as an attempt to hide the crimes that the Americans committed against Vietnamese civilians during the war.

The political aspect was one of the most important aspects that were not only simplified but also deviated from both the book and history in general. As mentioned earlier, the Vietnam War had complex and controversial causes. It began as an ideological and political war before turning into a military conflict, leading to a significant divide in American society. Given the film's release during the wartime, it was unlikely that the cinema industry, the second-largest income generator, would address these issues.

Randall Wallace avoided political discourse in the film, particularly regarding the causes of the war. The film opens with a scene of the French group Mobile 100 being massacred by the North Vietnamese in June 1954. Following a conversation between two Generals in which one remarks, "The White House wants a victory over cavemen in black

pajamas. They've already beaten the French army. The other general replied by "The French army? What's that?" (00:22:07). Then, Moore is suggested to lead the battalion. This scene indicates that the Americans mostly intervened because of the loss of the French army. This does not only hide and erase the most important aspect of the Vietnam War. But also changes and manipulate our perspective of the history. Adding to that the film only referred to the North Vietnamese as enemies and avoided words such as "communist".

The book presented the causes of the war as development course starting with the defeat of the French army. "In 1954, when the French were trembling on the brink of disastrous defeat at Dien Bien Phu, and President Eisenhower's advisers debated the pros and cons of American intervention in Indochina-intervention possibly even including a nuclear strike-then Senator Lyndon Johnson stood up strongly against that folly, arguing against any war on the Asian mainland. Johnson was proud of that" (Moore 12).

President Johnson was reluctant to deploy American troops to Vietnam or what he referred to as "Veetnam" (Moore 11) and derogatorily as "that damned little pissant country" (Moore 14). But, he stated "American boys will not be sent to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves" (Moore 13). Johnson did not see Vietnam as the ideal battleground to confront the Communists, but as the President, he couldn't ignore the escalating troubles in the region. He couldn't afford to appear weak against communism either. Consequently, "President Johnson was approving a slow but steady build up in the number of American advisers in South Vietnam" (Moore 12).

In the summer of 1964, in Hanoi, the capital of Communist North Vietnam, an important and serious decision was made to escalate the war in order to "liberate the southern half of the country" (Moore 12). It was time to liberate the people of the 17th parallel. The plan was to make three strong trained and equipped regular army regiments and send them to

the south "Hanoi's planners envisioned a classic campaign to crush the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), starting in October 1965, after the monsoon rains ended in the mountains and plateaus of Pleiku province. They would lay siege to the American Special Forces camp at Plei Me with its twelve American advisers and four hundred-plus Montagnard mercenaries. That attack, in turn, would draw an ARVN relief column of troops and tanks out of Pleiku and down Route 14, thence southwest on the one-lane dirt track called Provincial Route 5--where a regiment of People's Army troops would be waiting in a carefully prepared ambush. Once the ARVN relief forces were destroyed and Plei Me camp crushed, the victorious North Vietnamese army regiments would then take Pleiku city and the way would be clear to advance along Route 19 toward Qui Nhon and the South China Sea. By early 1966, the North Vietnamese commanders were certain, South Vietnam would be cut in two and trembling on the verge of surrender." (Moore 13).

Initially, Johnson refused to declare a state of emergency, believing that he could negotiate a resolution with communist Vietnam. However, following a series of North Vietnamese terrorist acts, such as the one on the night of Feb 6, 1965, resulting in the deaths of 8 Americans and over 100 wounded, Johnson's perspective shifted. Expressing his frustration with the situation, he declared, "I've had enough of this" (Moore 14), and subsequently authorized the deployment of forces to Vietnam, providing support to General William Westmoreland and approving all his requirements. The book is firmly rooted in historical facts, with Moore himself expressing his disappointment at the failure to declare a state of emergency and acknowledging the negative impact it had on his troops. Additionally, the battle itself was fought using M-16 rifles by the USA forces and AK-47 rifles by the North Vietnamese. Moore consistently highlights this distinction, as in the language of war and military; the AK-47 Vs M-16 represents the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism.

In the film Moore and Harry Kinnard had a conversation during the party away from the crowd. The conversation is about an issue in the military where the enlistments won't be extended without a state of emergency declaration from the president. This means a third of Moore's men will be taken away, including experienced officers, just before being sent into battle against an enemy with more combat experience. Moore questions Kinnard about seeing this issue coming and mentions that the new crop of platoon leaders given to him won't be enough. They also discuss the possibility of this being a decision made by politicians (00:28:53).

This conversation in the movie reinforces the idea that America and its soldiers were victims of their leaders' poor decisions during the war, but the film does not explore the political reasons that led to it. In other words, what we see here is a direct reference to the fact that U.S. leadership and politicians are the one that should be blamed for the loss boosting the concept that during the Vietnam War, the country and its best young men were only victims of their leaders.

Cecile asks her father, during a chat, why conflicts occur Moor said "it's something that shouldn't happen, but it does when some people try to take lives of other people it's my job to go over there and stop them" (00:24:55). This is one of the many justifications claimed by the US administration for its military actions in Vietnam. In the memoir, however Moore's youngest daughter asks him, Daddy, what's a war?. His reply is stark; he recounts, I tried my best to explain, but her look of bewilderment only grew (Moore 28). Thus the film's represent the war as a humanitarian mission with Moore figured as the hero.

The film presents a limited perspective on the Vietnam War that focuses solely on the military action and neglects the real reasons behind the conflict, as a result, viewers may

Come away from the film with a more positive view of the American intervention in Vietnam than is warranted by the historical record.

Past versus Present

Despite the film narrates a story set in the past, it seems to selectively manipulate certain historical evidence in order to enhance its coherence with the contemporary context in which it was released. The plot structure of the film in general seems to be influenced by the social, cultural, and historical context of the 2000s.

Due to the political tension of the 2000s, the society comforted once more a threat of a fragmented society between supporters and opponents of the war. Understandably, discussing the political complexities surrounding the Vietnam War during a period of heightened tension would divide the Audience rather than unite them.

The film did not just neglect the political causes, but also criticized it, which serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it serves to manipulate the ideological images of the soldiers after the Vietnam by portraying the soldiers like any other American citizen, like men that fight for their friends, wives, and children. "Some had families waiting. For others their only family would be the men they had bled beside. There were no bands, no flags, and no armed guards to welcome them home. They went to war because their country ordered them to, but, in the end, they fought neither for their country nor their flag. They fought for each other." (2:09:33). This demonstrates the hate that the soldiers had to face upon returning from Vietnam as if it was their fault. Additionally, the general in the beginning calling the Vietnamese "cavemen in black pajamas " (00:04:23), and the reaction when they took away soldiers from Moore " Korea didn't teach them anything. Politicians? Politicians." (00:29:33), shows that both the Americans and the soldiers were the victims of the irresponsible decisions of the politicians. Moore's reaction over taking the same name as Custer's division shows that

he is upset which indicates that fighting in Vietnam will only be disastrous. Similarly, Randal Wallace suggests that the war was not in favor of the Americans through the scene when Lt An came back to the battlefield "and the end will be the same except for the numbers who will die before we get there"(02:06:10). Such scenes were added to the film only to present a good image of the soldiers to the audience. This does not just mean that the film failed to address the past, but also can be interpreted as an attempt to facilitate the process of the traumatic aftermath of the Vietnam War rather than primarily aiming to project the Vietnam War as it is.

The film addresses the audience of the 2000s by suggesting that their soldiers were ordered to fight and they are in the same situation as those of Vietnam. It is a way to say that the soldiers must be welcomed and celebrated for their sacrifices in order to protect them, instead of criticizing them. Undoubtedly, the political Discourse presented in the film was not the only exclusive element that conveyed the contemporary context of the 2000s by contextualizing it with the context of the Vietnam War, but there is also the discourse of ethnicity and racism; and while the film was meant to eliminate and manipulate the political discourse, it also incorporated the discourse of ethnicity.

The film primarily explores the theme of the new patriotism which emphasizes the notion of fighting for each other and willing to die protecting their lovers. These scenes of patriotism emerged during the harsh times of the 90s and 2000s, as they realized that the people needed more to see unified soldiers fighting for each other rather than fighting for the country. The film sheds a specific spotlight on the subject of racism because the period in which the film was released and even few years earlier, was marked by numerous significant racial incidents, notably, organizations like the KKK, a white supremacist hate group that promoted terrorism, violence and especially racial hatred among people, and neo-Nazi that promoted extreme right-wing beliefs, racial superiority, and anti-Semitism and often engage in hate speech, propaganda, and sometimes acts of violence against minority groups. Those

groups were still active, and distressing events such as the racially motivated murder of James Byrd Jr. by three white racists in 1998, the Rodney King beating in 1991, and the Los Angeles riots took place.

One of the most important scenes that address the ethnicity issue occurs when the wives of the soldiers engaged in a conversation with each other asking for a good place to do the laundry, a woman called Catherine responded "The Laundromat in town is ok, but they won't let you wash colored things. In a public Laundromat? It doesn't make sense. But they have a sign in the window saying 'whites only'." And a black woman response to her "Honey, they mean white people only." (00:20:22). And after that she commented "that's awful. Your husband is wearing the uniform of a country that allows a place to say that his laundry's not good enough, when he could die for...." and of course the black lady responded in the most classical way with a tone of proudness "I know what my husband's fighting for and that's why I can smile. My husband will never ask for respect, and he'll give respect to no man who hasn't earned it." (00:20:41). This scene precisely propagandizes the idea of unity, suggesting that they were all together in this situation, and therefore they must stand together to protect each other.

This particular scene where the women are gathered together does not historically belong to the 1960s; it also doesn't perfectly align with the 2000s. Racism, being deeply rooted in history, is not simply an unfamiliar or unheard-of concept. However, by connecting it to another scene and questioning the purpose of that conversation, it becomes more relevant to the 2000s. The fact that this specific scene is entirely fictional further suggests that Randall Wallace may have been influenced by the heightened levels of racism during the 2000s. The impact of the scene featuring the black lady is amplified by the dramatic portrayal of Jack Goughaghan's death. As Jack attempts to assist a black soldier, he is shot in a poignant slow-motion close-up, capturing his final moments as he kneels before collapsing (01:48:05).

Additionally, there was some other scenes that supported that. The final scene before they were sent to Vietnam is one more of an invented scenario that got many interpretations. Moore says in a speech

look around you. In the Seventh Cavalry, we've got a caption from the Ukraine. Another from Puerto Rico. We've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanic, Cherokee Indians. Jews and gentiles. All American. Now, here in the States, some men in This unit may experience discrimination because of race or creed. But fro you and me now, all that is gone. We're moving into the valley of the shadow of death Where you will watch the back of the man next to you, as he will watch yours. And you won't care what color he is or by what name he calls God (00:32:22).

This scene just as the previous example, urges to a united community against the same enemy. In Moore's speech, he mentions the diversity within the army, including Asian, European, African, and South American soldiers. However, the absence of Middle Eastern soldiers raises questions. Considering the context of the conflict against communism, which the US portrayed as the source of evil, featuring close-up shots of Chinese soldiers seems somewhat logical, although highly improbable in reality. Even Moore himself speculates in the book that some Chinese may have been present during the battle. This raises the question: why are there no Middle Eastern soldiers in the American military units? The answer is simply that it was a time of war against the Middle East. Even the religious aspect of Moore's speech includes references to Christians, Jews, and even gentiles, but not Muslims.

To conclude this point. We can say that while Moore in the book stayed objective and presented a factual event in the Ia Drang valley, the film seems to be approaching the Battle subjectively and seems to be trapped and controlled by the events of its time release.

Drama Versus Reality

Randall Wallace successfully captivated the audience's attention through a dramatized narrative of the event that resonated with their preference. The drama elements serve as unifying elements that connected the events with each other. In the book, the plot is primarily structured to narrate the events that took place in the Ia drang Valley objectively. Moore divides his book into four main sections, carefully building up to the battle and providing the necessary context and leading causes. He aims to engage readers by presenting comprehensive information surrounding the battle. On the other hand, the structure of the film serves a different purpose and the film approaches the story subjectively.

The film can be divided into two main acts. The initial act is dedicated to portray the soldiers and their families, illustrating the brotherhood and the friendships forged among them. This part serves to hook up the audiences and making them connect with the soldiers and feel emotional toward them. This suggests that the film, right from the beginning, prioritized the presentation of a dramatic and emotional event over an accurate historical depiction of the battle. This not only deviates from the purpose of the book but also manipulates historical records to accomplish the dramatic aspect.

Jack Geoghegan is one of the characters that are completely different from the book. Moore said in the credit of Jack "The 2nd Platoon leader was John Geoghegan, a handsome, red-haired young officer, commissioned out of the Pennsylvania Military College, who was four days past his twenty-fourth birthday. Geoghegan was married and the father of a baby daughter born three months before we shipped out to Vietnam" (120). Then, he informed us of his death later. The book portrayed Jack as any other Lt who would sacrifice his life for his troops. The film portrayed Jack as a husband and a father. Randall added these features to Jack's personality to make him pure and create drama material.

In the book Jack was a secondary character that got mentioned briefly. Moore describes his death:

Jemison remembers, "Godboldt was hollering: 'Somebody help me!' I yelled, 'Til go get him.' Lieutenant Geoghegan yelled back: 'No, I will!' Geoghegan moved out of his position in the foxhole to help Godboldt and was shot. This was ten minutes or so from the time the firing first broke out." Struck in the back and the head, Lieutenant John Lance (Jack) Geoghegan was killed instantly. The man he was trying to save, PFC Godboldt, died of his wounds shortly afterward (174).

The film portrays the sacrifices made by American soldiers in Vietnam as an act of selflessness and heroism. For instance, the characters of Cpt. Metsker and Lt. Geoghegan are depicted as brave and courageous soldiers who give their lives for the sake of their fellow soldiers. The scene where Metsker gives up his place on the rescue helicopter to save Ray, a badly wounded soldier, is a poignant moment that highlights the importance of sacrifice and selflessness in times of war. Similarly, Lt. Geoghegan's ultimate sacrifice while trying to save his friend, Willie Godboldt, emphasizes the deep bond that soldiers share with each other and the lengths they are willing to go to protect their comrades.

The film brings Geoghegan's death (01:48:05) into the post September 11th era by allowing his death to go undiscovered for several days, lost in the rubble of bodies, the scene is shot in a way that creates a sense of isolation and vulnerability. The darkness of the jungle and the use of shadows and silhouettes create a sense of danger and uncertainty. The use of close-ups of Moore's face and Geoghegan's bracelet highlights the emotional weight of the moment and underscores the personal connection between the two men. The use of silence and minimal sound design also adds to the emotional impact of the scene.

The conflicts during the battle is another dramatic aspect that is added to the film. In the book after bravo company second battalion succeeded to penetrate the enemy and saves savage and his troops, Moore was ordered to leave the battlefield and let bravo company second battalion take care of LZ X-Ray. But because the battle didn't end and the shooting continued. Moore refused to leave and waited till the situation calmed down.

The film created conflicts during the battle to set for Moore obstacles that he has to surpass. After the battle started the battalion were surrounded and over numbered by the enemy. This led to a discussion at HQ, "losing a lot of draftees is a bad week. Losing a colonel is a massacre. Moore is still fighting. He's against more than he can count. A platoon is lost. They are not lost. They are cut off and surrounded. Then they are lost" (01:01:21), and shortly after an order was given to Moore to go to HQ: "it's brigade headquarters, they want you out. We can't get out, damn it!. Not all of us, just you. Saigon wants to debrief you." (01:02:11). The order to leave came for Moore after the cut off platoon was saved in the book. The order in the film came because they underestimated the soldiers and did not believe they could win. Even the fight between Crandall and a general at the HQ is not taken from the book and only serves dramatic purposes. Conflicts serve to make the audience have an idea of what the soldiers felt and appreciate them more even if that means fabricating scenarios.

The scene of Julia delivering death notes to the wives was dramatized and shifted from what really happened. In the last chapter of the book, Moore showed that the families were upset by the way they were treated; the death notes were delivered by a Taxi. Julia with some other wives protested, she consoled the wives for their losses, but never delivered the notes herself. Julia each time delivered a note with Barbara to make the audience not only get in touch with the soldiers but with their families and cover the deaths in the battle with drama. Even when Jack died and Julia delivered his death news to Barbara, it was a pure dramatic

scene that Randall added to the movie. In the book his death news were delivered to his family who called Barbara:

Barbara Geoghegan was away that day; she had gone to New Rochelle, New York, to stay with her husband's elderly aunt. The aunt's husband had died on this date two years earlier and the family thought someone should be there to comfort her on so tragic an anniversary. When the Geoghegans telephoned Barbara with the news, she was writing her ninety-third letter to Jack, a letter filled, as usual, with news of their baby daughter, Camille. The next morning, in the mailbox at home, she found Jack's last letter to her. He wrote, "I had a chance to go on R and R, but my men are going into action. I cannot and will not leave them now (383).

Receiving the news by Julia fits more the dramatic aspect of the film. The emphasis on the soldiers' families during the Vietnam War, particularly the delivery of death notices, draws parallels with the emphasis on family and interpersonal relationships following the September 11th attacks. The delivery of death notices was an agonizing experience for military wives, who were left to bear the burden of the news alone. Mrs. Moore's felt obliged as a General's wife to deliver the notes herself in an effort to provide a support for the widowed wives, which was notably absent in their original delivery method of Western Union telegrams delivered by taxi. The anxiety felt by Mrs. Moore and other military wives, constantly aware that one of the notices could be about their own husband, is reminiscent of the days following 9/11.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Battle of Ia Drang was a very important event in the Vietnam War, and Hal Moore's book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the battle. The film adaptation of the book is an emotional portrayal of the battle that takes some creative liberties and sacrifices historical accuracy for the sake of drama. To summarize the points discussed earlier concerning the comparison, the film *We Were Soldiers* aligns with the first argument raised by critics of historical films, which asserts that filmmakers simplify history to cater the audience and generate more profit. In this case, the film can be seen as leaning towards the perspective that the violation of historical accuracy does not arise from inaccuracies or fictionalization but rather from the compression of the past into a single, linear storyline with a singular interpretation. Randall Wallace, the director, simplifies the narrative of the Battle of La Drang Valley, reducing it to a shallow battle devoid of context. The film lacks crucial information about the soldiers, the battle itself, and the broader plot. Not only does the film simplify history for digestibility, but it also appears confined to the time it was released, as alluded to earlier. *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* and its film adaptation are important cultural artifacts that provide valuable insights into the human experience of war and the ways in which we construct and represent history.

Simplifying the course of history will only benefit the filmmakers as the audience understands the film and appreciates it. This fact will only end in making more money for the industry. Therefore, in this case we can say that the film leans more toward the claim that the notion of history is violated not by inaccuracies or fictionalization but rather by the compression of the past presented by a single, linear storyline with one interpretation.

Additionally, the plot of film seems to be influenced by the period of the 2000s, therefore failing to portray the past, and this is another argument the filmmakers were accused of. Filmmakers show more interest portraying their story using the past to narrate the stories

of the present. The film added scenarios and omitted others to make the story more fitting with the time it was released. Not only that, but it also approves the argument that cinema manipulates the historical evidence to heal the wounds, and films can be seen as an instrument to rewrite a history that hurts.

Finally, it is evident that the film is based on dramatic narrative rather than factual narrative. Filmmakers were always accused of destroying the historical facts and evidence in order to make the film more dramatic. Indeed, many historians suggest that the audience are more interested in the drama, action, and look of the film rather than its historical accuracy. Furthermore, the argument suggests that the perfect way to achieve historical authenticity is with the accuracy of the *mise en scène*. Indeed, these films are not praised for their historical accuracy but rather for their spectacles, costumes and stars.

General Conclusion

The present research has looked into the relationship between cinema and history. It has compared Randall Wallace 2002 film *We Were soldiers* to Hal Moore and Galloway's historical book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang- the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam* (1992). Our study has claimed that *We Were Soldiers* was not completely faithful to the book and that cinema cannot effectively convey the complexity of historical events.

This dissertation is divided into a general introduction, two chapters and a general conclusion. The general introduction covered many points: The influence of history films on how people think and remember the past, particularly the Vietnam War's impact on American history and culture. The increasing role of films in helping people learn about the past, as many viewers' only knowledge of certain historical events and figures comes from what they've seen on screen. The specific focus on the Battle of Ia drang in the Vietnam War and its depiction in the book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* by Harold Moore and Joe Galloway the background of historical filmmaking, its evolution over time and the varying levels of accuracy and attention to detail. Moreover, it has reviewed previous research works related to the film *We Were soldiers* and the portrayal of war and military action in Hollywood films, the role of the film industry in shaping public perceptions, and the influence of cultural memory.

The first chapter entitled "The Vietnam War: A Transformative Event in American History" has examined the roots of US engagement in the Asian land Vietnam, the reasons and its embarrassing consequences on American people and government. It has also looked into the public debate among historians about the accuracy of historical films and why those films can never satisfy historians as a book of history does. As far as the New Historicism

theory is concerned, this chapter has highlighted that New historicism views a film as an opportunity to investigate its crucial aspects, indicating underlying cultural, social, and historical settings of the time period in which the film was created.

In the second chapter entitled “Revisiting the Vietnam War in the Context of 9/11: Comparing *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* to its Film Adaptation *We Were soldiers*”, we critically examined various aspects of the film and we compared them to the book. We discussed the film's portrayal of its historical context, the inclusion of fictional scenes, the depiction of racism, the emphasis on drama, and the portrayal of American soldiers as heroes. Through this analysis, we highlighted discrepancies and offered insights into the differences between the film and the book. It was a critical examination rather than a simple description of the film.

By Applying New Historicism theory to the comparison between *We Were Soldiers* film and the book we gained insight into the cultural and historical contexts in which the film was produced and how it reflects and shapes those contexts. The filming *We Were Soldiers* took place in 2001, from June 18, 2001 until October, 2001 and it was released in March 1, 2002. The 9/11 tragedy happened during the post-production phase of the film, it is true that the film's plot does not depict this event, but the aftermath of the terrorist attack inevitably affected the perception and interpretation of the film, given its drama and action over historical accuracy.

Our findings indicate that while the film *We Were Soldiers* by Wallace can provide a basic understanding of historical events, it should not be solely relied upon as an accurate depiction of history. Films are a form of entertainment and are designed to be engaging and emotionally impactful. This often means that certain parts of history are simplified, or even fictionalized to make a more compelling story. In addition to the fact that *We Were Soldiers* is

limited by its runtime and often cannot include all of the important details of the historical event, it may also present a biased or one-sided perspective of the story.

While *We Were Soldiers* can be a useful supplement for learning about the Vietnam War in general and Ia drang battle specifically, it should be viewed critically and in conjunction with other sources such as its primary version which is the original book *We Were soldiers Once and Young* in this case. A comprehensive understanding of history requires a multifaceted approach that includes a variety of sources and perspectives. It is important to consider that the film *We Were Soldiers* did not change the real outcome of the Vietnam War, nor did it rewrite the story of the battle. However, it did contribute to the way that the war was remembered and understood by many Americans.

In considering the collaboration between filmmaker Randall Wallace and Hal Moore, it is noteworthy that Moore himself acknowledged that the final product was only 60 percent accurate in representing the historical events. This acknowledgment further emphasizes the complexities and challenges inherent in translating history to the cinematic medium. While collaboration between historians and filmmakers is valuable, it is essential to recognize that achieving complete accuracy in film adaptations of historical events can be a complex task.

Moving forward, future studies could explore strategies to bridge the gap between historical accuracy and creative storytelling in cinema, aiming for a more balanced and nuanced representation of the past. This may involve further examining collaborative approaches, research methodologies, or innovative storytelling techniques that enhance the accuracy and authenticity of historical portrayals on screen. By continuing to investigate and improve the relationship between cinema and history, we can enhance our understanding and appreciation of the past while ensuring its faithful representation on screen.

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the complexities of depicting history in film and the need for a critical approach when engaging with historical films. It has provided valuable insights into the main differences between cinema and a book of history. By addressing the gaps between history and cinema, we can strive for a more accurate and nuanced representation of the past in film, ultimately enriching our collective understanding of history.

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Résumé

À l'ère moderne, la majorité des individus façonnent leur compréhension de l'histoire par le biais de films captivants, influencés par l'idée que les films offrent un moyen d'apprentissage plus accessible et plus rapide. Cet article évalue l'exactitude du film *We Were Soldiers* dans la représentation des événements historiques de la bataille de Ia Drang pendant la guerre du Vietnam. En comparant le film *We Were Soldiers*, réalisé par Randall Wallace, à sa source originale, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young : Ia Drang the Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam*, nous cherchons à résoudre la divergence entre le cinéma et l'histoire en répondant à la question de savoir si le film a fidèlement dépeint l'histoire de Hal Moore et de ses troupes et en montrant comment les films peuvent s'écarter de l'exactitude historique. La comparaison est basée sur les arguments d'historiens et du néo-historicisme en tant que cadre théorique. L'article révèle que, bien qu'il ait été bien accueilli par le public, le film *We Were Soldiers* ne dépeint pas les événements de la bataille aussi fidèlement que le livre. Il met en évidence les limites de l'utilisation des films comme source d'information historique.