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Why We Fought: America's Wars in Film and History

Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor

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Film moves audiences like no other medium; both documentaries and feature films are especially remarkable for their ability to influence viewers. Best-selling author James Brady remarked that he joined the Marines to fight in Korea after seeing a John Wayne film, demonstrating how a motion picture can change the course of a human life?in this case, launching the career of a major historian and novelist. In Why We Fought: America's Wars in Film and History, editors Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor explore the complexities of war films, describing the ways in which such productions interpret history and illuminate American values, politics, and culture. This comprehensive volume covers representations of war in film from the American Revolution in the 18th century to today's global War on Terror. The contributors examine iconic battle films such as The Big Parade (1925), All Quiet on the Western Front (1930), From Here to Eternity (1953), and Platoon (1986), considering them as historical artifacts. The authors explain how film shapes our cultural understanding of military conflicts, analyzing how war is depicted on television programs, through news media outlets, and in fictional and factual texts. With several essays examining the events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath, the book has a timely relevance concerning the country's current military conflicts. Jeff Chown examines controversial documentary films about the Iraq War, while Stacy Takacs considers Jessica Lynch and American gender issues in a post-9/11 world, and James Kendrick explores the political messages and aesthetic implications of United 93. From filmmakers who reshaped our understanding of the history of the Alamo, to Ken Burns's popular series on the Civil War, to the uses of film and media in understanding the Vietnam conflict, Why We Fought offers a balanced outlook? one of the book's editors was a combat officer in the United States Marines, the other an antiwar activist?on the conflicts that have become touchstones of American history. As Air Force veteran and film scholar Robert Fyne notes in the foreword, American war films mirror a nation's past and offer tangible evidence of the ways millions of Americans have become devoted, as was General MacArthur, to "Duty, honor, and country." Why We Fought chronicles how, for more than half a century, war films have shaped our nation's consciousness.

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