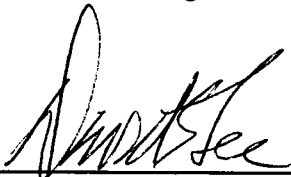


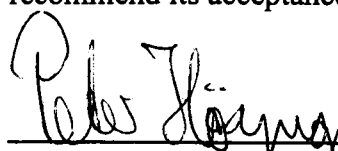
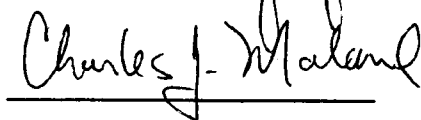
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sandra Ransier Smith entitled "Political Culture and Propaganda: A Comparison of the Films Kolberg and Bataan." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in German.



David E. Lee, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


_____

Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

**Political Culture and Propaganda:
A Comparison of the Films Kolberg and Bataan**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

Sandra Ransier Smith

December 1998

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For Alex

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ABSTRACT

Film propaganda in Hitler's Germany has a notorious reputation, though it remains one of the least understood genres in film history. We can partially demystify the sinister aura surrounding Nazi propaganda by comparing it with films from other countries. This thesis compares the Nazi film Kolberg with the Hollywood film Bataan, and finds that both have two overarching aims in common: 1) to depict for the audience who they are as a people, and 2) to convince the audience to support/fight in the war. Chapter One examines the term "propaganda" and also places the film industries of Germany and America in historical context. Chapters Two and Three examine, respectively, the ways in which the films appeal to national identity and fighting spirit. In sum, both films can be understood as political acts that use plot, characterization, image, and sound to appeal to the emotions and sometimes the intellect of the audience in order to reinforce its prejudices, evoke fear, and make it feel that supporting the government's war positions is the only reasonable alternative.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction	1
1. Propaganda and a Tale of Two Film Cultures	5
2. “Who Are We?”	16
3. “Why Are We Fighting?”	40
Conclusion	57
Bibliography	61
Vita	65

Introduction

Political propaganda is considered tainted, if not downright diabolical, although a day seldom passes that people do not feel its effects. The very word "propaganda" carries frightful connotations, mainly because of the rise of totalitarianism in this century.

Propaganda is itself a central concern of totalitarianism. The Third Reich was able to mesmerize an entire nation and lead a people to support tacitly or openly the most unspeakable policies. Its record in this regard is perhaps matched only by the regimes of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, who after all dominated far less educated populations. That this propaganda was most systematically administered and with the highest degree of sophistication to a people one might have thought immune to its most blatant and crude aspects still fascinates scholars and laymen to an extent neither Stalin nor Mao can reach.

In America, television documentaries about the Third Reich are popular and often incorporate clips from Nazi film. Such unforgettable images from Nazi "documentaries" as the scurrying rats from *Die ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew--1940) or the fervent, blonde Hitler Youth from *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will--1936) are all most people have seen of state-sponsored film in Hitler's Germany. Most American citizens do not think about Nazi film as such, and it is only a small selection of its myriad images that have helped make the Nazis an uncomplicated metaphor for evil in the popular culture--a metaphor that seems to invade even the attitude of scholars on the subject of Nazi art.

"The assumption has been, and in many cases continues to be, that this art, commissioned by the state and therefore unfree, is nonart and does not deserve our

attention” (Hinz xi). On the other hand, American film propaganda from World War II, judging by the frequency with which it appears on cable television, is extremely popular with the public. Channels devote entire weekends to war films during patriotic holidays like Memorial Day. The anniversaries of Pearl Harbor and the D-Day invasion are always commemorated on at least one popular channel with combat movie “marathons.” The very sound of a combat film is so familiar to our culture that it has been used frequently in films, diegetically, to suggest the presence of a television in a room, or to identify, without showing it, the kind of television program that is on!

Clearly, there are reasons why Hollywood combat films (unlike films made under the Nazis) are not considered “mere propaganda.” But while aversion to Naziism is understandable, it should not lead us to abandon sound analytic methods in our treatment of film aesthetics and history. Prominent film scholars have voiced their dissatisfaction in recent years with the number of questions that remain unanswered about film in the Third Reich. Karsten Witte, for one, points out that among the films made during the Nazi period, the dozen films actually sponsored by the state have been, on the whole, regarded by critics as understandable only in terms of the political system that sponsored them. These twelve films have been viewed as “other”--objects of fascination and loathing, products of a despised regime. But vital questions get overlooked when the analysis turns on the system; for example, what does Nazi film have in common with the film products of the other Axis nations and what does it have in common with Hollywood films?

Eric Rentschler, too, has called for a more precise definition of Nazi film aesthetics. In a 1990 article entitled "German Feature Films 1933-1945," he argues that comparative studies that more clearly define the various discourses that influenced Nazi film art from both inside and outside Germany are sorely lacking in the scholarship on the subject. Among other topics, Rentschler thinks it might be fruitful to explore "the conscious way in which German feature films of the [Nazi] era reflect the workings of classical Hollywood cinema and yet in decisive respects differ" (261). More specifically, he suggests comparative analyses between several Nazi and Hollywood films, including Kolberg (UFA, 1945) and Bataan (MGM, 1943).

In this thesis, I intend to take up Rentschler's suggested topic and compare Kolberg and Bataan, two films that, though produced in opposing political cultures, have certain propagandistic features which make them comparable. Chapter One will attempt to clarify the term propaganda by pointing out its complicated nature. And in order to understand the kinds of systems that produced the film propaganda in this study, the first chapter will also provide some relevant background history of the film industries in each country.

My comparison of the films in Chapters Two and Three, while dealing with such elements as characterization, plot, and selected cinematic techniques, will be structured according to what I contend are the two essential aims of these films: 1) to depict for the audience who they are as a people, and 2) to convince the audience to support/fight in the war. Certainly, these aims are closely linked. In fact, they both often inform the

“message” of a single scene. But for the purposes of pulling apart the components of the propaganda--that is, in order to see the differences between the appeals to feelings of national pride, on the one hand, and to outrage/fighting spirit on the other--I will examine them in separate chapters.

Chapter One:

Propaganda and A Tale of Two Film Cultures

In order to see Rentschler's primary point, that categorizing or dismissing state-sponsored Nazi films as mere propaganda is reductive, it is necessary first to realize that "propaganda" can describe a very complex art form. David Welch, in his book Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations, points out two widespread misconceptions regarding the nature of propaganda. One is the "belief that propaganda implies nothing less than the art of persuasion, which serves only to change attitudes and ideas" (2). The other is that propaganda is constructed entirely of lies. If these assumptions were correct, then no one would ever need to fear the power of propaganda! In fact, propaganda is much more "concerned with reinforcing existing trends and beliefs" by making use of "many different kinds of truth--from the outright lie, the half truth, to the truth out of context" (2). It must, after all, appeal to our rational nature as well as our emotions in order to be convincing. As Aldous Huxley wrote, "Propaganda gives force and direction to the successive movements of popular feeling and desire; but it does not do much to create these movements. The propagandist is a man who canalises an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain" (quoted in Welch, Limitations 7). It is also good to be reminded that propaganda is employed by every political culture, not just those we think are evil. The United States produced many films about World War II both during and after the War that are blatantly propagandistic (Bataan, for

example) but are still enjoyed by audiences and studied by scholars within the framework of cinema art.

Furhammar and Isaksson agree that “[s]election and half truth are the cornerstones of propagandist documentary” (152). In Politics and Film they discuss some of the basic characteristics of the propaganda film and offer a formula that they claim provides the backbone to propaganda films throughout the world: “Broadly speaking [the formula] comprises three consecutive phases: 1) we are shown an idyll of quiet, harmonious contentment, which wins our sympathy; 2) a force from the outside threatens the idyll, seeking to destroy it by some abominable means; 3) heroic attempts are made to defend it” (57). War propaganda, especially, exploits our feelings of insecurity. As Balfour contends, “In time of war, as in time of economic and other emergencies, people are gripped by fear for themselves, their loved ones and their possessions. Objective thinking becomes hard to maintain: institutions which foster and individuals who engage in it come under attack” (425).

We can also generalize about the aesthetics of propaganda. “Propaganda’s rhetoric is visual,” according to Furhammar and Isaksson (164). The visual style must be at once “solemn” and “emotionally charged enough to achieve the necessary level of audience involvement” (164). Sound plays an important role, as well. Propaganda films often employ the crescendo form--a gradual “building up” of images or music--to heighten the emotions of an audience (158). Coaxing this emotional involvement is also often a matter of providing the audience an opportunity to make a choice between

opposites. Indeed, contrasts of color and light and dark are exploited by the propaganda filmmaker perhaps more than any other stylistic device (167).

The most powerful contrasting effects, however, operate more on an emotional than on a formal level . . . The genre is full of confrontations between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, purity and filth, order and chaos, poverty and abundance, idyllic past and menacing present--or between past suppression and present prosperity. (168)

It is no surprise that the "favorite" emotion of the propaganda film is indignation (Furhammar 155). However, "[t]he emotions on which propaganda operates do not need to be intrinsically tendentious. They make up the motive force behind the audience's involvement, the direction can be guided by other elements" (155). A love story, for instance, can charge a film with emotion. Indeed, love tends to play a significant role in propaganda from the United States (156), with the notable exception of the combat film genre. Tributes to the perseverance of women on the homefront, to women as WACs and nurses, and women who risked their lives to save soldiers were all popular film subjects in the 1940s. But as Basinger points out, the absence of women in combat films (after, perhaps, the opening segment) is a generic requirement (61-2).

Crucial to a full appreciation of the similarities between two propaganda films like Kolberg and Bataan is an understanding of the historical contexts in which they were made. The webs of official control over the film industry were spun quite differently in Germany and America immediately before and during World War II. If, as one line of reasoning might conclude, we need only examine the political system of the Third Reich to determine how it could produce entertainment as blatantly propagandistic as Kolberg,

then how is it that Hollywood, relatively free of government control, generated so many films equally unabashed in their promulgation of the government's war positions and programs? One art was "unfree" and the other was "free," yet the products are not as different as one might expect.

The ability of films to reach mass audiences made them one of Joseph Goebbels' favorite means of propaganda. "A government," he said, "must not neglect them" (quoted in Herzstein 272). On 13 March 1933 every form of public expression in Germany came legally under Goebbels' jurisdiction, which reflected the Nazi idea of *Gleichschaltung*, or "putting everything into the same gear" (Manvell 66). Though total government domination of the film industry did not occur until 1942, Goebbels made it clear at the outset that his intention was not just censorship but the imposition of National Socialist ideology. "From now on the cinema was to be in the vanguard of the struggle for 'national culture.' . . . Film had to be taken out of the hands of an anonymous group of people and made an educational instrument for building the new Reich" (Herzstein 259).

Goebbels established the *Reichsfilmkammer* (Reich Film Chamber), which carried out the orders of the film division of the ministry. As the result of a 1935 Hitler decree, Goebbels gained the power to pre-approve all films before they were shown. "Goebbels warned producers to submit their final scripts to the film division a month before an approved film was to be made by a studio" (Herzstein 261). But while the received impression is that the Chamber's hold on the film industry was iron-fisted, there is some dispute among directors of the period over exactly how much control it had over the

finished product. “Veit Harlan [director of Kolberg and of the anti-Semitic Jud Süß] described Goebbels as an omnipresent, demonic dictator of film, justifying his own work as a director during the Third Reich on the ground that as a director he was simply not responsible for the content of his films” (Leiser 15). According to director Wolfgang Liebeneiner, however, directors often found ways around the Minister’s “instructions.” He claims it was even possible to “sabotage unequivocally political projects” (15). The writer William Moritz agrees, and explains, “The few filmmakers who did triumph over this restrictive system did so by dint of native ability abetted by clever strategy of setting their films in mythical locations” (188).

While propaganda is only effective to the degree that a society is saturated with it, Goebbels was master enough of his craft to know that it, too, can reach a point of diminishing returns. As Manvell and Fraenkel point out, “He did not make the same mistake as the Communist propagandists in the Soviet Union under Stalin, by imposing too great a burden of propaganda on the entertainment industries. He realized that even the most dedicated Nazis must have their lighter moments, and relax with fun and games” (68-9). For this reason, the state sponsored relatively few feature films: Only about 50 of some 1,100 films made in the Third Reich can be said to be informed by a strong National Socialist world view (Manvell 75). Leiser maintains, however, that even films deemed “unpolitical” and “pure escapism” are rife with similar clichés: “Americans smoke fat cigars, drink whisky and never take their hats off, even in the livingroom. Certain professional classes--bankers, hoteliers, newspaper publishers--can’t be trusted.

A woman who jeopardises a marriage or turns a man into a criminal is seldom blonde” (19).

The films made directly under Nazi control have a recognizable, albeit not adequately understood, aesthetic. Hinz calls images of “marches, pageants, and the meticulously organized mass meetings and Reich party rallies” the new “mass aesthetic,” and notes that what Nazi ideology lacked in substance, it attempted to make up for in appearance (xii).¹ Robert Edwin Herzstein claims that “the unique nature of National Socialist propaganda lay in its combination of traits common to other nations’ war efforts with a demonology and an idealism that made sense only in the context of historical experiences and cultural traditions shared by the German people” (18).

One of the hallmarks of a great many Nazi films is the image, borrowed from Russian film, of the “growing collective”—a scene in which a few citizens marching through a village or across the countryside are joined by ever increasing numbers of citizens in a demonstration of solidarity, often “accompanied by a rising flood of martial music” (Furhammar 160), another hallmark of Nazi films. “Patriotic marches and

¹ The Hinz citation is worth quoting in its entirety: “From the beginning, the Third Reich spared no expense and used all available aesthetic means to project its image. . . . Whenever highways, bridges, representative buildings, or even whole cities were planned or built, they were justified in terms of their aesthetic and cultural significance. Their practical value was ignored and not even admitted as a point of discussion. We are left with the impression that the National Socialist state tried to capitalize on its cultural achievements and play up its aesthetic projects and activities rather than lay claim to any social achievements or improvements. In this way, it avoided any possible criticism or skeptical inquiry. The government’s constant reference to ‘greatness’ and to the realization of that greatness in the ‘Thousand-Year Reich’ was in reality never more than an aesthetic claim, not an argument based on practical goals and considerations.”

national anthems,” say Furhammar and Isaksson, “become signature tunes of good or evil forces. In Nazi films, the heroes operate to the accompaniment of the Horst Wessel Lied, ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles’ and ‘Wir fahren gegen Engeland . . .’--tunes to stir up emotions called for by the fatherland and the idea of national revenge” (161). The film Kolberg contains splendid examples of both of these devices.

The power of film to influence the public was also not lost on the American government during the war years, though evidence suggests that the government “fingers reaching into production to mold the movies into prescribed shapes” (Doherty 36) were far less adroit than the films themselves may suggest. Indeed, given its relative laissez-faire attitude toward Hollywood in previous years, the U.S. government was poorly suited to be a controlling force in cinema during the war.

Hollywood itself had created its own Production Code in 1930, overseen by its own “censor,” the Hays Office, to provide it with “standards” and at least a nominal controlling authority that it could display to Catholic pressure groups. Trying to survive the Depression in the early 30s, though, the industry sought as much as possible to ignore the Code while it was good for business.² With the post World War I emancipation of women and general loosening of sexual mores, the American public had an appetite for titillation in film (Shindler, Crisis 97). Thinly veiled sex films about the private lives of flappers, with such titles as Passion Flame and Mating Call, were quite popular.

² See Richard Maltby’s discussion of the Code in Tino Balio’s The Grand Design.

“Claudette Colbert took a suggestive milk bath in Cleopatra; Hedy Lamar swam nude in a European import, Ecstasy; starlets in Murder at the Vanities extolled the virtues of ‘sweet marijuana’” (Koppes 13).

In 1934, in order to stave off threats of federal control and to keep from provoking the growing ire of Catholic groups, Hollywood agreed to enforce the Production Code more strictly by establishing the Production Code Administration (PCA). So while the 1920s were a time of exotic, remote glamour and mystery--the more glamorous the lives of the stars, the better--the 1930s became a time of relative down-to-earth accessibility in Hollywood, a result of a new commitment to wholesome, “American” values. Robert Sklar sees 1934 as a shift from the “golden age of turbulence” to the “golden age of order,” and cautions against giving the “moral watchdogs” the entire credit for smashing “a successful and prosperous filmmaking style like Carrie Nation chopping up a saloon.” Sklar owes the change to a new generation of movie moguls--young men like Irving Thalberg, David O. Selznick, and Darryl F. Zanuck--who “suddenly found greater opportunities for profit and prestige in supporting traditional American culture, in themselves becoming its guardians” (175).

The rewards to the studios for this change of approach were certainly proof that the Hollywood moguls had good business sense. By the end of the decade, “[s]tudio finances had been restored to comforting health. The year 1939 was the first since 1931 in which all the studios recorded a trading profit” (Shindler, Crisis 213). The new values reflected in film, though, were more than just a matter of good economics. The values of

the moguls themselves coincided quite genuinely with those of Middle America:

The audience was, of course, to a large degree white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant and native-born. It is ironic that the men who mediated between them and the hordes of recently arrived urban immigrants were almost exclusively working-class Jews born in Central Europe. Gabler writes of Louis B. Mayer that he was uniquely situated because of his deep yearnings to join the establishment to provide reassurance for all Americans against the anxieties and disruptions of the time. He did this by producing movies which trumpeted the values of family, loyalty, virtue, tradition and patriotism. (Shindler, Crisis 220)

Not surprisingly, the policies of the Nazis in Germany provoked an angry reaction on the part of the large Jewish community in Hollywood. Ticklish U.S. foreign policy in the mid thirties, however, as well as the film industry's own overseas interests, would allow production and release of only vaguely anti-fascist films (Shindler, Crisis 212-13).³ With the essential closing of the German market for American films by 1938, Warner Brothers--where Harry and Jack Warner had become vocal anti-Nazis--ventured production of the first topical film critical of Germany. Confessions of a Nazi Spy was released the following year to simultaneous praise and condemnation. An internal memo circulated by the Hays Office in response to its first reading of the script before production cautions that "Hitler and his government are unfairly represented in this story in violation of the Code. . . . To represent Hitler ONLY as a screaming madman and a bloodthirsty persecutor and nothing else is manifestly unfair . . ." (Shindler, Crisis 208).

In 1942 the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) was given the responsibility within

³ See Nick Roddick's A New Deal in Entertainment for a discussion of some early fascist films.

the newly created Office of War Information (OWI) to review Hollywood films and advise the film industry about “desirable” themes and issues surrounding the war. Unable (and unwilling) directly to censor films or to be seen as attempting to bring Hollywood under government control, the BMP’s advice came in subtle forms, “including private conversations, speeches to motion picture guilds and associations, vague pronouncements . . . , and informational memos and booklets” (Doherty 45). President Roosevelt had sought the aid of Hollywood in the war effort but made it clear that he wanted no appearance of government constraint: “I want no restrictions placed thereon which will impair the usefulness of the film other than those very necessary restrictions which the dictates of safety make imperative” (45).

Tensions sometimes made for interesting conflicts. The OWI, for instance, given the increasing openness and graphic quality of media reports and photos of the war, thought it important for Hollywood to be more “honest” in its handling of off-color language and the difficulty of the soldiers’ struggle. However, the film industry’s own Production Code Authority saw no reason to abandon its “churchly discretion” and alter the tight restrictions it had put into place before the war (Doherty 54). “In the most ridiculed example of the Code’s tender ears, Noel Coward’s In Which We Serve (1942), a British import, was held up from American release for seventeen words: ten ‘damns,’ two ‘hells,’ two ‘Gods,’ two ‘bastards,’ and one ‘lousy’” (Doherty 56).

Once the U.S. entered the war, the gates opened for a flood of war movies, and a new genre began to take shape--the combat film. Basinger calls Tay Garnett’s Bataan

“the seminal film of the formation of the genre” (26). Typical for its genre, and suiting the needs of propaganda, Bataan provides its audience with answers to such inevitable wartime questions as Why are we fighting? and Who is “the enemy”? Implicit in the first question, of course, is Who are we? While Kolberg answers this question by, among other techniques, setting the opening for its inner story during a traditional festival, Bataan answers by peopling the story’s fighting unit with men whose names represent the “melting pot” of America. “The group, the cluster of central characters, is a sampling of these many kinds of people and an attempt to derive from it an idea of America, and thus of the purpose of the war. The group is a metaphor for America” (Kane 66). The group can also be said to represent the idea that, though we are very different from each other, we are all “in this together” and therefore should work together toward the common goal--a little like the tacit agreement between the government and the film industry.

The relationship between Hollywood and Washington in the war years was indeed a complicated mixture of subtle coercion and willing compliance, suggestive of a “close mutual dependency” (Shindler, Crisis 220). War propaganda in the United States, then, can be said to have emanated less from the government than from a private industry that put itself at the service of the government for, one could argue, relatively altruistic as well as economic reasons.

Chapter Two:

"Who Are We?"

During the scene in Kolberg in which the mayor and town council discuss whether to capitulate to Napoleon's forces, a council member asks, "Why do we have to sacrifice ourselves, for what purpose and to what object." Nettelbeck, the mayor, replies, "Ah, you need reasons to stay a decent fellow!" Thus, Kolberg fulfills its role as wartime propaganda by attempting to define "who we are" and "why we fight." Here, the film makes an appeal to both the emotions and, to a lesser extent, the intellect of every "decent" citizen. "We" are decent people; we preserve that decency by fighting on. The chances of victory are slim, but the virtue of fighting on is reward enough.

Both Kolberg and Bataan prove that two propaganda films from quite opposite political systems can share at least partially similar goals. This chapter will take a look at how these films, through appeals to the emotions, achieve the common objective of defining a national identity--or, in other words, explaining "who we are." To this end, Furhammar and Isaksson's notion of the "quiet idyll" from their basic formula of the propaganda film must be modified to include more than what we are merely "shown" on screen at the beginning of a propaganda film. The quiet idyll--what a film describes as threatened by "a force from the outside"--must include whatever ideas as well as images gain our sympathy. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that, by their definition, Bataan is not a propaganda film! Bataan is set in the Philippines. We are "shown" the

jungle and the Filipinos, but, as we shall see in this chapter, the film does not make them the focal point of our sympathy.

In Kolberg and Bataan, then, the quiet idyll referred to by Furhammar and Isaksson is the audience's national identity, expressed in the representation of what it values most. Kolberg defines national identity primarily by presenting a series of contrasts that force the audience to choose a positive, National Socialist idea or image over a contrary, negative idea or image, and thereby also adopt the rhetorical stance represented by it. Bataan uses contrasts, too: "We" are compared to the Japanese or cynics who question the war. Kolberg, most of which is actually set in Kolberg, relies to a greater extent on visual and aural techniques to depict German values than does Bataan. The setting allows it to refer more to the concrete: architecture, music, dancing, festival regalia, traditional dress, a Christmas tree, etc. But while Bataan's definition of what it means to be American is limited by location, its reliance on plot and character proves effective in evoking the egalitarian ideal upon which America bases its claim to greatness.

In light of the fact that propaganda is, by its very nature, meant to have an effect on a population, it is interesting to note that the grand style of treatment of the subject matter of Kolberg, along with the film's inherently contradictory themes--a promise of victory alongside what can only be termed a call for collective suicide--suggests a need for escape from reality on the part of the filmmakers. Joseph Goebbels, who is said to have "deeply desired vindication 'before history'" (Herzstein 19), made Kolberg one of

his “pet projects” (Furhammar and Isaksson 46). But more than a mere piece of transparent propaganda, the movie is, like Gone with the Wind, a rich, sweeping historical epic. Upon receiving his commission from Goebbels to make Kolberg on the first of June 1943 (Leiser 122), Veit Harlan set to work with a nearly limitless budget. Harlan claims that 187,000 German soldiers and 4,000 sailors were pulled from active duty to make the film as the regime’s war losses on the Eastern front mounted. If this number is true, then “Veit Harlan had more troops at his disposal for his war games than did both sides put together during the actual battle for Kolberg.” “The total cost,” writes Erwin Leiser, “amounted to 8 ½ million Marks. For one scene Charlemagne’s Imperial Crown was used. . . . Several trainloads of salt were used to transform fields and rooftops into a snow-covered landscape” (128-29). David Stewart Hull, in conversation with Harlan, learned that Goebbels called daily during filming

to rush the completion of the film in the face of the Russian advance. The battle scenes had to be photographed before all the costumes had arrived, and the troops in the rear were forced to dye their military uniforms overnight and wear sashes improvised from toilet paper. There was a shortage of ammunition in the East, but factories were put on overtime to make the necessary blank bullets for this movie. Millions of feet of color negative film had to be especially prepared and developed at a staggering cost. (263)

By the time Kolberg was released in 1945, Germany’s situation in the war was indeed desperate. The film made a dual premiere in one of the last intact theatres in Berlin and in the fortress town of La Rochelle, where it had to be air-dropped. In a telegram to Goebbels, which was broadcast over the radio the day it was received (Welch,

Cinema 233), the commandant of the fortress manages an appropriately inspired tone:

Deeply moved by the courageous action of the Kolberg fortress and incomparable artistic presentation, we add to our gratitude for the despatch of the film on 30 January [1945] our renewed vow to emulate the heroic struggle at home and not to fall short of them in our perseverance and initiative. Long live Germany, long live our Führer!

Within three months, La Rochelle surrendered. By this time in the war, needless to say, Germany was not capable of sustaining a normal film industry. “Even if the towns of Germany had not been bombed, even if the theaters had been intact and the transportation system had functioned efficiently, shortages of raw film and personnel would have severely hampered Goebbels’ film work by 1944” (Herzstein 272). Copies of Kolberg were given to the top Nazi brass, and the film was shown to the military and populations of beleaguered cities like Danzig, Breslau, and Königsberg, but most Germans never had the chance to see it.

The subject of the film is the heroic resistance put up by the besieged fortress town of Kolberg to Napoleon’s advancing forces during the Franco-Prussian War of 1806-07. Kolberg, now Kolobrzeg on the Baltic coast of Poland, was then the only town in Pomerania to resist Napoleon’s attempt to subjugate the region. The film was conceived in 1941 as little more than a spectacular paean to the heroic stand by the citizens of Kolberg. As production began in 1943, however, and Germany’s fortunes in the war took a turn for the worst, the story was changed drastically. “Goebbels, who never trusted the army, decided to place the emphasis on propaganda aimed at promoting popular resistance should the army be on the defensive” (Hull 262).

In the film, the military commander of Kolberg, Colonel von Loucadou, is unwilling to take on the French. Ineptly led, the military has even let the town's cannons rust. It is up to Nettelbeck, the mayor, to rally the town--or, more exactly, to fan the will to resist that already smoulders within the people--and to convince the few skeptics that the honor of the town is worth dying for. This causes him to clash with Loucadou, who eventually throws Nettelbeck in prison and plans to hang him. From prison, Nettelbeck is able to deliver a message via his niece Maria to Queen Luise of Prussia. As a result, the young, zealous General Gneisenau is sent to replace Loucadou. The citizen army is trained by Lieutenant von Schill, who, at the beginning of the story, has just returned wounded from the Prussian defeat at Auerstedt. The dashing Lieutenant and Maria are strongly attracted to one another. Led militarily by Gneisenau, and spiritually by Nettelbeck, the people of Kolberg are able to hold out against the French. The siege ends, miraculously, when the French generals begin quarreling amongst themselves.

The actual battle for Kolberg ended in a somewhat less than glorious truce, the town remaining in Prussian hands until Napoleon eventually overwhelmed all of Prussia. The film uses a frame story from the War of Liberation (1813-1814), which led to the defeat of Napoleon, to create an indirect historical parallel between the siege of Kolberg and the state of Germany in the last months of the Third Reich. To this end, the film opens and closes in Breslau in 1813, the year Prussia once again declared war on France. Gneisenau is trying to convince the Prussian King, Friedrich Wilhelm III, that a "people's army," similar to the one he led in Kolberg, is what is needed now to defeat the usurper

Napoleon. The story-within-a-story structure of the film, the past event influenced by the pre-past event, is meant to inspire the audience to draw a similar conclusion about present events in the Third Reich. Harlan claimed that the film "is intended as a memorial to Gneisenau and Nettelbeck and to the people of Kolberg; but above all it is a memorial to the German people today" (Leiser 124). Goebbels wrote in his diary: "I expect extraordinary things of this Harlan film. It fits exactly the political and military landscape we shall probably have to reckon with by the time the film can be shown" (Leiser 122-23).

The true account of the siege of Kolberg, however, sheds somewhat different light on this historical "example." "The leading characters in Kolberg have historical names, and the film's prologue assures us that the story is based on 'historical fact.' The most important parts of the story, however, are wholly invented" (Leiser 125). The quarrel between the French generals which leads to the end of the siege is one such invention, presumably to hide the fact that Kolberg eventually fell to the French. Leiser also writes that "Gneisenau, the film's young hero, was in fact 47 years old when he commanded the troops at Kolberg. He never entertained any prospect of capitulation, nor was he the author of the proclamation 'To my people,' which was signed in 1813 by King Frederick William III" (126). Other conspicuous fabrications include the fact that General Loucadou, the film's much maligned "old-style career officer," only threatened to arrest Nettelbeck and was in command when the fighting started at Kolberg (Leiser 126). Kolberg, historically, also received help from the British. Welch finds it "a measure of

how far Nazi propaganda had become entrenched in a mythical world that the Propaganda Minister ordered Harlan to disregard historical fact, even when it revealed such heroism.” (Cinema 226).

However, from March 1813 to March 1814, the Prussian army did indeed accept more than 50,000 civilian volunteers from all social strata (Koch 197), giving the film’s central theme, the power of the people, the support of the historical record. While it would be inaccurate to suggest that the film makes a simple villain of the military, it is portrayed as weak-willed. Take, for example, this key exchange between Schill (Gustav Diessel--an actual German officer) and Loucadou (Paul Wegner) in Loucadou’s office. The citizens of the town are drilling outside in the square:

LOUCADOU: Sieh mal einer an! Was wollen die denn?

SCHILL: Das ganze Volk wehrfähig machen. Das wollen sie. Ein Volk von Soldaten wollen sie werden. Das können wir doch gebrauchen, Herr Oberst. An den Bürgern liegt die Rettung des Vaterlandes. Auf ihren Mut und auf ihre Haltung kommt es an. Wenn eine Festung belagert wird, dann gibt es keinen Unterschied zwischen Bürgern und Soldaten.

LOUCADOU: Kriegführen ist ein Handwerk, das gelernt sein will.

SCHILL: Gelernt, ja. Aber ein Handwerk, Herr Oberst? Nein. Ein Handwerk ist es nicht. Es ist eine Sache des Herzens, und die Kolberger haben Herz. Die lieben ihre Stadt und ihr Heimat und ihr Meer und ihre Ecke. Und darum werden sie ihre Heimat besser verteidigen als die Festungskommandanten. . . .

[LOUCADOU: But just look at them! What do they want?

SCHILL: That everybody should be capable of fighting. They want to become a people of soldiers; we can use that Colonel. The salvation of the

Fatherland lies with the people. It all depends on their mood and attitude. If a fortification is besieged, then there can be no difference any more between civilians and soldiers.

LOUCADOU: Ah, but waging war is a craft that has to be learnt.

SCHILL: Learnt, yes, but a craft Colonel, it's not that. It's something that comes from the heart and the citizens of Kolberg have got that. They love their corner of the earth, and for this reason they'll be even better defenders than the soldiers. . . .] (Welch's translation)

Citing Veit Harlan's own diaries, Welch claims that "Goebbels wanted to show that resistance to Napoleon came from the people and not from the military. He saw the civilian militia as the prefiguration of the *Volkssturm* and told the director that he wanted him to symbolize the continual conflict between the SA and the Waffen SS, with the former depicted as the true heroes" (Cinema 226). Mouthing the objections of Goebbels' opponents, Loucadou and his subordinates, then, "embody the mythical world of Goebbels' propaganda, the reactionaries of 1806 and the defeatists of 1944" (227).

The people are contrasted with the military in the film's opening segment, set in Breslau. A visually striking rendition of the "growing collective" motif depicts the people as a superior force: Martial music. Cut from a long shot of the town to a long shot of a small group of soldiers marching down a street towards the camera. Cut again to a long shot of another street in the town, this time with countless citizens (all male), marching towards the camera, their arms linked. Significantly, the marching citizens in their neat rows, filling the length and breadth of the street, make the more stunning image. The troops march by mere fives, and not very enthusiastically, but the people are

clearly a force to be reckoned with--powerful and determined.

Nowhere is the extent of the people's commitment to the fatherland so clearly revealed as in the trench-digging segment. Gneisenau has ordered Nettelbeck to oversee the flooding of the farmland on Kolberg's most vulnerable side. Realizing that many of the citizens will lose their homes and farms, he instructs Nettelbeck to be quick and ruthless (*rücksichtslos*) in fulfilling his duty. The people, however, are shown digging the trenches as if the idea to sacrifice everything had been their own. As the camera pans down the length of one trench, we see by their costumes that there are men and women from various levels of society, with a few soldiers mixed in, all digging with the same energy and enthusiasm. Even Maria is there. When the sluices are opened and the sea begins to flood the fields and homes, the people cheer and wave their hats as if welcoming a conquering hero. One couple even dances in the water. Thus, the people are shown to be of one mind, happy to destroy everything they have (including themselves) rather than suffer the ignominy of being possessed by the enemy.

"The people" are defined in the film in typical National Socialist, "blood and soil" terms by the Werner family, close relatives of Nettelbeck. Early on, the family farm is established as an example of a proper, wholesome environment for "real Germans" (*Echtdeutsche*). The trunk of a large tree is visible growing up through the floor of the living room, suggesting the family's ancient connection to the soil. Maria, the daughter, played by Veit Harlan's wife Kristina Söderbaum, works at her weaving, sings folk songs, and waits on the men. "Maria is portrayed as the archetypal Aryan woman; blond,

big-boned, stoical, and dressed in peasant costume, she is seen throughout the film as the upholder of traditional peasant values” (Welch, Cinema 228). At the same time, exemplary of the typical “savior-heroine” found in Nazi film (Herzstein 344), she listens with rapt attention to the men’s discussion of the threat to the town, demonstrating her concern for the Fatherland. She is extremely close to her brother Friedrich, which is made more than plain by their scenes together. When Friedrich returns home from the battle at Auerstedt, he and Maria embrace, kissing and caressing. The image of a proper German family unit is completed with the arrival in the scene of the father (the mother is deceased), who joins them in a three-way embrace. There is a second son, Klaus, but Father Werner explains to Nettelbeck that Maria and Friedrich are the ones that take after him (the father). Klaus “is a caricatured ‘man of the world,’ refusing to join the ranks of the fighting community, irritating the wounded hero Schill by playing the violin, and losing his nerve when he hears the cannon-fire” (Leiser 126).

The entire family is represented, though, in a scene which combines traditional images and music to evoke the strong sentiment associated with German Christmas, the most important holiday of the year. Set on New Year’s Eve, the segment opens with the sight and sound of the town’s bells ringing, then fades into a close-up of six hands clinking glasses in a toast. Cut to a medium shot of Maria, Friedrich, Klaus, their father, Nettelbeck and Schill standing around the dinner table at the Werners’ farm, spending New Year’s Eve the traditional German way (traditional, at least, for the 20th century audience): at home in the company of one’s closest circle of family and friends. In other

shots with which most Germans would identify strongly, Maria lights the candles on the Christmas tree, and Klaus is shown playing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano (providing the segment with appropriately German background music). Nettelbeck and Schill sit in a corner, toasting the New Year with misgiving about the future.

One of the film's basic contrasts is between Nettelbeck and Klaus, who are as visually distinct from each other as they are ideologically. Nettelbeck (Heinrich George), a large, blonde, healthy-looking man with a face at once wise and kind, is a character whose physical presence and calm, thoughtful manner command respect. "Although the historical Nettelbeck was a small, thin man, in the film he is a rugged, earthy father figure" (Leiser 122). He even tells Maria, after she has lost her father, that he will be her father. (He is not the only one--Friedrich also claims that he wants to be "everything" to her: brother, father, and lover.) As spokesman for the people, Nettelbeck defines their national identity. He associates himself passionately with the town, the actual soil and stones, advocating throughout the film death as the only moral alternative to losing mastery over the land of one's birth:

Sie sind nicht in Kolberg geboren, Gneisenau. Sie sind nach Kolberg kommandiert. Aber wir, wir sind hier großgeworden. Wir kennen hier jeden Stein, jede Ecke, jedes Haus. Ach, wir lassen auch nicht los. Und wenn wir uns mit unsern Nägeln in unsern Boden einkrallen an unserer Stadt. Wir lassen nicht los. Nee, da müssen sie uns die Hände einzeln abhacken oder uns erschlagen, einen nach dem andern, Gneisenau. . . . Ich hab's ja auch unserm König versprochen: Lieber unter den Trümmern begraben als kapitulieren.

[You were not born in Kolberg, Gneisenau. You were ordered to Kolberg. But we grew up here. We know every stone, every street corner, every

house. So, we won't let go now! And even if we have to hang on to the soil of our town with our fingernails, we won't let go. No, they will have to hack our hands off one by one, kill us one after the other. . . . Better be buried under the ruins than capitulate.]

The land, the town, is what they are. Without it they are lost.

Klaus (Kurt Meisel), on the other hand, disparages what he calls "the Kolberg perspective." Indeed, Herzstein finds much in common between "the violinist Klaus, a young man who will not fight Napoleon's army because 'one must be a citizen of the world'" and German propaganda that "often contained denunciation of 'cosmopolitan' Germans who despised their own nation and preferred foreign styles and ideas to German ones" (349). Dark-haired, pale, and effeminate, Klaus' appearance and behavior reflect the idea of the "degenerate," the antithesis of National Socialist manhood. Having studied music in Strasbourg, he is shown playing both the violin and the piano in the film--an occupation, Leiser informs us, "usually, though not always, considered unworthy of a real man in Nazi film" (31). When drunken French troops occupy the farmhouse, Klaus is discovered by his father (Otto Wernicke) drinking to Napoleon. This shame eventually leads his father to commit suicide after setting fire to the house and barn--in keeping with the "scorched earth" policy.

Befitting its epic style, Kolberg includes a subplot never found in combat films like Bataan; namely, a love story. The romantic scenes between Maria and Schill allow quite a bit of the film to focus on Maria, as well as lending a "human dimension" to the story (Welch, Cinema 226). The resultant concentration on her feelings--her love for

Schill but her renunciation of any claim to him when he explains that he belongs to the military--is aimed directly at the women in the audience. The film's implicit call to the population to give up everything for Hitler is, after all, directed at everyone. (By the time of the film's release, even children were recruited.) Maria stoically sacrifices everything in the film: her immediate family, her lover, and her home. But as Nettelbeck assures her (and the audience), such sacrifices make a person "great."

It can also be said that the love story allowed for a somewhat awkward declaration of the people's "moral identity." In a conversation at the New Year's Eve gathering, Maria's brother Friedrich confronts his friend Schill:

FRIEDRICH: Ich möchte dich etwas fragen, Schill. . . . Liebst du Maria?

SCHILL: Auf eine so direkte Frage war ich offen gestanden nicht gefaßt, aber. . .

FRIEDRICH: Antworte mir!

SCHILL: Ja, ich lebe sie.

FRIEDRICH: Aber was soll daraus werden? . . . Das mußt du doch überlegen, Schill. Sie ist doch meine Schwester. Ich habe einen Satz in einem Buch gelesen. Ich lese sonst nicht, aber den Satz habe ich mir gemerkt: "Tue keinem Mädchen etwas zuleide. Bedenke immer, daß deine Mutter auch einmal ein Mädchen gewesen ist." Das weißt du.

[FRIEDRICH: I want to ask you something, Schill. Do you love Maria?

SCHILL: Frankly, I was not prepared for such a direct question, but I must confess, I love her.

FRIEDRICH: But what can come of it? . . . You'll have to think about it, Schill. After all, she is my sister. I don't read much, but a phrase in a book once caught my eye: "Don't hurt any girl. After all, your mother was a

girl once, too.” You know that.]

While this is as unlikely a dialogue between world-weary soldiers as one could possibly imagine, such prudishness is in keeping with a certain National Socialist tendency in art. George L. Mosse has written about the moral mission of National Socialist painting and sculpture; his remarks, perhaps, have implications for Nazi film as well: “[Neoclassical and neoromantic art] symbolized a certain standard of beauty that might serve to cement the unity of the nation by projecting a moral standard to which everyone should aspire. Respectability was to inform personal and public morality, which true art must support” (25).

The year before production began on Kolberg, “MGM began discussing [Bataan] with OWI soon after the Bureau of Motion Pictures opened its office in Hollywood. A complete script was submitted in September 1942, and OWI was pleased with the results of close collaboration” (Koppes 258). The film was released in April 1943, about a year after the real fall of Bataan, to good reviews and good box-office receipts (Basinger 45). In stark contrast to Kolberg’s lavish expense, Bataan was shot entirely in a studio in black and white (common for war films of that day).

It is interesting to note, as does Andrew Sarris, that “World War II was the last war to be endorsed by the intellectual establishment as a valid artistic subject” (46). It was also probably the last time that the values of Middle America were defended and mythologized in Hollywood with such enthusiasm. These values worked their way into the form and style of combat films, serving the purposes of propaganda as well as creating

a new genre. "Invariably, the combat movies employed similar techniques emphasizing what appeared to be a casual, semi-documentary look that attempted to portray war not as a strange distortion of the normal world, but as something solvable by 'business as usual'" (Ray 118). Ray claims that the basic motifs one finds in some combination in all combat films were established by the action film Only Angels Have Wings (1939), which employed all of them. Briefly, the motifs are:

1. The isolated male group involved in a dangerous situation. . . .
 2. The group, composed of distinct types, that relies on both teamwork individual exploits. . . .
 3. Professionalism and stoicism in the face of danger and death. . . .
 4. Outsiders who are threats to the group but finally win admission to it.
- (121-24)

All of the motifs are expressed primarily through character. The latter three of these motifs have the function, among others, of defining for the audience who we are as Americans. No combat film does this more clearly, perhaps, than Bataan, an archetype of the genre that incorporates all of Ray's motifs.

Basinger calls Bataan "the Citizen Kane of combat films": "Bataan is not the work of art that Citizen Kane is, but what Kane did for form and narrative, Bataan does for the history of the combat genre. It puts the plot devices together, weds them to a real historical event, and makes an audience deal with them as a unified story presentation . . ." (62). The historical event is the American retreat onto the Bataan peninsula, considered at once the most crushing defeat and yet the most valiant defensive effort of the Pacific War. The Philippines had been viewed early on as difficult to defend

against a Japanese offensive, though military planners also nourished the slim hope that American forces might retreat to the Bataan peninsula and hold out until the fleet was able to fight its way through to the islands. By the eve of the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, even this was viewed as impossible. Japanese strength in the region, along with the decision to concentrate the bulk of America's resources on the war in Europe, basically sealed the fate of the defenders of Bataan, who fell in early April 1942. The fortress of Corregidor and the rest of the Philippines fell a month later. General MacArthur, who opposed the government's "Germany first" policy, had trained an army of Filipinos who nevertheless remained unprepared at the time of the Japanese invasion, but whose heroism, along with that of the Americans, is portrayed in the film.

In Bataan, thirteen men volunteer to stay behind and try to delay the Japanese so that MacArthur's forces can try to regroup. They are given the job of blowing up a key bridge and then keeping the Japanese at bay as long as they can. It is a mission that can only end in the death of all of them. After blowing up the bridge, the group sets up camp in the jungle to wait for the Japanese. They sleep, take turns going on watch, listen to the radio, and work on repairing an abandoned plane. The men's attempts to work and live together create tensions, but also friendships. Though they hold back the Japanese for several days, the men are, one by one, killed off either by the enemy or disease until the only man left is the Sergeant/hero. In the last scene, he takes up his final position in the grave he has dug for himself and, laughing wildly, shoots as many of the oncoming Japanese as he can. We assume he is killed, though we never witness his death.

Even given the outrage over Japan's aggression against the United States, Hollywood's use of an American defeat as subject matter might seem at first glance to risk evoking the wrong emotions in the audience. Bernard F. Dick writes, "The fall of Bataan was a problem for Hollywood: how could defeat, much less the largest single capitulation in America's history, be ennobled? The answer was to make the same distinction between defeat and destruction that Hemingway would in The Old Man and the Sea (1952): 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated'" (133). In the same vein, Koppes calls Bataan MGM's "version of a World War II Alamo" (256-57), a similarly strong emotional touchstone for the audience to rally its powerful indignation. Basinger describes the defeat's connotations:

Bataan opens with credits which appear against a map of the Philippine Islands. BATAAN! screams the title, jumping out of the frame and coming at the viewer in all its implied horror, defeat, and sacrifice. For the audiences of the day, the word practically dripped American blood and shame. Its impact was directly emotional, linked as it was to a current event that no one in the audience could be unaware of. (56)

For all the formal and stylistic differences between the films, Kolberg and Bataan do share some interesting plot points that drive the propaganda missions of both films. The situation of the men in Bataan is not unlike that of the citizens of Kolberg: The thirteen men are isolated, holding out against the Japanese, as the town of Kolberg holds out on its own against Napoleon. The odds against the defenders in both films are astronomical. And both groups define the conflict in terms of a threat to their nation's values and way of life.

The opening dedication in Bataan sets the stage for the story and makes the film's first appeal to emotion by reminding the audience of the recent events in Bataan, a description embroidered with sentiment:

When Japan struck, our desperate need was time--time to marshal our new armies. Ninety-six priceless days were bought for us--with their lives--by the defenders of Bataan, the Philippine army which formed the bulk of MacArthur's infantry fighting shoulder to shoulder with Americans. To those immortal dead, who heroically stayed the wave of barbaric conquest, this picture is reverently dedicated.

Here, the pronouns "we," "our," and "us" immediately pull the audience in to give it the same stake in what happens as the men in the film--a hold the story reinforces, for the characters reflect the demography of America in many particulars.

As Ray points out, combat films customarily people their male groups with "distinct types." But Bataan exploits this motif to make an all-out case for the great American melting pot, an idea that not only appeals to the hearts of most Americans but also has the practical advantage of taking the propaganda message to more members of the audience. The names of some of the men are meant to telegraph "diversity": Feingold (Jewish), Katigbak (Filipino), Malloy (Irish), Matowski (Polish), Ramirez (Hispanic), and Salazar (Filipino). Kane maintains that

the particular presence of ethnic groups . . . designates some of the major waves of immigration to this country and so invokes America's cherished heritage of freedom and tolerance. These people, it is implied, or their parents and grandparents, came to America seeking something they could not have in their own countries. The fact that such ethnic groups exist, not yet completely absorbed, and that many of the same countries . . . still suffer tyranny, is sufficient to portray America as the continuing beacon of liberty. Ethnic groups freely adopt the American culture and are willing to

fight and die for their new country. (66)

Private Epps, the demolitions expert, is black. Stereotypically, he walks around camp singing the "St. Louis Blues." Koppes calls the inclusion of Kenneth Spencer as the black private "an act of pure deception, for there were no integrated combat units then" (258). But his inclusion makes the film's message visual: Spencer's blackness is emphasized by his going shirtless much of the time--the only one of the men to do so. The contrast communicates strongly the "we Americans" are all different, yet are on the same team.

Similarly, Desi Arnaz as Ramirez is stereotypically "Hispanic." The only one of the group who wears a bandana, he claims to have built a jalopy from "second-hand junk," finds the maggot-infested mule meat that the men are forced to eat tolerable "if you hold your nose," and is sent into raptures when he manages to tune into an American station playing jazz on a camp radio. The latter scene is infused with Americana--the more strikingly so because of the relative absence of background music during the men's quiet time in camp. Ramirez uses current slang as he taps his fingers to the sounds of Tommy Dorsey, a popular American band leader of the time: "Oh boy, he's tall!" "Talk to me, talk to me!" "That Tommy Dorsey--he sends me!"

The portrait of diversity, however, does not tell the whole story of who we are. The other--and crucial--part of the message is the assertion that, though we are individualistic, we come together as one people when we must. The thirteen men in Bataan are not only ethnically diverse, but they come from "everywhere: West Point,

Middle West, California, New York, Pittsburgh, the South, and nowhere” (Basinger 53).

All different parts of the armed services are also represented, as are different ranks:

Captain Lassiter is a West Point cavalry man. Lieutenant Bentley comes from the Air Force. Sergeant Dane is an infantry career man, and Corporal Feingold comes from the 4th Chemical Corps. Purckett and Ramirez, both privates, come from the Navy and the Army Tank Corps, respectively.

The purpose here, as Kane reveals, is both to affirm a kind of spiritual unity that underlies America’s diversity and “to add urgency to the need to unite against a common danger” (67). Basinger emphasizes the importance of the “thrown together” quality of the group, and characterizes the message as paradoxical:

Our strength is our weakness and vice versa. We are a mongrel nation--ragtail, unprepared, disorganized, quarrelsome among ourselves, and with separate special interests, raised, as we are, to believe in the individual, not the group. At the same time, we bring different skills and abilities together for the common good, and from these separate needs and backgrounds we bring a feisty determination. (51)

It is interesting that Bataan also includes a Conscientious Objector among the thirteen--Private Gilbert Hardy, who enlisted as a medic. This was an unusual role in early combat films, though a “peace loving” character in the core group was not an uncommon type (Basinger 56).

One of the ways in which national identity finds expression in both Bataan and Kolberg is through the depiction of the military command structure. America’s egalitarian ideals extend to rank in Bataan, as men are seen taking orders from a rank

subordinate with more experience. The hero, Sergeant Bill Dane (Robert Taylor), is the only leader among the men with two years' experience in Bataan. Lassiter, though a captain and a West Point graduate, wisely tells Dane to speak out freely when he feels one of Lassiter's orders may be misguided. When Lassiter is killed, Lieutenant Bentley has no problem taking orders from Dane. Thus, military protocol is flexible when Americans, recognizing the need, find a more effective way to get a job done--especially when the democratic ideal is threatened. Koppes comments on the importance to OWI of this particular aspect of the film, and quotes the agency as noting, "Superior officers are willing to take suggestions from men under them. . . . Thus, the army reflects the democratic way of life--which is one way of demonstrating the difference between our ideology and the Fascist doctrine.'" (258).

On the other hand, Kolberg's interpretation of power relationships reinforces the importance of hierarchy and the superiority of the group over the individual. Those who are not already a part of the command structure do not become leaders. But since the film does allow for special cases, it never clearly solves the dilemma of exactly whom to follow and when. On one level, while the film makes clear that the greatest power resides in the people, it also underscores the need for discipline and obedience to avoid "chaos." This is made plain in a segment featuring a debate between Nettelbeck and the newly-arrived Gneisenau on orders and the value of individual discretion: Nettelbeck has just announced to Loucadou in front of Gneisenau that he has revoked Loucadou's order to tear up the paving stones in the street. "Rescind your order or my actions will look like

rebellion [subtitles],” Nettelbeck demands. After pointing out that Nettelbeck’s actions constitute unquestionable rebellion, Gneisenau introduces himself as the new commander of Kolberg and orders Nettelbeck to carry out Loucadou’s original order. There now ensues a battle of wills in which the “son” eventually wins out over the “father” (a fitting metaphor for the self-image of the youthful Nazi movement). Nettelbeck asserts that he is the leader of the people and claims the right to refuse any order he deems “nonsense”-- just as he had done with Loucadou. But Gneisenau asks, “Was meinen Sie was daraus wird, wenn jeder nur den Befehl ausführen würde, den er für recht und sinnvoll hält? . . . Dann wären wir auf dem besten Weg zur Anarchie.” [“What would happen if people only executed orders they thought right and proper? . . . We’d be on the road to anarchy.”] While inviting Nettelbeck to “work with” him, he nevertheless cites “discipline and law” as the source of his ultimate authority.

On another level, the film does support the insubordination of Nettelbeck in his relationship with Loucadou. In the act that triggers his arrest, Nettelbeck responds with what the film implies is understandable outrage at Loucadou’s plan to surrender by attacking him physically. Loucadou is defeatist and would turn the country over to foreign rule. He has the proper rank but lacks the indomitable spirit of a Frederick the Great. Even Napoleon, in a scene in the film in which he stands at Frederick’s tomb after his victories at Jena and Auerstedt, asks, “Serais je là, si tu [Frederick] vivrais encore?” [“Would I be standing here if you were still alive?”] Kolberg (as well as, quite literally, Nettelbeck) is “saved” by the arrival of the youthful Gneisenau, a man of rank who also

embodies the requisite idealism and zeal of the “new order.” Nettelbeck’s rebellion is therefore sanctioned when it is directed against one who lacks National Socialist ideals, “if at the same time it means paving the way for a new order based on the Führer principle” (Leiser 22).

By the same token, the film supports the near rebellion of Gneisenau against King Friedrich in the frame narrative. In their first scene together, early in the film, Gneisenau has come to the King’s residence to demand that he issue a proclamation calling the people to form a citizen army--an idea that “came to him” when he was commander during the siege of Kolberg. After being told that the King may be sleeping, Gneisenau, incredulous, breaks through the guards at the door of the King’s chamber, crying, “Geruhen zu schlafen? Jetzt am Mittag?” [“Sleeping? At noon?”] His clearly “non-defeatist” attitude contrasts sharply with the King, who appears tentatively from an antechamber with his face in shadow.

Gneisenau’s authority for making demands of the King, the film tells us, comes from the kind of man he is: a real National Socialist leader. When Gneisenau and the King stand side-by-side, the audience’s sympathy could not have an easier choice. Visual contrasts establish his superiority to the King: Gneisenau is young, confident, and much taller than the King. Especially in close-ups, his gaze is elevated and his expression passionate. Gneisenau speaks with energy and enthusiasm; the King seems depressed, sickly, and apprehensive. The King, positing his objections weakly in his distinctly aristocratic syntax, reinforces Gneisenau’s priestly aura by calling him an “impractical

dreamer” and the people “rebels.” Gneisenau’s answer is to identify himself with “the people,” who march in readiness for war just outside the palace: “Majestät, ich gehöre zu denen da unten.” [“I belong with those down there.”]

Finally, as “real Germans” in Kolberg never give up, Bataan depicts Americans as people who do not back out of their commitments. After Lassiter is killed, Dane wonders aloud whether the group will be able to “stand it.” Feingold (Thomas Mitchell) reassures him: “Those kids signed up for this just like you and me. They’ll get tired, sure. Things’ll get tough, sure. But I don’t think they’ll put their tails between their legs and run any more than you would.” As Dane points out, most of them are not “real soldiers.” But because they are Americans, they stay to finish a job once they begin it. The premise, of course, is that it is a job worth doing. We are assured throughout the film through the plot itself and through direct statements by the characters that it is. The endeavor is given value by the fact that, as the men die one by one, the remaining men keep fighting. Even the noncombatant makes a contribution by lobbing a couple of grenades at the Japanese after he is mortally wounded. When Bentley (George Murphy), the pilot, gets the plane working and offers to fly them out, the group reiterates its resolve by refusing to go. Bentley is shot shortly afterward, but he tells Dane that he is going anyway: “Got a lot to do. And not much time.” As he is dying of his wound, he flies the plane Kamikaze-style into the newly rebuilt bridge.

Chapter Three:

“Why Are We Fighting?”

In Chapter Two we examined the ways in which Kolberg and Bataan depict shared ideals and morality in order to awaken in the audience feelings of national pride. However, the evocation of these emotions serves the larger purpose of the propaganda: to influence the audience's resolve to fight the enemies of the regime. As we shall discuss in the present chapter, contrasts between characters with opposing views, among other methods of propaganda, are designed to direct the audience's resolve to fight. For instance, Nettelbeck and Klaus represent contrasting values. But these characters also function as opposites in the debate over fighting the enemies of the nation. The way in which Kolberg favors Nettelbeck's viewpoint reveals the propagandist's technique. In addition, “parallel conflicts” between Nettelbeck and Loucadou, and Schill and Loucadou reveal that fighting the war is, primarily, a concern of the people. In Bataan, as we have seen, the camaraderie of the men from different backgrounds portrays America's egalitarian ideal. Moreover, quiet time in camp between attacks or killings allows the men to discuss why we fight. Finally, the common man is promised honor in death, which is depicted in nearly mystical terms in the films. The question raised by these stories is whether a man should give his life in a cause when he cannot be sure that his death will make any difference--to which both films answer an implicit “yes.”

One of Kolberg's strategies in its argument for why people should fight is its

inclusion of skeptics who function as foils for the point of view of the protagonists by mouthing objections that are then invalidated by the superior wisdom of Nettelbeck. The schoolmaster on the town council, an intellectual, finds the idea of fighting Napoleon's vastly superior forces irrational. The wealthy ship owner selfishly worries about his possessions. Early in Kolberg, Klaus, trying to argue against his uncle's nationalism, identifies Nettelbeck as a man who (like himself) has seen the wider world and should therefore have more cosmopolitan views. In so doing, though, Klaus helps establish his uncle's intellectual authority while at the same time undermining his own: A man with "real" perspective would be a nationalist (or National Socialist). In another scene displaying the mayor's "credentials," Nettelbeck begins reading Napoleon's letter to the town council in French before he is stopped by a council member who reminds him that not everyone there knows the language. Thus, the film establishes Nettelbeck as a man of education and experience whose opinion should be trusted. His rebellion against authority--as comic as this authority, Loucadou (with his bad teeth and high, asiatic cheekbones), may be--should be emulated.⁴

⁴ Although it would be hard to argue that any of the characters in Kolberg are complicated, Heinrich George's performance as Nettelbeck is probably the most subtle characterization that could be expected from an actor who so obviously represents, if not Goebbels exactly, then the superiority of the ideology of the Party over the military (Petley 114). According to Harlan, Goebbels identified closely with Nettelbeck (Leiser 122). "Goebbels saw this civilian militia as a kind of SA. He wanted it emphasized that at least as far as Kolberg was concerned the real hero was Nettelbeck and not the great General Gneisenau" (122). While Gneisenau's role is by no means belittled in the film (on the contrary, he becomes leader of the people's army in Breslau), it is Nettelbeck who inspires the Kolberg uprising, exhorting his fellow citizens not to be "less than our fathers" now. When the French are about to receive reinforcements from Danzig, it is Nettelbeck who has to convince Gneisenau that it is worth fighting on.

Sergeant Dane, the hero of Bataan, is, like Nettelbeck, a “man of the people” whose leadership seems natural because of his wisdom and experience. Even Lassiter, the West Point officer, asks Dane to advise him. Basinger writes,

He is so capable that he ‘would have been an officer’ except that he ‘trusted a man’ who went AWOL from him during his time as a military policeman. . . . However, because of his having been tested and found wanting, this character has learned that the world is not an easy place. He has proved his ability to withstand the hardships that lie ahead, because he has withstood those from his past. Not only is he personally ready for trouble, but he can guide others through difficulties. (54)

The presence of Corporal Todd, the man who went AWOL, provides a fitting subplot to the film by forcing Dane to confront his past. It also allows the film to depict two contrasting attitudes toward the war--the “good,” represented by Dane, who is a role model and source of inspiration, and the “bad,” represented by Todd, whose cynicism brings spirits down.

Dane plays the leading role at the pivotal point in the film’s argument for why we fight. This occurs when all of the men are dead except for Dane, Todd, and Private Purckett, the youngest of the group. Purckett (Robert Walker), his hand injured, is dictating to Todd a letter addressed to his mother, when he begins crying over the thought that “maybe there won’t be any of us to get out alive.” Dane then begins speaking for Purcket, which gives the film a chance to make its best case for fighting: “It’s too bad some of the other men I came here with had to get killed. Maybe it don’t seem to do an awful lot of good. But we figure the men who died here may have done more than we’ll ever know to save this whole world. It’s like Corporal Katigbak said, ‘It don’t matter

where a man dies, as long as he dies for freedom.” Purckett’s calm, relieved face is a cue for the audience’s reaction: profound reassurance and acceptance.

Opposition to the war or the military generally in combat films is often the role of the “misfit” (Kane 87-88). In Bataan, Corporal Todd (Lloyd Nolan) serves the same function as Klaus in Kolberg: to be “the foil against which the issues of the film are played” (Basinger 54). Todd, like Klaus, is a worldly type, though in a different way. A cynic and a streetwise tough guy with a dubious past, he hates the military. He does his job but keeps to himself and refuses to be hopeful of the group’s rescue when he knows there is no chance of it. Though his view is later proven correct, the film sides with the more hopeful men, whose indomitable spirit shouts Todd down and proclaims their will to believe in the unbelievable. Basinger calls Todd’s character “an important stand-in for audience doubts, and for its unwillingness to face the hardships the war will bring. Such a character becomes an appropriate initiation figure into the change-of-attitude that will be required for the task at hand” (54). Indeed, Todd’s own attitude changes somewhat by the end of the film—he offers to bind Purckett’s wounded hand—proving the ability of the most cynical to “come around.” “Even the malcontents realize that what they are denying themselves is far more worthwhile than the positive, harmonious, strengthening attitude of the majority” (Kane 88).

Although there are no overt racist themes in Kolberg, the film’s demonization of internationalists certainly has its roots in Hitler’s conviction that the Jews were attempting world domination through “international Bolshevism.” The case for why we

fight in Bataan, however, relies heavily upon a racist contrast between the thirteen men and the Japanese. In contrast to American decency and individualism, the Japanese are depicted as brutal and “mindless,” “an impersonal, faceless enemy” (Basinger 60). Referred to variously as “monkeys,” “no-tail baboons,” and “yellow-skinned, slanty-eyed devils,” the Japanese are seen nonetheless as clever and skilled warriors. But as this skill is depicted as not quite human, the Americans lose nothing in the comparison. The “Japs” are said to be able to live and fight for a month on the amount of food that would not last an American soldier two days. They engage in brutal psychological torment by cutting up one of the men’s bodies and hanging it from a nearby tree. And they are sly and treacherous. When Purckett hesitates before killing one of them, he is tripped by the man and thrown to the ground.

Koppes explains how the geography of the war in the Pacific helped reinforce a racism that combat films like Bataan could exploit to create fear:

The European war, both factually and cinematically, took place in the midst of civilization, in cities and villages where the impress of human order could be seen in churches, plazas, streets, and homes. The enemy seemed knowable, the battles regularized. The Pacific war, by contrast, took place in the wilderness, much of it a particularly frightening wilderness: the jungle. There is a long tradition in the West of identifying the wilderness with the absence of civilization--indeed, as a place of evil, where the hard-won norms of civilization give way to savagery. . . . Japanese soldiers camouflaged themselves so ingeniously that they seemed to take on the attributes of the jungle itself. (253)

Indeed, certain types of Germans in World War II films may be depicted as brutal, but on the whole Germans were not faceless hordes. The results of an OWI survey in

August 1942 reveal that public sentiment distinguished between “Nazis” and “good Germans.” “As a group the Germans were not, therefore, cruel or sadistic. They were a people temporarily ruled by a brutal aggressive regime. These distinctions in attitude were not extended to the Japanese” (Koppes 282).

Kolberg makes its most explicit case for fighting the regime’s enemies through the character of General Gneisenau. Caspar’s performance is over the top--clearly designed to fan the hottest of nationalist sentiments. “The career of the actor Horst Caspar was that of a man whose manner reflected the tone and style of the ‘convinced National Socialist.’ Youthful, decisive, an inspired fanatic, these terms characterize Caspar in the German screen roles he played during the war . . .” (Herzstein 299). In Chapter Two, we focused on Gneisenau’s visual appeal in his first scene with the King. His youth, vitality and energy give him authority with the audience, an effect that is enhanced by close-ups during his most ecstatic speeches. As the camera closes in on Gneisenau’s face, effectively aiming his rhetoric and emotion at the audience, it momentarily eliminates any meaningful difference between the audience and the citizen army of Kolberg or Breslau.

But the scene also has intellectual appeal. When the King is reluctant to issue a call to war to the people, Gneisenau argues in historical terms: “Wenn es nach dem Volk gegangen wäre, so hätten wir Napoleon, als er mit seinen Generalen auf der Flucht durch Deutschland war, gefangen gesetzt. Gezögert haben bloß immer die Diplomaten, und die Militärs, die sich von diesem Herrn Metternich gängeln ließen--! Versäumen wir nicht

wieder den Augenblick, Majestät.” [“If it had been the people’s choice, we would have imprisoned Napoleon and his generals in their flight through Germany. Only the diplomats hesitated, and the soldiers were duped by Metternich. Let’s not miss the moment again.”] When the King suggests that the General is not being realistic, Gneisenau argues his practical experience: “Ich kenne die Wirklichkeit, Majestät. Ich sah ihr ja ins Gesicht damals, in Kolberg, als unsere Armeen auseinanderstoben und sie Napoleon durch ganz Deutschland vor sich her trieb. Als eine Festung nach der anderen fiel, da waren es die Bürger, die Preußen gerettet haben.” [“I know reality. I looked it in the face at Kolberg many years ago. As our armies were driven through Europe by Napoleon and one fortress after another fell, it was the citizens who saved Prussia then.”] Vague as these historical allusions are, they attempt to fulfill the audience’s need for rational reasons to fight. The stirring of the emotions, however, is the primary concern: “Das Volk steht auf. Der Sturm bricht los!” [“The people are rising. The storm is breaking out!”] Gneisenau assures the King, with lines taken from an 1813 poem by Theodor Körner, the poet of the War of Liberation (Koch 197). Moreover, words like “deutsche Freiheit” [“German freedom”] and “die Kraft, das Recht, und den Sieg” [“strength, justice, and victory”] give urgency and grandeur to his appeal.

Leiser writes that Kolberg’s “aim was to prove that it was the people and not the military who wanted to resist to the last and that ‘every Prussian, whether civilian or in uniform, has to be a soldier’” (122). Clearly, the film’s audience was meant to see itself as the citizens of Kolberg--or at least to empathize with them as forbearers--and thereby

“recapture” the supposed spirit of those times. The scene in which Sergeant Dane confesses to Jake Feingold that he doubts the men can “stand up to this stuff” has a parallel in Gneisenau’s contemplation of surrender near the end of the film. Both Dane and Gneisenau are reassured by arguments that, though their soldiers are common citizens, they will never give up, never be afraid to die for the cause. Gneisenau, in fact, despondent only moments before, exclaims brightly, “So wollte ich’s von Ihnen hören, Nettelbeck! Jetzt können wir zusammen sterben!” [“That’s what I wanted to hear from you, Nettelbeck! Now we can die together!”]

But the question of who exactly is being asked to die in reality is not answered so directly in Kolberg. In Bataan, as Koppes points out, the thirteen men were “soda jerks, salesmen, farmers, and teachers before the war” (258). The common man is glorified on the screen because he is the one who will have to make the ultimate sacrifice in the real-life war. But the common man (the average representative of “the people”) in Kolberg exists largely rhetorically. Nettelbeck is his leader, but as mayor and as a well-traveled man he is hardly average. While the Werners’ traditional ways are meant to reflect those of a typical German family, the Werners themselves--with a son who studied in Strasbourg and a mayor in the family--are somewhat privileged.

“The people,” then, are largely an abstraction. They are suggested in the growing collective in the opening segment of the film, in the trench-digging scene, in the scene in which they fight fires during the siege of the city, and in various shots of cheering crowds. And they are talked about a lot. But the question of who is to die in the real-life

war still remains answered only by inference: With the men fighting the enemy on the main fronts, the defenders of the towns would be women, children, and the elderly. Frankly stated, if the enemy is kept busy shooting at "the people," it cannot be elsewhere tormenting the beleaguered military. Nettelbeck nearly says as much to the shipbuilder in the town council scene: "Es gibt doch Gründe, warum man eine Festung nicht aufgeben soll. Zum Beispiel, die besten französischen Kanonen, von denen Sie vorher sprachen, Herr Rektor, hier festzuhalten vor Kolberg, damit sie nicht gegen unsere Truppen bei Danzig oder Tilsit oder sonstwo eingesetzt werden können." ["There are certainly reasons why one doesn't just hand over a fortress. If the best of the French cannons were pointed at Kolberg, they couldn't be used against our troops in Danzig or Tilsit or wherever else they may be."] Those who will find honor if they die for Hitler, then, are women, children, and old men.

The pivotal message in both of these films--that the common man can be a hero if he dies for the cause--is given further importance and allure by the films' glorification of death. Indeed, the artistic expression of the Nazi regime strongly lends itself to an interpretation of the regime's ideology as belonging to a "cult of death." Hinz writes,

Even before the war, artists were paying homage to this theme [of death] by retrospectives into history. Wilhelm Sauter's Shrine of Heroes looks both to the past and to the future in portraying the dead and wounded of the First World War and of the National Socialist "era of struggle." Lives sacrificed in the past were to justify a future sacrifice of lives in the process of realizing the "four-year plan" announced in 1936. (157-58)

Herzstein claims that films like Ich klage an (I Accuse—1941), Jud Süß, Die ewige Jude,

and Rite of Sacrifice share with Kolberg “a common commitment to death”: “The German screen offered incitement to murder in 1940. Now in 1943-45, it presented a vision of salvation in death. The nihilism of this orientation towards death embodied the spirit of National Socialism” (321). Leiser agrees that the “‘die for Germany’ theme finds recurring variations in Third Reich films. In Ich klage an a major says that one has not only a duty but even a right to die for one’s country. Death is the individual’s sacrifice for the community, which in its various forms embodies the fatherland” (24). Some critics liken this spirit to religious fervor. “Commitment to fatherland . . . had always been fundamental in the Nazi world view,” remarks Herzstein. “But as the Third Reich crumbled, these yielded to a ‘higher’ theme of personal redemption for the protagonists blessed with the grace of faith” (320).

Perhaps the most emotionally charged scene in Kolberg, the scene in which Maria delivers a message from Nettelbeck to Queen Luise of Prussia, derives its power from an obvious appeal to religious sentiment. Maria, so nervous she can barely state her message, is transfixed by the Queen, standing before her in her sparkling crown. A series of four cuts from Maria, her eyes welling with tears, to the Queen, her face highlighted, beginning with medium shots and ending with close-ups, imply that the simple peasant girl is face-to-face not only with the embodiment of Prussia, but, one could argue, Germania incarnate. The Queen, with her gaze slightly elevated and serene, and her head compassionately tilted, seems to know what Maria would say if she could bring herself to speak. “To the accompaniment of melting celestial music the Queen tells the farmer’s

daughter that she receives daily reports from Kolberg and that Maria can be proud of her home town. She then embraces Maria with the words, 'This is how I take Prussia and Kolberg to my heart. There are only a few jewels left in our crown. Kolberg is one of them'" (Leiser 125). Herzstein characterizes the scene as "the elevation of ideology to the level of transcendent, redemptive religion," reflecting an attempt at "the romantic salvation of Joseph Goebbels, now a man inwardly beyond cynicism as he expressed a faith symbolically intended to outlive the physical destruction of Germany" (320).

For a war film, and for all its ecstatic references to death and dying, very little death actually occurs in Kolberg. Maria's father dies in the fire he sets in the barn (a proportional response to his son's treachery), and her brother Klaus is hit by artillery fragments (a "punishment" for his decadence) as he tries to rescue his violin. Friedrich supposedly dies in the fighting, but we only see his clean and bloodless body being taken away on a cart. General Loucadou threatens to hang Nettelbeck, but Nettelbeck is saved at the last minute. Indeed, there are no real death scenes in Kolberg, which has the effect of sanitizing the question of sacrifice and concealing the film's true motives.

In contrast, no one could claim that Bataan hides many of the dirty realities of war. The film is, in fact, unusually brutal for its time, almost milking the theme of death for everything it might hold. In the opening segment we see a soldier with his leg blown off crawling to hide from the Japanese attack and then being crushed by a falling structure. Stray body parts can be seen in other shots. The deaths of the thirteen men come in every conceivable way: We are shown a close-up of Private Epps' screaming

face when he gets a machete in the neck. Basinger calls this “one of the most graphic and violent killings of the pre-sixties period of film history” (58). We see Private Salazar’s lifeless body, hung where the men were sure to find it, covered with knife cuts from torture. The timing of the deaths is often depressingly ironic: Captain Lassiter is shot early, right after the men celebrate blowing up the bridge the first time. Lieutenant Bentley is about to fly the plane out, taking the sick noncombatant to medical help, when he is mortally wounded. Just when the men are celebrating Malloy’s having brought down a Japanese plane with his machine gun, we are stunned when the scene cuts to his body, riddled with bloody bullet holes, about to fall over dead.

This straightforward violence could not have failed to evoke in the audience outrage at the Japanese. Indeed, rhetorically, death is regretted in Bataan. But the sum of the film’s images makes a more complicated statement. While Bataan does not worship death, the graphic brutality spaced at near regular intervals as the men die one by one contains a suggestion of ritual sacrifice. In addition, an aura of sacredness is created by the use of mist on the jungle floor in a few key scenes. At one point, Dane and Bentley go looking for Private Katigbak, who has been missing for some time. When they come upon the handle of a Samurai sword sticking straight up out of the mist, Dane realizes what has happened, though he (and we) cannot see Katigbak’s body. The sense of dread fascination is only deepened as the medic feels around in the mist for the body and nods in confirmation of what we suspect. The Japanese, whose faces we never see (with the exception of Purckett’s “Jap”), crawl through the mist in another scene like insects. “This

eerie white mist provides a sense of danger, coming as it does from images in horror films. It also provides a sense of the mist of myth and of history. The dead die and fall into the mist, tumbling away into legend. It surrounds their graves. . . . The misty look does much to enhance their historic importance" (Basinger 61).

The feeling of sacredness is conveyed, also, by the ritual with which Sergeant Dane faces his own fate, a segment that is downright morbid: Dane is shown digging his own grave next to the others as mist fills the hole and encircles the grave markers. He even prepares a grave marker with his name on it. Then, apparently sick with fever, he sets up a machine gun in the hole and awaits both his fate and the chance to take with him as many of the Japanese as he can. The scene ends with Dane shooting in every direction, laughing like a madman. As a close-up of the barrel of his gun, still shooting, fades to white, a voice-over pays tribute to the dead and confirms that fighting in this war is an ennobling experience: "So fought the heroes of Bataan. Their sacrifice made possible our own victories in the Coral and Bismarck Seas, Midway, New Guinea and Guadalcanal. Their spirit will lead us back to Bataan!"

It is somewhat curious, given America's reputation for optimism and Hollywood's reputation for happy endings, that the last segment is this dismal. Joseph Goebbels, reputedly the greatest propagandist of them all, rejected the inclusion of any violent shots in Kolberg because they could weaken the public's resolve. An earlier script for Bataan, in fact, calls for a different ending, in which Dane is rescued (Basinger 46). Basinger's description of the planned final shot of legions of American soldiers--the

honored dead--marching toward the camera brings to mind the image of the "growing collective" depicted in the opening sequence of Kolberg. But the history of the combat film demonstrates a tendency to turn to the sublime for inspiration. Basinger writes, "The films of 1943 which defined the genre were films that used colossal defeats for patriotic inspiration. The films of 1944 tend to repeat this pattern, or to inspire by a sense of we ain't licked yet. As American forces began winning the war, our films grew even darker. Even when we survive and take our objectives, the overall sense is one of death and sacrifice" (133). While Bataan's ending is bleak, it is nonetheless effective. The mythical aura surrounding death realizes its full power in the image of the last soldier of the unit making his last stand against the enemy from inside his own grave.

As Furhammar and Isaksson point out, all nations will tend to produce the "boastful historical film" in wartime (241). More than just "pleasant memories" or lessons in achieving victory, such films are "power rites" through which past glory is evoked and the people find "reassurance in the belief that fate will realise the wishes expressed in the rite" (241). Kolberg and Bataan assure their audiences that death can be faced with confidence of ultimate victory. The people of Kolberg and the soldiers of Bataan are all (with the exception of the misfits) portrayed as confident that their causes are worth their lives. But Gneisenau's claims in Kolberg that the "people are rising up" and "the storm is breaking out" must have rung hollow to those watching the film who still had a foothold in reality. By January 1945 it should have been clear to everyone that ultimate victory was impossible. But "[a]s the Red Army marched into Guben and

Babelsburg, work was still being done on the editing of the second negative” (Leiser 132). What makes the Nazi case so fascinating is, as Herzstein points out, the fact that “total war” in the last months of the regime came to mean “protecting and conserving the minimal forces necessary for the perpetuation of a major medium of propaganda” (272).

In Bataan, on-screen history overstates a case that is flimsy at best in the light of reality. The film claims that “the men who died here may [my emphasis] have done more than we’ll ever know to save this whole world,” an assertion that is at once hyperbolic and cautious. During quiet time in camp the men express their slim hopes of being rescued or else their stoic acceptance of their sacrificial role in the war. But far from embracing their fate philosophically, the real defenders of Bataan more closely resembled Corporal Todd, who remarks at one point, “You know, Sarge, you better bury the rest of us face down so we don’t keep lookin’ up for the planes that ain’t gonna come.”

Embittered by hunger, disease, lack of sleep, inferior equipment, and the growing realization that reinforcements were not going to arrive, the American infantrymen “told one another that the Vs they had chalked on their steel helmets stood, not for ‘Victory,’ but for ‘Victims’” (Manchester 237). The real defenders of Bataan thought of themselves as the “battling bastards of Bataan”--men with “no mama, no papa, and no Uncle Sam” (237). And though General Douglas MacArthur was deified in propaganda, the real heroes of Bataan called him “Dugout Doug,” implying that he was too afraid to leave the

comfort of his bunker on Corregidor ("the Rock") and face the Japanese onslaught (236).⁵ Undeserved as the epithet may have been (the history of MacArthur's actions in the Philippines is punctuated by countless instances of needless personal risk-taking). MacArthur did visit the men on Bataan only once. He may simply have been emotionally unable to face them again after promising reinforcements, but his absence left the doomed men feeling forgotten (Rovere 57).

Of course, the propagandist does not serve the truth; the truth serves the propagandist. In his attempt to address the public's need for reasons to support or fight in the war, he presents another side of the issue only if he can weigh his own side heavily enough against it. Kolberg and Bataan contain contrary voices, but the propagandist's art makes them weak. The "best among us" in each film are ready to fight while the "worst

⁵ "An anonymous ballad-maker wrote the 'USAFFE Dry of Freedom' to the tune of 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic.' It passed from hand to hand during the black weeks of February 1942.

Dugout Doug MacArthur lies ashaking on the Rock,
Safe from all the bombers and from any sudden shock
Dugout Doug is eating of the best food on Bataan
And his troops go starving on. . . .

We've fought the war the hard way since they said the fight was on
All the way from Lingayen to the hills of Old Bataan
And we'll continue fighting after Dugout Doug is gone
and still go starving on.

CHORUS

Dugout Doug, come out from hiding
Dugout Doug, come out from hiding
Send to Franklin the glad tiding
That his troops go starving on!" (Rovere 57-8)

among us” are not. In Kolberg, Klaus and the King are physically unattractive and appear cowardly. In Bataan, Corporal Todd is shifty-eyed and unfeeling, while the Japanese are not even quite human. Though contrasts stack the deck in favor of the propagandist’s viewpoint, the audience can easily receive the impression that it is making a free and wise choice between the alternatives. The propagandist then hopes that the members of the audience walk out of the theatre not only supporting the fight but feeling secure that their sacrifices will redeem their otherwise unremarkable lives. Imagery and rhetoric have promised them glory in death, which is itself made--if not exactly desirable--more attractive than before.

Conclusion

This thesis represents a small inquiry into the aesthetic affinities between film at the end of the Third Reich and American film of the same period. Far from a statement of moral equivalency between the systems that produced these films--much Nazi film is itself, as Karsten Witte has called it, "a despicable legacy"--this work has intended simply to show that National Socialist film has enough in common with Hollywood film to raise questions about the singularity or "otherness" of its art. This kind of comparison--a Nazi film with an American film--seemed especially interesting not only because films made in the Third Reich are seldom if ever examined next to American films in criticism, but because American films from World War II (unlike Nazi films) are generally as uncontroversial as the War itself is.

The effectiveness of these particular films as wartime propaganda relies partly on the audience's ability to identify closely with the values of the film's protagonists, and then see those values as threatened. To this end, both films attempt to evoke fear of the loss of what the people value most: in Kolberg, the destruction of the homeland is threatened by "Napoleon," and in Bataan, the eradication of the American ideals of freedom and independence is threatened by the Japanese. Emotions are evoked through images of German traditions and through music in Kolberg; in Bataan they are evoked through the depiction of America's egalitarian ideal. The audience for each film is both flattered and encouraged to think of itself as the kind of people who do not give up.

Simplistic visual and rhetorical contrasts are constructed to reinforce audience prejudices or coax its sympathy for the propagandist's side of the question: Todd and Klaus are cynical and untrustworthy, outlets for audience doubts. Their viewpoints are overwhelmed by the rhetoric of the "reasonable" side. The attractive central characters in the films, Gneisenau, Nettelbeck, and Dane, act as mouthpieces for the propagandists' position on the war. They appeal not only to the emotions but to the intellect--important for effective propaganda.

Finally, if simplicity is king in the art of propaganda, then paradox is queen. Both films attempt to stand certain central assumptions on their heads. Soldiers do not win wars, citizens do. Self-sacrifice in a lost cause is heroic rather than tragic. Likewise, both films turn failure into success: Kolberg, by altering history; Bataan, by claiming a moral victory.

This comparison has also meant to focus on the films, narrowly, as political acts, because it is precisely the perception of the "purely political" motive in one film and not another that would seem to warrant closer examination. To be sure, there are glaring differences between the films. For the objective truth that it left out, Bataan never strikes one as basically out of touch with reality. It was made relatively quickly and at far less cost than Kolberg and had a realistic shot at reinforcing support for the war. Kolberg, on the other hand, probably reveals more of substance about the psychological state of its makers than it does about the actual position of Germany in the war at that point. Their similarities, though, tell us not only about the power of film in shaping our view of

reality, but that the tools used in manipulating that view--the techniques of the propagandist--are largely the same, whether in the hands of a Nazi or an American.

The place of National Socialist film in the history of world cinema is certainly a wide-open topic for exploration. Aside from the many other possible formal comparisons that could be made between Nazi films and Hollywood films (propaganda or not), the question of comparative styles has yet to be investigated, as has the question of influence. How much does Nazi film propaganda have in common with film propaganda from other Axis countries? How much does it have in common with Soviet film? How strongly and in what ways was Nazi film influenced by Hollywood film? by film in other Western countries? Scholarship has uncovered much of interest over the years about the relation of Nazi film to the Nazi leadership and ideology. Hopefully, scholars will now be interested in moving beyond this narrow approach.

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