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History and Memory in *Gettysburg*

Abstract

Media productions have often turned to history as a source for a narrative. Wars have been refought, kingdoms have risen and fallen, and significant moments have been replicated for documentaries, films, television shows, radio productions, and other live mediums. These presentations give audiences access to moments in history that might have otherwise been forgotten. With this access, research suggests audiences will actually learn from the presentations available. This study focuses on the types of information available in a historical film.

The study is a textual analysis the 1993 film *Gettysburg*, one of the most well-known and best remembered films about the American Civil War. *Gettysburg* is a piece of historical fiction that contains many dramatic inventions, yet is also full of depictions of war that attempt to be realistic. Through character dialogue and actions, the film's three main themes emerge. The first main theme is the idea that Gettysburg was the American Civil War's decisive moment. The second main theme is that war is a test of manhood- a test some men pass and some men fail. The third main theme is that all of the battle's participants, both North and South, are heroes. These factors seem to encourage the audience to view the Civil War as an important struggle that helped shape the United States as it is today.

History and Memory in *Gettysburg*

by

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B.A., Le Moyne College, 2008

THESIS

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Introduction

The Battle of Gettysburg was one of the most important events of the American Civil War. Between July 1 and 3, 1863, more than 150,000 men fought on the hills and fields surrounding the prosperous Pennsylvania town. By the time the fighting was over, more than 4,000 Union and Confederate soldiers were dead. At least another 45,000 were wounded, captured, or had gone missing. But despite the losses, the North's Army of the Potomac was successful in its efforts to drive the Southern Army of Northern Virginia out of Pennsylvania. The battle proved to be a turning point of the war, a war that the United States would finally win two years later.

Like most summaries of historical events, these facts only tell a part of the story. Neither side expected to fight at Gettysburg, meeting instead because of the decisions made by lower-level commanders and fateful timing (Coddington, 1968). Once the battle began, it did not happen continuously. It stretched over three days in various pockets, which are now remembered by names like The Wheatfield, The Valley of Death, and Culp's Hill (Pfanz, 1987). During the fighting, generals on both sides missed opportunities that would have resulted in the destruction in part or all of the enemy army. And not all of the 50,000 casualties played a role in the outcome of the battle. Some were fed into the battle with an outcome already decided, while others were captured running away from a fight (Coddington, 1968; Pfanz, 1987).

The conflict was a very deep, complex event. The definitive treatment of the battle runs more than 500 pages, while works on more focused events and incidents pack bookshelves. A deep understanding of the battle takes years of reading and study by the most interested of its disciples. This inaccessibility hampers individuals who seek only a general overview of the incident. There is, of course, a great deal of interest in the battle. The Gettysburg National Battlefield hosts more than two million visitors a year.

But where do individuals who have never seen the battlefield and have never picked up a book about it get knowledge about the event? The battle is very briefly touched upon in history classes in schools and colleges. This is often more of a mention in passing and not much more. From what source can millions of people with a passing interest in the Battle of Gettysburg find informative and interesting accounts of the battle in just a little time? The media fills these needs. The battle has been the subject of television features and documentaries for years. However, the most well-known and best remembered treatment of the battle is a 1993 movie entitled, *Gettysburg*.

The film is based on the 1975 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Killer* Angels. It tells the story of several men, North and South, and the roles they play in the battle. The film opens with Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet deciding to march their army towards Gettysburg. Union soldiers, including Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, march towards Pennsylvania to meet them. The Confederate army meets resistance outside of Gettysburg in the form of soldiers commanded by Union General John Buford, igniting an unexpected battle. Buford manages to keep a much larger enemy force at bay for hours, thus preserving a valuable military position south of town. The next day, Lee's army attacks again, with Longstreet in command. Colonel Chamberlain manages to preserve a key position by ordering a daring charge against the enemy. This maneuver helps fight off the Confederate attack. On the battle's third and final day, Lee sees no other option for success but to attack the center of the Union line. Longstreet begrudgingly leads the attack, which becomes known to history as Pickett's Charge. The attack fails, and a depressed Longstreet and Lee are forced to accept defeat. The events are presented with a dramatic flourish, and their emphasis suggests a huge importance each of these smaller fights had during the course of the overall battle.

Not surprisingly, the parts of the battle highlighted in *Gettysburg* are often viewed as the most important, the most decisive moments. But the movie, while maintaining many truths about the battle, is a work of fiction. Actual events have been altered or exaggerated for dramatic effect, while other important pieces of information are eliminated, wiped off of the page to suit a storyline. This is not a malicious or ignorant attempt to rewrite history, but an attempt to tell a story. But with all of these alterations and changes, the question must be asked: What kind of influence does this have over its audience? How is the memory of a historical event influenced by a film?

The purpose of this study is to analyze the main themes of the film *Gettysburg* to understand how its producers interpreted the battle and what lessons about the conflict can be derived from viewing the production.

Literature

Memory

Memory is a complex neurological process. At its most basic, it is the storage and retention of information (Howe, 1983). This includes the retention of facts, properties, objects, and events (Bernecker, 2008). Biologists speculate that the process works through a series of nerve circuits in the brain. Memories are created through experience. These experiences are recalled through association after encountering a similar sensation. (Thalen, 1989).

Memory is a unique and personal phenomenon. It is a matter of interpretation and reflects the way in which an individual's experiences shape it (Thalen, 1989). Because memories are processed internally, a person's recollection of a specific event does not have to match or resemble those of a separate individual. Outside factors play a large role in influencing a person's recollections. The way in which a memory is stored can be influenced by race, gender, economic status, and other variables (Thiels-Stern et. al. 2011). Memories can also change over time. The interpretations of a past event shift as an individual's needs and desires change (Thalen, 1989). Memories tend to look longingly at the past as a better time and place (Kitch, 2007). This indicates individuals look longingly at the past because they believe individuals have been corrupted as time has progressed (Halbwachs, 1992). To look back at history and the achievements individuals made would suggest that people were great men, but are no longer.

While memory is the work of individuals, memories of larger events, especially events that individuals did not experience firsthand, have a tendency to be influenced by group thought. Collective memory is a complex phenomenon. It requires an individual analyze and understand an event to an extent that an opinion can be formed on it, yet also requires an individual to be influenced by the thoughts of others (DiMaggio, 1997). The concept of collective memory often

ties directly into memories of history. Memories are not formed without influences. An individual can be expected to create a memory in the context of his or her surroundings. This includes the time period, the dominant social thought, the fashions of the time, and numerous other factors. In short, a personal memory cannot be made without the influence of society (Halbwachs, 1992). Especially when an event occurred hundreds of years ago, it is impossible to possess any knowledge about a historical event without relying on the statements of others. History is learned from other people instead of experiencing an event directly (Blatz and Ross, 2009). Yet, every individual is required to recall the same event, although often in slightly different ways. This indicates that collective memory is a phenomenon which supports and guides the memories of the individual, and not the other way around (Halbwachs, 1992).

History and Memory

History is not written in a vacuum. Historians and others who work with history have their own experiences, their own lives outside of the craft. Biases are inescapable in history (Evans, 2002). A historian who grew up in the South, around family members who are still strongly in favor of the Confederacy, will probably have a difficult time giving a fair treatment to an explanation of why the North entered the war. With this in mind, it must also be noted that historians cannot use every possible fact available to them. The craft of history is about selecting and arranging specific facts (Carr, 1962). Sometimes, critical portions are left out, while sometimes information is not completely correct. This is sometimes done intentionally and other times it is not. But no historian has the space or the time to include every possible detail and argument in their work. Therefore, while accuracy is important, it is not the responsibility of a historian to act only as a stone tablet of facts. It is the responsibility of the historian to explain the events, not recite them faithfully (Carr, 1962).

Memory is meaning. History is an exercise of placing meaning on an event that occurred away from the present. Film is another medium for individuals to place meaning on historical events. A study of Southern newspapers shows that 150 years after the Civil War, there is still an effort to put meaning on the conflict (Hume & Roessner, 2009). Individuals tend to create memories that history is "unchanging, incorruptible, and harmonious" (Thalen, 1989). While examining historical fiction, especially in film, it must be noted that history is much less rigid than is usually assumed. History transcends its traditional role; that is, a series of facts and records of what happened during a particular event in the near or distant past (Carr, 1962). Instead, information that is presented without argument in traditional settings like schools can always be questioned. The information is not set in stone. Instead, facts and recollections must be examined and reexamined constantly in order to find new interpretations and analyses (Rubin, 2002). It is the job of the historian to make sense of what happened, how it happened, and why it happened (Carr, 1962; Evans 2002). Even if the same information is being looked at for the one hundredth time by the one hundredth scholar, it is still the responsibility of that historian to find a different meaning, a new direction, or develop some other interpretation of what actually happened at a certain point in history (Rubin, 2002).

Media and Influence

Dominant views of historical figures and events is created by content producers (journalists, filmmakers, etc.) and accepted by the mainstream. Often, this suggests the entrepreneurs and their audience share ideals about their views on history (Schwartz, 2000). However, the media is also capable of taking a solitary position on a historical topic. An analysis of a film dealing with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 suggests that individuals want an arena for debate on historical issues. The study shows that media sources found a single

definition for the piece. This position ostracized many individuals who may not have agreed with the interpretation (Jordan, 2008).

Van Dijck (2004) says media and memory share a similar purpose, to share a connection between society and the individual, or between the past and the present. Media and memory are both exclusive concepts, including only fragments of a full truth. Yet media producers are often interested in generating memory. There is a large interest in popular works about the past, including movies and television shows. Audiences seem to respond to productions that attempt to reanalyze historical events in a contemporary way (Zelizer, 1995). This interest suggests a sizeable amount of interest in historical topics. However, the messages being presented on a movie or television screen seem to create more memories than written word because research suggests pictures create a longer-lasting image (Schwartz, 2009).

Historical dramas, documentaries, and other productions dealing with subjects that took place in the past give access to events that would otherwise go unknown to millions of people (Toplin, 1996). History is used in many different forms in today's television and film outlets. History is not always a focal point, as it is in the movie *Gettysburg*. It can also serve as a backdrop, like a television show that happens to be set in the 1950s (Warner, 2009). This access opens up debates about history and gives access to ideas and arguments that were previously unknown by the audience (Toplin, 1996). Access to different time periods can be used for different purposes. In the earlier days of film and television productions, history was used as a static platform. Events were recreated to show the audience how something happened, or why it happened. But now, historical productions are much more interactive. Instead of using history as an explanation of how history was, it is now showing how the audience became who they are today (Burgoyne, 2010). Historical pieces have a long history of trying to balance the line

between historically accurate and promoting ideas of mass appeal (Smyth, 2003). In the 1931 picture *Cimarron*, producers attempted to be as factual as possible about the settlement of Oklahoma, but still worked in ideas of different racial and ethnic groups working in harmony for a greater cause.

By using history as a plot device, the audience can do so much more than experience what history looks and feels like. Research shows that audience members have the potential to learn from productions that include history in their plots, especially if the information is new or unfamiliar (Shapiro and Lang, 1991). The more media a person consumes, the more likely they are to absorb information that has been presented. It is unclear if there is actual pedagogical value to historical films, whether factual or fictional. These films may transcend entertainment and actually serve as a useful teaching device (McCrisken and Pepper, 2005). However, it has not been determined if this information is long-lasting, or what types of information are retained. This is especially true when a fictitious event can be taken as fact. In films, there is often a large deal of truth behind historical fiction. However, the heaviest consumers of media can be expected to start blurring the lines between what is real and what is invented for broadcast (Shapiro and Lang, 1991).

Audience and Retention

Social Cognitive Theory suggests individuals, limited to contact only with a few other individuals on daily basis, are forced to gain large portions of their world view from the media (Bandura, 2001). Instead of passively consuming media, Social Cognitive Theory suggests individuals are evaluating while they are consuming, retaining information as they consume. This theory has been tested numerous times on television and film audiences. Useful conclusions

have been reached to varying degrees, but it is clear that audiences are active in their consumption of media. Therefore, they do retain information as it is presented.

Baum (2002) suggests that individuals learn a great deal from soft-news shows that share a great deal of information while also providing entertainment. While watching late night comedy shows, like The Daily Show and The Tonight Show, uninformed participants were found to become more informed about news items that were presented frequently and joked about constantly (Baum, 2002). Baum (2003) also argues that an increase in knowledge about a particular issue, like a political situation, does not guarantee a long-term growth in political knowledge. This research indicates that individuals may seek out entertainment and gain knowledge almost unknowingly, but it does not guarantee an individual will continue to try and learn about the general subjects. It seems likely that individuals can also learn from other types of entertainment, like historical fiction, and carry on limited knowledge, in the same way.

The difficulty with memory is combating it on a major scale. Any number of ideas can be spliced into the collective memory as correct or proper, even though a large amount of evidence supports the contrary. It is nearly impossible to alter the course of a large memory once it has reached the public mindset (Schwartz and Schuman, 2005). It is likely that information regarding famous historical events, such as battles or other significant moments in history, have been learned in a specific way. Often, history is presented in a way that is favorable to the existing mindset of the one who is learning the information (Blatz and Ross, 2009). Therefore, once an idea is learned, it is nearly impossible to convince a body to unlearn it. This difficulty can be explained by the memory of individuals. Research suggests individuals pay attention to information selectively, remembering only what is deemed to be a priority (Schwartz, 2009). A

subject area like history can presumably not be given a great deal of thought by the general public.

Shapiro and Fox (2002) found that over time, audience members tend to believe information they view as typical to be factual more frequently than information that is atypical. In other words, audience members viewing a battle scene in a movie are more likely to think of it as factual over time if the participants are using swords or rifles as opposed to laser guns and dragons. Shapiro and Chock (2003) found that audience members tend to identify events as "typical" or "ordinary" because of their appearance in dramatic television programs. This is true especially with concepts that viewers would have no exposure to or experience with in their ordinary lives. That is, audience members tend to take dramatic presentations seriously. However, Shapiro and Chock (2003) also found that audience members tended to take less seriously information that was clearly intended to be funny or entertaining. Feldman (2011) found that information is less likely to be retained when being presented in a personality-driven format, such as an opinion-based news program. The study suggests information is more likely to be remembered by an audience if it is the focal point of a presentation. Baum (2002) suggests that only the most dramatic or compelled information is likely to be retained.

Nabi and Clark (2008) found that individuals are likely to take information more seriously from a presentation that has never been seen before. In their study, Nabi and Clark found girls who had not seen specific episodes of *Sex in the City* were more likely to be impacted by the messages about casual sex being presented in the episode. A similar study (Ferris et al, 2007) suggests frequent media users with preformed opinions are more likely to find assurance in information being presented than consumers who have less formed opinions.

The Lost Cause

When the Civil War came to an end in the spring of 1865, the South was in shambles. Hundreds of thousands of men had died over the previous four years, while millions more were crippled physically or emotionally. Almost as soon as the firing ceased, former Confederates began defending why the war was fought as a way of justifying their actions and making a positive idea out of an utterly failed experiment (Gallagher, 2000). From this need for self-fulfillment, the myth of the Lost Cause emerged. Historian Allan T. Nolan (2000) considers the Lost Cause to be a legend which "…tells us the war was… heroic and [a] romantic melodrama, an honorable sectional dual, a time of martial glory on both sides, and triumphant nationalism." Nolan states that the Lost Cause is more fiction than reality, a made up saga that blurs and alters what really happened in the conflict between the North and the South.

The way in which the war was remembered fell into the hands of post-war organizations like the Southern Historical Society, United Confederate Veterans, and other groups composed of war participants (Foster, 1987). These groups began publishing studies and essays about the war in self-published periodicals (Osterweis, 1973). The printed form became a forum for discussion and debate. As time passed, physical memories merged with embellishments and personal desires to protect reputations to create a new, more cumbersome history. This forum generated the Lost Cause that is known today (Osterweis, 1973).

The Lost Cause has long stated that the South did not actually lose the war. Instead, the Southern cause was overwhelmed by the more populated and better armed North (Nolan, 2000), or because the South had been so worn down by four years of hard fighting in a war they could not win (Foster, 1987). However, the legend also persists that if the South had won the Battle of Gettysburg, it would have won the war and secured independence (Nolan, 2000). This belief was spawned by many of the men who fought in the battle with the South, who reexamined its events

constantly in postwar writings (Gallagher, 2000). In these writings, Southern officers began pointing fingers at who could be blamed for the defeat of the Confederate army in Pennsylvania. As the battle became more and more a distant memory, former Confederates began indicating that individual mistakes were what prevented the Army of Northern Virginia from crushing the Northern army, marching 100 miles through Maryland, and capturing Washington, D.C., and thus ending the war (Foster, 1987).

The Lost Cause also props generates the myth of the greatness of Robert E. Lee. Confederate General Jubal Early, who fought at Gettysburg but only appears in the film *Gettysburg* in a deleted scene, went to great lengths to promote the contributions of his former commander after the war (Gallagher, 2000). Others also took part in this cause, and soon Lee's reputation as a talented soldier and humble man was expanded to a God-like creature who was nearly a perfect general.

Masculinity

Wartime combat is viewed as a manly act, one of the few remaining activities that is exclusive only to men (Donald and MacDonald, 2011). This makes warfare a very masculine, macho act to perform. In film, masculinity equates to being a good soldier. According to Donald and MacDonald (2011), a masculine soldier is involved closely in battle and always willing to fight, follows orders to the best of his abilities, and is not afraid to take charge of a situation. Clarke (2006) argues that a soldier is portrayed as manly on film if his emotions are always even. Good soldiers do not get upset about homesickness or death, nor do they get excited about victory (Clarke, 2006; Donald and MacDonald, 2011).

Heroism

Heroism is everywhere in the present media climate, with individuals being praised and admired for singular deeds on a daily basis (Strate, 1994). The inclusion of the internet and other face-paced modes of communication make the consumption of heroes even more fast-paced. In the current climate, the type of hero can change to fit the needs of the consumer (Fishwick, 1979). Heroes can be used to comfort individuals or to provide them with motivation to live their lives in a better way (Kitch, 2007).

Heroism is defined as a voluntary action that is made in an effort to aid or benefit others, even if that action could lead to serious injury or death (Beacker and Eagly, 2004; Ranklin and Eagly, 2008). Zimbardo (2007) goes further with his definition of heroism, pinpointing what defines a military hero. He considers it an "action that exceeds the call of duty by individuals involved in repeated high-risk situations." But in film, a hero is often portrayed as a commoner, a person of earthy origins who overcomes a difficult situation. Fishwick (1979) considers this type of hero to be an "everyday hero", a phenomenon that didn't appear until the 20th century. He believes this type of hero reflects the wants and desires of the public, who crave this kind of uplifting story. A study (Gibson et al., 2007) suggests audiences crave stories about volunteers who are put into a trying situation as opposed to professionals who are doing their jobs in a positive and collected manner. This suggests audiences want simple people presented in the media- individuals they can create a connection with and maintain.

Methods

The project began with several screenings of the movie *Gettysburg*. The film was released theatrically in late 1993, with limited box office success. It premiered on television during the summer of 1994. The length of the film (more than four hours) required the cable network airing the film to release it as a mini-series. During this presentation, extra scenes were added, increasing the length of the film. For this project, the DVD release of the film was used. This release is the same as the theatrical version. It includes none of the extra scenes featured in other releases. *Gettysburg* has a total run time of about four hours fifteen minutes.

For note-taking purposes, a script was obtained from the internet and was thoroughly checked for validity. The script is a transcription made by another viewer of the film. It includes only dialogue and no stage directions or other film-making details. This transcript was used as a guide during note-taking. To assure its validity and value, the accuracy of the transcript was checked constantly while viewing the film. This unofficial collection of dialogue is not intended to influence the ways in which the film was viewed. Instead, it was used specifically for unofficial note-taking purposes.

The study then proceeded to a textual analysis. Research shows that audience members are capable of withdrawing meaning from any production in any medium. It can be assumed a viewer of the film *Gettysburg* will take away information about the actual battle. But while research indicates the utility of programming for educational purposes, there is little research on the connection between the messages being presented in a program and learning. What types of messages are available in *Gettysburg*? What are the most recurrent themes, the most obvious points to the story that individuals are likely to recall later on? Therefore, a textual analysis was performed to withdraw these meanings (McKee, 2003). The analysis process sought to identify

the memorable themes and techniques that dominant the movie. The dominant themes of the film are not readily available upon one viewing. Therefore, it was necessary to view the film numerous times. Four complete viewings of *Gettysburg* were required to fully draw out all deep meanings. These themes and techniques were recorded on the script. This recording process was a simple way for the researcher to keep tracking of where specific moments fall during the film.

The types of notes that were taken during the film are reflective in nature. Researcher comments reflected questions about what is occurring in the narrative, as well as observations. These notations were made on dialogue as well as the way the film is visually composed. This approach was designed to include all possible themes, both grand and subtle in nature. As previously mentioned, it was necessary to watch the film multiple times to fully understand many of these themes. After the data collection process was completed, it was organized. Common themes were grouped together into three or four larger groups. These groups were related in theme. Smaller or less useful observations were eliminated. The way in which thematic elements derived from the film will be grouped together was determined after data collection was completed.

The researcher is in a difficult position in this role. I am an ardent student of the American Civil War. I possess biases and opinions about the war and about the Battle of Gettysburg that have developed over the years. I am more likely to favor one side of the conflict over the other. While I realize the film is a work of fiction, I still seem to prefer the Union side in comparison to the Confederates. This bias is based upon my identity and familiarity with the Northern cause. I am a native of New York State, which raised and outfitted more than two hundred units for the United States during the four years of fighting. Therefore, my interests have always laid with the North. This bias is very active while I was watching the film. I found

myself approaching the scenes about Northern characters with more compassion and less cynicism than I did with Southerners.

I am also highly interested in studying the Battle of Gettysburg. I have been researching the battle for almost ten years, and even spent a semester in Gettysburg to focus on Civil War Studies. My knowledge and appreciation for the battle goes much deeper than the average viewer of the film. It is rather difficult to watch the film, having to remind myself that this is a fictional account. The actual accounts of what occurred during the battle often do not match what happens on film. However, this project has taught me one critical lesson- history is nothing if not a varied and incomplete memory. Therefore, while the scenes in the film *Gettysburg* may not reflect an accurate history of the battle, the existing histories of the battle may contain inaccuracies of their own.

Gettysburg and its Presentation

The memory of history is influenced in a variety of ways. No historical event will ever fully be recounted or understood. The men and women who lived during specific periods of time only saw pieces of what was happening around them. The historians who piece together accounts to create narratives were not present at all, and have no first-hand experience with the events that took place. Therefore, it is easy for history be blurred and altered as time goes by. The Civil War has experienced such changes in narrative as the decades have passed, with phenomena such as the Plantation Myth and the Lost Cause becoming a part of the story. The Battle of Gettysburg has not avoided these alterations. The film that bears the battle's name has many components that may or may not actually be true.

The very first shot of the film reinforces a Confederate myth. The film opens with an identification screen of the financier of *Gettysburg*, Turner Pictures. Above the Turner Pictures name is a giant plantation house. The house features multiple wings, numerous windows, and several columns. This type of house is a symbol of the Old South, where cotton was king and slave labor made a few, powerful men rich. Few of these homes actually existed before the war began (Chadwick, 2001). But the image of such a building gives the impression of a civilized, iconic group of people. The plantation house suggests Southerners were civilized and cavalier, living at the highest degree of happiness and efficiency. By showing the plantation house in its opening frames, *Gettysburg* is suggesting this attitude of the cavalier and civilized South before any characters are introduced or any dialogue is spoken.

Characters in *Gettysburg* often discuss how the battle will be the Civil War's decisive moment. The opening scene of the film is a narration offering an explanation of how two opposing armies managed to position themselves on the cusp of battle in Southern Pennsylvania.

The narration explains how the Confederate commanding general, Robert E. Lee, "…knows that a letter has been prepared by the Southern government, a letter which offers peace. It is to be placed on the desk of Abraham Lincoln, President of the U.S. the day after Lee has destroyed the Army of the Potomac…" The film establishes that Gettysburg is a critical juncture before any characters are introduced, before fighting is anywhere close to beginning. The idea of Gettysburg being the decisive moment in the war continues early in the movie. Colonel Chamberlain tells his troops before any suggestion of an impending battle is made to the characters, "I think if we lose this fight, we'll lose the war." This fact, as it is presented in the movie, is established very early for the audience to understand the importance of the battle.

The battle's significance as the decisive moment of the Civil War is continually developed as the film progresses. After General Lee draws up an ambitious plan of attack for the second day of the battle, a lower ranking general says to General Longstreet, "If he's right, General Lee, then the war is over by sundown." General Lee, while talking to himself after the first day's fighting, says, "In the morning is the great battle. Tomorrow or the next day will determine the war." General Longstreet tells his subordinates before the final attack is launched, "I do believe this attack will decide the fate of our country." These statements convey to the audience the idea that this clash will decide the entire war. This is a dramatic hook, a theme built into the film to give it more intensity and more desperation.

This angle ignores the realities of the war. It also accommodates the Lost Cause myth that the war was decided at Gettysburg. At the time of the battle, the Confederates had several major armies in the field, spreading from Mississippi to Virginia. The Battle of Gettysburg was a significant incident in the course of the war, but it was hardly the deciding moment. The war lasted for nearly two years after the July, 1863 battle. The continuation of the fighting until 1865

is mentioned very briefly in an epilogue before the closing credits. The viewer, without any other knowledge about the battle, is led to believe this was the war's decisive moment.

From the beginning, participants on both sides indicate a Confederate victory could mean an end to the war. This reflects the beliefs of many Southern soldiers, years after the fighting had died down. The mistakes made during the battle by Confederate commanders were analyzed in detail in the decades following the war. As time passed, the loss at Gettysburg was pointed to as the critical juncture. The film's narrative seems to be relying on this interpretation of the battle as its background. The battle's importance is brutally clear to the participants, both North and South. While it is important to the storyline for the battle to be significant, it also conveys to the audience that no instance in the war was as important as the events described in the film.

As the troops file into what is considered to be the decisive battle, the film makes it apparent which side is expected to win. The Northern Army of the Potomac is cast as a heavy underdog in the film. Characters, from both the North and the South, suggest that the commanding generals in the North are incompetent and unorganized. When Sergeant Kilrain wakes up Colonel Chamberlain in the beginning of the film, he reads his superior a note written by General Meade, the new commander of the army. "Our very own general of our very own corps has been promoted to command of the whole army. The latest, if you keep track of them, as they go by." The statement indicates Union soldiers have no faith in their commanders. Instead of putting their trust in the high command, they denigrate it and disrespect it. This view is echoed by a mutinous soldier. He tells Colonel Chamberlain, "We aren't gonna win this war. We can't win with these lame-brained bastards from West Point. These damn gentlemen! These officers!" The view of many in the Union army, it seems, is that they are being poorly lead and uncared for. Confederate officers seem to agree that the Union army is poorly led. When General

Pickett makes his first appearance, General Longstreet tells an English guest, “He graduated last in his class [from West Point]. Dead last. Quite a feat, considering his classmates.” Pickett adds, “The Yankees got all the smart ones. Look where it’s got them.”

The Union is portrayed at a disadvantage because of leadership, but it is also presented as an underdog numerically. When General Buford decides to deploy his troops outside of Gettysburg, he is doing so in the face of significant opposition. Buford tells one of his subordinates, “We have 2,500 men. They’ll be coming in force. They could have 20,000 men coming in the morning.” When Buford’s men are attacked, they are stretched hard by the sheer number of men they are fighting. Buford is forced to shuffle troops around, looking to fill gaps and keep his force intact as long as possible.

Colonel Chamberlain and his men are also facing a desperate situation in their defense of Little Round Top. Chamberlain has already been told by his commander, “Colonel, sir, you’re the end of the line… You can’t withdraw under any condition… You must defend this place until the last.” The 300 men of the unit face constant pressure from wave after wave of enemy troops. Before the attack reaches Colonel Chamberlain, Confederates are shown brushing aside other Union soldiers. The film gives the impression that the entire weight of the attack is heading for the 20th Maine. When the attack hits, it is a constant battle. Northern men are continually cut down and the unit’s ranks thin. Just before the attack hits, one of Chamberlain’s men expresses the belief that, “… The whole damn Reb army is coming this way.” Yet, despite the odds against them, Colonel Chamberlain and his men manage to hold their ground.

The presentation of the Union army as the underdog is an effort to create sympathy. Confederates are able to explain their reasons for fighting in the war. Throughout the film, Rebel officers and soldiers list protecting their homes, protecting their rights, and fighting for freedom

as their motivations for fighting the war. Northern motivations aren't so clear. This forces the film's narrative to find ways to present the Union in a positive light. This is done by establishing the weaknesses and inabilities of the Army of the Potomac throughout the film. By presenting all of the army's shortcomings, the viewer is shown how the North wasn't a faceless, tyrannical invader. Instead, the army is poorly organized and questionably led as it heads towards an important battle. The viewer is allowed to sympathize with the Northern army, to help make both sides of the conflict likeable.

The idea of the Union as the underdog is significant because it ties in to the belief that the Confederacy could have won the war. The Southern army is expecting victory in battle. In the film's opening scene, General Lee is anxious about his chances until he discovers a change in Union command. He tells General Longstreet, "Meade would be cautious, I think. Take him some time to get organized. Perhaps we should move more swiftly. There may be an opportunity here." General Lee is willing to take an immediate risk and push forward. His men have always been victorious. He is certain that this success will continue.

Within the Confederate ranks, the opposite is true. There is complete faith in the prospect of victory. Characters frequently mention previous Confederate successes in the war. In an exchange between Generals Longstreet and Lee after the first day of fighting, the generals agree upon their army's ability to succeed continuously. General Lee says, "But we have prevailed. The men have prevailed." Longstreet replies, "Yes. They have always done that." It is not until the end of the film that General Lee suggests his belief that the Confederate army as an undefeatable force was misguided. He tells troops surrounding him after the failure of Pickett's Charge, "It's my fault. It's my fault. I thought we were invincible." Only after three days of

fighting and an ever-rising body count do the Confederates finally admit to being capable of losing.

The film celebrates one specific telling of the Battle of Gettysburg- the Confederates on the cusp of victory, only to be beaten back by the slimmest of margins. This approach is a compelling presentation of the story; the noble Southerners fighting a desperate cause to protect the ideals they hold dear. Obviously, this is a dramatic effort to generate interest. The purpose of the film is not to educate intentionally, and therefore has no responsibility to offer contrasting viewpoints or offer different voices.

By telling the most well-known interpretation of the battle, *Gettysburg* is helping to perpetuate a single interpretation of the incident. This version is steeped in mythology, having been altered through time in the interest of reputation, pride, misinformation, and numerous other factors. This myth is at the foreground of the narrative. It is being used as a means of creating drama, keeping the audience in suspense even though most probably know how the fighting will turn out. But the fact that the film is told from the position that the South had every opportunity to succeed is significant. By repeating this point over and over, it becomes more present in the audience's mind. Since this is a piece of entertainment and not meant to be an educational piece, there are no contrasting pieces of evidence, no alternate points of view that refute the way in which the storyline is being told. This presentation of a singular, solid plot eliminates the need for other truths. Instead, it creates one evident truth that is intended to be clear and obvious to the audience.

Gettysburg and Masculinity

Throughout the film, the audience is constantly exposed to the theme that war is a test of manhood. Some pass this test and become great men. Others fail this test and become weak and humbled. As a template for how a great man should be judged, the audience is often shown Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Lee is in command of the entire Confederate army, an experienced man who has lead his army to a series of impressive victories over their Northern foes. Throughout the film, Lee is presented as pious, kindhearted, father-like, and caring, but also decisive, intelligent, and confident.

General Lee's greatness is expressed by other characters in the film frequently. First, he is only referred to in the movie as "General" or "General Lee." He is never addressed by his first or last name or any nickname. This is not the case for any other character in the film. This presentation elevates him to an untouchable position. He has no peers, no one he confides in. There are no equals to General Lee on the battlefield. The thousands of men he commands often confirm his greatness. In a moving scene towards the end of the film, dozens of Confederate soldiers mob General Lee. They chant his name, reach out to touch him, shake his hand. In another scene, a lower ranking Confederate general describes how the men stop talking and marvel at General Lee as he rides by. Even after General Lee blunders and sends an attack forward that is doomed to fail, his men will not let him accept the blame for the failure. Instead, the men that serve under him volunteer to try again, almost as a way of apologizing for letting the general down.

Lee is often shown praying. The scene which begins the battle's first day starts with Lee in prayer. He is asking God for assistance in battle, hoping for help on a fight he knows is coming. Often, the film depicts Lee as leaving the course of the battle up to the will of God. For

example, General Lee rides towards Gettysburg after a battle unexpectedly breaks out near the town. He is concerned that the fighting has started too early and his men will have little opportunity for success. However, upon finding out that his troops are certain of winning a smashing victory he utters to himself, “God’s Will.” No other character is depicted as being so pious. It is no coincidence that no other character in the film is as successful or beloved as General Lee.

General Lee is shown as a decisive, talented army commander. It is his decision to send the Confederate army towards Gettysburg in the film’s beginning. It is General Lee who recognizes opportunities within the battle that may lead to victory, and it is he who keeps coming up with new ideas on how the battle should be executed. The General always seem to have a solution to a problem. He always knows how to properly deal with the men who serve under him. Lee is depicted as always knowing what to say to smooth over a situation, or to put a blundering commander in his place.

The story of Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is an example of how the film suggests war is a crucible of man. At the beginning of the film, Chamberlain is ill, rousted from his sleep by a foot soldier. The soldier, Sergeant Buster Kilrain, acts as a father figure in the first scene. He affectionately refers to Colonel Chamberlain as “lad”, “darling”, and “me bucko.” Instead of following normal military protocol, Kilrain reads to the Colonel an order sent from a general with instructions on how to deal with a group of prisoners. Chamberlain seems perplexed, scared, confused.

Once Chamberlain emerges from his tent, he is greeted by his brother, Tom. Chamberlain holds a much higher grade of military rank (Colonel versus Lieutenant), but Tom still refers to his superior officer by family nickname- Lawrence. Tom does not view his brother as a

competent military leader, but a family member who happens to be in command of a military outfit. Even Chamberlain's requests to his brother to stop with the familiarity are ignored. "Darn it Tom. Don't call me Lawrence… It would look like favoritism."

Chamberlain's lack of military ability is further shown when an officer from another unit arrives on official business. "You're Chamberlain?" he asks with genuine surprise upon finding out the sickly, poorly dressed man standing in front of him is the man he is seeking. It takes the officer a few moments to wipe the surprise off of his face upon finding out the truth and continuing on with his message.

Colonel Chamberlain's lack of military ability, his youth and boyishness, are further show as the unit marches towards Gettysburg and the battle that awaits them there. Chamberlain is constantly chided by Kilrain to ride his horse instead of walking alongside his men. "…would the Colonel please do us a favor and get back on the damned horse? … It's not easy… when the officers act like they ain't got any sense, sir." Kilrain is much older, a father-like figure to Chamberlain, and is allowed to talk in this way to a man who is much higher in rank. Chamberlain is still naïve, still in need of guidance, even as the men of Chamberlain's unit walk towards an impending battle.

Chamberlain's immaturity and boyishness is once again show when he is addressed by is immediate superior, Colonel Vincent. They speak of their affections for the colleges they attended years before- Chamberlain's Bowdoin and Vincent's Harvard. The two men appear to be about the same age and are close in rank. However, Vincent is presented as a confident and composed commander. Chamberlain, on the other hand, is presented as nervous and scared.

However, Colonel Chamberlain slowly begins to morph as battle draws near. He stumbles through his orders as he prepares his men for a critical battle, a fight that, according to

the narrative, could mean the end of the United States. Yet, when the battle heats up, Colonel Chamberlain reacts quickly, appropriately. First, Chamberlain moves his men around to block an enemy maneuver. Then, after most of the ammunition has been spent, the Colonel decides to take a big gamble at attack the enemy. Over the course of the fighting, Chamberlain's boyishness and ignorance slips away. In the heat of battle, Chamberlain becomes decisive, confident, and strong.

After the fight, it is certain that Colonel Chamberlain is now a great man. As his soldiers begin to reorganize and collect prisoners, his brother, Tom, walks up with a captured Confederate officer. He says, "I want you to meet this fellow from Alabama. Captain Hawkins, this is my brother *Colonel* Chamberlain." Tom emphasizes his brother's rank with pride. This boast serves as a signal to the audience that Chamberlain has earned, if not forced, the respect of all of those around him. Tom is now proud to be related to the man who just two days before he could not stop calling by a family pet name.

Sergeant Kilrain shares similar pride after serving with Colonel Chamberlain. Kilrain has been grievously wounded. Just before he is carried off to the hospital, he tells Colonel Chamberlain, "The army was blessed. I just want to tell you… that I never served with a better man." This character is an experienced army man, serving in the infantry for many years before the war broke out. Yet, through all of his experiences, Chamberlain has risen above them all in ability. Two days before, Kilrain was acting as a father figure to an immature commander. But after a battle where Chamberlain was forced to make critical decisions, the weathered army man looks up to the now accomplished military commander.

Following Chamberlain's decisive moment, there are more glimpses of him as a great man. As the larger battle draws on, Chamberlain is more decisive with his troops. He gives Tom a lengthy order following concerns about another possible attack by the enemy. He also becomes

more demanding, seeking supplies and munitions from other officers without concern for feelings or reputation. All of Chamberlain's sheepishness and concern about his military abilities has been replaced by an officer who knows what he wants and how to handle any situation that may arise. He ends the film full of confidence and decisive.

Union General John Buford also experiences growth into a great man, though his trial is different from that of Colonel Chamberlain. Buford is an experienced military man. He is grungy and worn in appearance, looking as if he has no regard for his appearance or for how others think of him. General Buford and his men are riding in the front of the Union army and are the first to arrive in Gettysburg. In fact, the movie suggests Buford is the reason the battle ended up being fought where it was. The general is a loose cannon. He seems to have little interest in rank or the pomp and circumstance that come with it. He tells a fellow general at the end of the first day of fighting, "There's an old Indian saying. Follow the cigar smoke and find the fat man." This quote suggests Buford is an independent, a rogue who has never been tamed by responsibility or expectations. Before the battle begins, he expresses his belief that the inevitable fight will be an utter disaster for the Union. Buford is also a pessimist. He tells a subordinate, "Devin, I've lived a soldier's life, and I've never seen anything as brutally clear as this. It's as if I can actually see the blue troops in one long, bloody moment, going up the long slope to the stony top, as if it was already done, it was already a memory."

Despite his certainty of defeat, Buford decides to make a stand. He does not back away from a dangerous situation. He resolves to stand and fight, pitting his 2,500 men against a force of up to 20,000 converging against him in two directions. He vows to stand and fight north and west of Gettysburg in order to allow Union soldiers to take possession of the valuable hills south of it. He tells his men, "We'll hold here in the morning, long enough… for the infantry to arrive.

If we hang on to the high ground, we have a chance to win this fight that's coming." The general takes the initiative and positions his men in a way that will give the Union a chance the next day. Buford is not given any orders to hold his ground or to make a stand- instead, he takes the initiative, using his own experience and grit to hold off the enemy.

The Confederates win the first day of the battle's fighting. However, because of General Buford's skill and ingenuity, they are unable to capture the valuable hills south of Gettysburg that will make the difference later in the battle. The defeat is a setback for the Union, not a debacle. Buford realizes his contribution after meeting with higher-ranking officers that night. A peer, General Hancock, tells Buford, "We know what you did this morning. That was one hell of a piece of soldiering." Buford initiated his command's stance against the Confederates. The fight could have resulted in the destruction of his men and his reputation. However, Buford finds success and is commended for it.

Buford is shown to have reservations about the battle and the chances his men have against a superior force. However, he ignores his personal fears and biases for the greater good of the cause he believes in. Instead of shrinking away from an opportunity, Buford embraces it. He takes a sizeable risk and is eventually commended for his efforts. Buford is a modest, understated man. His performance that day is not celebrated or discussed in any detail by his peers. Yet, Buford is aware of his contribution and his passage from a good officer to a great man. At the end of the first day of fighting, the general leans up against a wagon wheel and says to the memory of a fallen comrade, "Well General… I held the high ground." Buford is nearly in tears, and the relief in his voice is evident. General Buford took a chance and became a great man because of it.

While Colonel Chamberlain and General Buford become great men through battle, General James Longstreet loses his greatness as the battle progresses. Longstreet is a Confederate office who is presented in the beginning of the film as General Lee's closest confident. Lee discusses strategy with Longstreet and considers suggestions made by his subordinate. Longstreet is the only character who seems to have General Lee's respect and attention. Their relationship is a close comfortable one, as is shown when General Lee asks Longstreet to stay out of harm's way in battle. "May I say it plainly, sir. I cannot afford to lose you."

But Longstreet is not able to maintain this level of trust for long. He is against attacking the Union army, something General Lee wants to do. Instead, Longstreet wants the army to move to another position that will offer a better chance of victory. After his desire is refuted, Longstreet agrees to go along with an attack. However, he orders his more forward unenthusiastically and without much conviction. Once he finally orders the attack forward, he tells one of his subordinates, "I argued it yesterday. I argued it all morning. I've been arguing against any attack at all. I can't call this one off. You know it." Longstreet admits he has been dragging his heels, something other officers in the film are not shown to do.

Most significantly, Longstreet argues against making the attack that is now known as Pickett's Charge. After two days of fighting, General Lee decides the only way to defeat the Union army is to attack it in a risky way that will obviously cost hundreds, if not thousands of lives. Longstreet is put in charge of the attack against his well. First, he suggests a fellow general should be in charge of the assault. Then, after this request is denied, he tells General Lee, "I must tell you now. I believe this attack will fail. No 15,000 men ever made can take that ridge."

Longstreet is not embracing his opportunity of greatness. Instead, he is shown to be cautious, argumentative, and afraid. These are qualities that are not apparent in great men.

Despite lengthy preparations, the assault that Longstreet orders forward fails. Pickett's Charge is shown to be a bloody, chaotic event. Men are killed and maimed by the dozen. All Longstreet can do is watch from the rear. He makes no effort to lead his men forward, encourage them, or make any other masculine decisions. Instead, he watches mournfully from a fence rail, alone. He is only pressed into action once his attack fails and there are no other options. The film ends with Longstreet being presented as mournful, dispirited, indecisive, and alone.

Another Confederate general, J.E.B. Stuart, also fails the test of greatness that he is presented with at the battle of Gettysburg. General Stuart appears in only one of the film's scenes. He is present for a few fleeting moments, but his contribution to the battle and his presence in the film is considerable. Stuart is in charge of the Confederate cavalry, horse-riding soldiers who are primarily employed to know where the Union army is and where it is moving to. Stuart's reputation and abilities are noted by General Lee, "You are one of the finest cavalry officers I have ever known, and your service to this army has been invaluable." but it is obvious from the film that the general's work is critical to the success of the Confederate army.

The presentation of Stuart's failure to be a great man is shown gradually throughout the battle. Early in the film, a scout hired by General Longstreet to track the movements of the Union army informs his employer that the Northerners are heading their way. When questioned why General Stuart hasn't reported anything like this, the scout replies, "He's riding up north somewhere, getting his name in the papers. He hasn't caused anything but a little fuss." This is the first indication that Stuart is not doing his job. Instead, he is more concerned with his own reputation and the publicity that comes with it.

The general's absence forces the Confederate army to stumble into battle without any knowledge of what they are approaching. A frustrated General Lee tells a subordinate, "I can't imagine what has happened to General Stuart. I've heard nothing. I have no idea of what lies in front of me. It may be the entire federal army." Northern officers are equally perplexed about Stuart's location. When Buford asks one of his officers if he has seen any enemy cavalry, the officer replies, "Not a lick, sir. That's strange. Infantry moving alone in enemy country, blind. Very strange, sir." The film makes it abundantly clear that General Stuart is not following orders, not doing what he was expected to do.

When General Stuart finally returns to the Confederate army, General Longstreet utters to General Lee, "The prodigal son." This references a parable in the New Testament, where a younger son wastes all of his inheritance foolishly, forcing him to return home to seek the shelter of his family. This statement suggests the immaturity of General Stuart. He is given an important task to accomplish by General Lee- to keep the Confederate army aware of the position of the enemy. Instead, as suggested by the Confederate scout, Harrison, Stuart has been joyriding. Instead of doing his job, the film suggests Stuart was using soldiers to enhance his own reputation.

General Stuart's manhood is completely erased when he finally meets with General Lee. Lee is angry with Stuart, but the younger general is unable to keep his ego in check. When Lee tells his subordinate that other officers believe him to have failed in his duty, Stuart replies, "Sir, if you will please tell me who these gentlemen are… I ask that I be allowed to defend my [honor]." Stuart's first concern is not with his own performance or with failing the army he serves in a serious way. Instead, he is angry that his reputation has been marred. General Lee quickly scolds Stuart, then puts him in his place. Lee tells Stuart that he has made a grave error

by not keeping the Confederates informed about the location of the Union army. “That mission was not fulfilled. You left here with no word of your movement or movement of the enemy for days.” Stuart then tries to resign in another effort to protect his reputation, but is again scolded. Stuart is eventually forgiven. However, his actions were unlike those of a great man; one who has been proven in battle.

The film uses the test of greatness as a way to explain why the North won the Battle of Gettysburg. The Union officers featured in the film have little confidence in their chances for victory. Chamberlain is boyish and naïve; Buford is cynical and pessimistic. Yet, the Northern officers do their duty despite these weaknesses. They follow orders, plus take initiatives that ultimately push the flow of battle in their favor. By comparison, the Southern officers featured in the film are less focused on victory. Longstreet drags his feet in order to avoid an attack plan he does not agree with while Stuart is more concerned with his own reputation. The pair do not follow orders directly and to not take initiatives that will aid the army as a whole. This lack of dedication to their cause inevitably leads to the Confederacy’s loss.

Gettysburg and Heroism

The film depicts the participants, both North and South, in a positive light. The film point the amazing similarities between the two warring sides. A British officer who is observing the war from the Confederate side tells General Longstreet, "You call yourselves Americans, but you're really transplanted Englishmen… The same God. Same language. Same culture and history. Same songs, stories, legends, myths. But different dreams. It's so very sad." To an outside observer, there really are few differences between the two sides. The men fighting for the North and South resemble each other in many ways. These similarities are emphasized in an effort to prevent the demonization of any character in the movie.

Neutral observers are not the only characters to realize the two fighting sides share similarities. After the first day of fighting, an anonymous Confederate soldier, talking to a Union officer says, "Many a good boy lost a young and promising life. Some wore blue, some wore grey." This statement suggests the participants in this war recognize the goodness and abilities in each other. The Confederate soldier does not hate his enemy. Instead, he is sad that Union soldiers had to die in the fighting, just as he is sad that Confederate soldiers perished. Enlisted men are not the only soldiers who feel sadness over fighting fellow Americans. General Longstreet tells General Lee, "I sometimes feel troubled. Those fellows, those boys in blue, they never quite seem the enemy." General Lee agrees with him. The lack of contempt for the enemy soldier indicates to the audience how significant the rift is between the warring sides. Men are fighting other men who bear a striking resemblance to them over a few political issues.

In *Gettysburg*, the rift between the North and South is so great it pits brother against brother. This phenomenon is metaphorically presented in the film through the relationship between Northern General Winfield Scott Hancock and Southern General Lewis Armistead.

Hancock and Armistead served together in the United States Army before the war began. The characters each explain to their peers how they were posted together in California. The two men become close, almost "like brothers" as Hancock suggests late in the film. Even as the battle rages, Armistead expresses to his peers how anxious to see his old friend again. After the battle's first day, Armistead asks for permission to see Hancock when the time is right, even though the two are on opposing sides. "I wish I could see him again… I sure would like to talk to old Hancock one more time," Armistead says with a hint of sadness.

The rigors of war cannot break the bond. Before the battle, Armistead tells General Longstreet that before Armistead and Hancock parted ways to fight on different sides of the war, Armistead told Hancock, "May God strike me dead if I ever raise a sword against you." The film's climax, Pickett's Charge, forces Armistead to lead his men in an attack against soldiers commanded by General Hancock. The Confederate leads his men from the front into the Union line and is struck down by a Union bullet. Armistead, asks to see General Hancock in his dying moments. However, General Hancock has also been hit. Upon hearing this, Armistead wails, "Not both of us. Not all of us. Please God!" This dialogue reflects the very splintering of the United States. Friends have become enemies over principles that seem trivial and needless, once the dead and the dying begin to pile up. Both Armistead and Hancock are willing to fight for their respective causes, but the individual bonds of fraternity cling deeper than alliance with a government.

This show of brotherhood helps the film celebrate the participants, instead of demonizing one side or the other. By linking a Confederate officer and a Union officer fraternally, we are shown how the war impacts all Americans. The audience is being asked to relate to both sides of the film, both North and South. Hancock suggests as much while talking to Colonel

Chamberlain. He says, “There isn’t an office on either side who hasn’t known someone wearing the other uniform.” The film is suggesting that the differences between the two sides are pronounced, but not important enough to cause hatred and resent against each other. There is little mention from participants on either side of the conflict about disliking their enemy. Instead, there is a sense of wonderment about the opponent- a sense of curiosity on why the other side is willing to shed so much blood and suffer so much hardship. The bond of brotherhood unites the two sides into a family quarrel, something that will later be resolved and forgotten.

The film suggests the soldiers of the Civil War were taking part because they had to, not because they wanted to be there. This is not to say these soldiers are there by force. Instead, their service is contingent on a greater calling. Colonel Chamberlain suggests this during a monologue at the beginning of the film. “Some came mainly because we were bored at home, thought this looked like it might be fun. Some came because we were ashamed not to. Many of us came because it was the right thing to do.” This statement suggests the men aren’t fighting a war of conquest or a war of aggression. Instead, they’re fighting to protect their honor, their reputations, and their country. Suggesting that fighting was the “right thing to do” means troops are fighting for the right reasons and are not an ugly enemy.

This view is echoed by members of the Confederate army. General Kemper, who serves under General Longstreet, tells an observer from the British army, “My home is Virginia.” General Longstreet later tells General Lee, “I couldn’t fight against Georgia and South Carolina. I couldn’t fight against my own family.” These men are fighting because they feel it is their duty to protect their homes and their legacies. As troops line up to make the final attack, General Armistead tells his men, “Virginians! For your land! For your homes! For your sweethearts! For your wives! For Virginia!” Each Confederate character speaks of defending their homes and

defending their honor. Confederate soldiers are fighting because they believe it is the only way to guarantee the safety of their hometowns.

The film presents both sides of the conflict having an intense interest in winning the war. But in spite of the fighting, the two sides do not seem to understand the reasoning of the opposing side. A conversation between an unnamed Confederate prisoner and Colonel Chamberlain's brother, Tom, best summarizes this viewpoint. The Confederate asks Tom, "Why are you fighting this war?" Tom replies, "To free the slaves of course. And to protect the Union." The Confederate replies that he is fighting for their rights. Neither side seems to be interested in granting the other as correct. But neither the Confederate nor Union soldier wants to tell his opposite he is wrong. Neither appears to be blood thirsty or anxious to purge a people from the Earth. Instead, each is standing up for what he believes to be right, and is granted that opportunity by his opponent.

All characters in the film have noble reason to take part in the fighting. Colonel Chamberlain is fighting because he believes it is the right thing to do. Tom Chamberlain is fighting to support abolition. Buster Kilrain is fighting to prove that all men are equal, that aristocracy in the Old World and the New World is a barbaric concept. Many Confederate characters are fighting to protect their home states, as well as their families. Other Confederates, like General Kemper, are fighting for their idea of freedom. With all of these causes presented in equal light, it is nearly impossible to choose which characters are supposed to represent good and which are supposed to represent evil.

While the main characters in *Gettysburg* are granted a forum for why they choose to fight, the hardships of war are easy to see. The work of the enlisted man is not presented as easy, joyful, or enjoyable. Instead, it is obviously hard and trying. A full day before the battle begins,

an aide to General Longstreet asks if it is time for the men to be awoken. It is still very early in the morning and Longstreet replies, “Let the boys sleep a little longer. They’re going to need it.” The general makes it clear that war is exhausting, and that men need as much rest and relaxation as possible to be an effective fighting force. When Longstreet’s men and other Confederate soldiers are on the march, the film shows men who are marching barefoot, with rags around their feet to offer protection.

Union troops have their share of hardships in the film as well. As Colonel Chamberlain and his regiment march towards Gettysburg, Tom notes, “We’ve gone 20 miles today. We’ve gone over 100 miles in five days.” After his unit reaches the Gettysburg field and has the fight of its life, Colonel Chamberlain is still unable to provide his men with basic necessities, such as food and bullets to defend themselves. Men on both sides are forced to deal with hardships. The film makes it clear these men live is a sacrifice. They’re sleeping when they can and are at the mercy of their officers when they can provide themselves with basic human needs.

Despite these difficult conditions, the men on both sides still want to fight. Armistead tells Longstreet before the battle that, “I’ve never seen any men more ready for a brawl.” This is echoed by Colonel Devin, an officer serving under Buford in the Union cavalry. Devin tells his superior before the battle, “The boys are ready for a brawl. No doubt about that.” On the Northern side, several prisoners under Chamberlain’s watch decide to go join the 20th Maine in combat just before their fight on Little Round Top. One nameless soldier tells the Colonel, “No man will call me a coward.” Another tells Chamberlain, “Why not.” The film is suggesting that despite the fear of death and the uncomfortable conditions they live with, the men are still more than willing to fight for their cause. While it is never spoken, the film is promoting the heroism of the common man. The common soldiers are fighting hard and dealing with situations they did

not expect to be in. Yet, they continue serving without question or complaint. These are characters with whom the audience can identify.

The desire to fight is so strong in many of the men that their officers believe they would do it alone if they had to. General Armistead speaks on behalf of the men he commands when he speaks of the reasons they are fighting. “Every man knows his duty. They would make this charge even without officers… They are all willing to make the supreme sacrifice to achieve victory here.”A monologue by General Lee suggests the soldiers in both armies will continue fighting, regardless of how long the war goes on. He says to General Longstreet, “They do not die for us. If this war goes on, and it will, what else can we do but go on, you and I? If they fight, we must fight with them.” The general suggests the cause is bigger than its commanders. The men want to fight and will keep fighting. The film suggests that the common soldiers are honorable for this. Their commanders are exhausted and tired of the fighting, but the men seem like they will never tire and will never give up.

By portraying the Battle of Gettysburg as event that happened in order to protect the interests of all combatants, it becomes clear that neither side will emerge completely victorious. No victory is celebrated or signified for very long in the film. Following the first day of fighting, Confederate troops drive back a part of the Union army. General Longstreet congratulates General Lee for the success of the day, but there is little discussion otherwise about the army’s success. Victory by Northern forces receives little attention either. When Colonel Chamberlain leads his unit to victory against heavy odds, he takes a certain level of satisfaction out of his achievement. But there is little celebration and few mentions of the action again.

The actions following the Pickett’s Charge fight also suggest there is little to celebrate following the battle. A group of Union troops are shown taunting their retreating foes, while a

Union General is shown with a collection of captured swords as he stands over the body of a dead Confederate. Otherwise, there is little celebration or joy derived from the Union victory. Instead, there is more of a sense of relief about survival.The Confederates are shown as losers of the battle, but not in a hopeless way. Following Pickett's Charge, Lee's men want to attack again. They want to keep the battle going and show they are a viable fighting force. The army is still intact and will be able to leave Gettysburg in an organized way.

In the film's closing scene, after the carnage of Pickett's Charge has come to an end, Colonel Chamberlain encounters his younger brother on the battlefield. The sun is setting and everything is suddenly quiet. The Chamberlain brothers share a deep, loving embrace. They've bickered throughout the movie, trying to follow military protocol and keep sibling rivalries to the side. But in the end, after all of the hardships have settled, they are still a family and love each other deeply. The camera then moves from the embrace to an American flag and fades to black. The embrace and the shot of the flag serve as a metaphor for the conflict in general. The sun is setting on the battle, and eventually, the Confederacy. This embrace signifies how the two warring sides will eventually reunite after the war and become a loving family once again. The focus on the flag as the last shot of the movie suggests unity and collectiveness. This final scene indicates that while all of the blood has been shed on the fields of Gettysburg, all of the participants are Americans and all need to be honored and respected for the fighting they did on that field.

With the film ending in this way, it is a reminder to the audience that each of the participants should be remembered as a hero. This reflects memories of the war that evolved greatly over time. Soon after the war ended, veterans from both sides recalled the previous four years as a terrible, bloody event. But as time passed, the Civil War became remembered as an

event that had to be contested because it was a righteous and noble cause (Schwartz, 2000). The film informs the audience that both Confederate and Union soldiers were fighting for their beliefs, expressing their rights of freedom and expression in a new and unusual way.

By ending the film on a shot of the American flag, we are reminded that the men who died on the fields of Gettysburg are the same men who helped make our country great. The battle was fought desperately hard on both sides. Many of the men who did the fighting wanted to separate themselves from the United States and form their own country. This effort failed, and the men of the Confederate States of America were reabsorbed into the United States. While this fractured almost doomed the country, the American flag reminds us that the war only made the country stronger. After the war ended, the United States grew and prospered into the country it is today. *Gettysburg* reminds the audience that there is plenty of reason to remember the men who fought and died on the fields depicted within because they helped make the country better. For that, the participants are presented as heroic.

This definition reflects Fishwick's (1979) definition of a modern hero, a common man who rises to greatness in a difficult situation. War is the difficult situation, where the men of the Confederate and Union armies face death on a daily basis. As has already been argued, the thousands of nameless foot soldiers do not want to be involved in the fighting. They have to take part in it in order to protect all they hold dear, both physically and emotionally. The willingness of the film's everyday heroes to suffer hardships and setbacks, plus stare death in the face on a constant basis is intended to be heroic.

The soldier-as-hero is supported by the way several of the film's supporting characters pass away. General Reynolds, an important general who reinforces General Buford's cavalry in the battle's opening moments, is struck down by a sniper's bullet not long after he arrives on the

field. Sergeant Buster Kilrain, Colonel Chamberlain's friend and confident, is mortally wounded after being struck in the arm twice during the 20th Maine's fight. While their deaths cause sadness, it is the way their deaths are depicted that is significant.

The death scenes of Reynolds and Kilrain reinforce the message that both died fighting for their country. Both scenes are framed in a similar way to the classic painting "The Death of General Wolfe." The Wolfe painting features a dying general during the French and Indian War. The battle rages in the background, but at least ten men have stopped their participation in the fighting to attend to the gravely wounded commander. One of the men surrounding General Wolfe holds a large British flag, proudly announcing the cause the dying man gave his life for. The similarities between the Wolfe painting and the death scenes of two characters in *Gettysburg* are striking.

In the film, General Reynolds is shot in the back of the head and collapses from his horse. An aide rushes to his side and cradles him, announcing to those surrounding him that the talented General is dead. The battle continues behind the group of soldiers, but the focal point is the deceased commander. Like in the Wolfe painting, General Reynolds is flanked on both sides and behind by worried soldiers. Directly behind the general is an American flag, prominently on display. The scene indicates to the viewer that the death of the general is a sad event. The flag in the immediate rear of the scene reminds the viewer which side the general was fighting for, and was ultimately trying to defend.

Buster Kilrain's death is smaller in scale but receives the same treatment. Kilrain is shot once during the fighting on Little Round Top, then a second time as the 20th Maine charges down the hill and repels their attackers. He receives aid from two of his comrades after the fighting dissipates. In a shot that tightly frames Kilrain as the only individual in sight, it is evident he is

actually laying ON an American flag. In an earlier scene, Kilrain, an Irish immigrant, explains to Colonel Chamberlain that he left his homeland to escape the oppression and inhumanities occurring there. Kilrain continues, telling the Colonel how important it is to him for the United States to win the war, in order for the ideas of independence and freedom to be protected. It is no coincidence, then, that Kilrain's last appearance in the film is an image of him sacrificing his life and taking some of his final breaths laying ON one of the most recognizable symbols of America.

The incorporation of the American flag into the death of two important figures in the film is a reminder to the viewer of the sacrifices their ancestors made to keep the United States intact. An officer and an enlisted man, a long-time resident of the United States and a recent émigré, symbolize the hundreds of thousands of men who lost their lives over four bloody years. The film appears to reminding the audience of the cost of liberty, the price that has been paid by previous generations to allow for the creation of the United States that exists today. In the eyes of the film makers, the portrait-like death scenes of General Reynolds and Sergeant Kilrain are intended to be heroic images that remind the audience of the significance of their sacrifices.

The film also uses portraiture to display the heroism of individual soldiers before they go into the battle. As the second day's fighting begins to unfold, the soldiers of an all-Irish unit receive a blessing from a Catholic priest. This prayer session is based on an actual event, in which a chaplain climbed on top of a rock and offered absolution to soldiers who knew the battle they were about to enter could be their last. The scene in *Gettysburg* resembles a painting depicting the moment. Both the scene and the painting feature men deep in prayer as General Hancock looks on. The scene is unexplained, and the significance of the exact event goes unmentioned in the film. Yet, it is still a powerful scene. It features men who are being given

their last rights, an opportunity to advance to the afterlife in the event of being killed. The scene does not show any men trying to run away or find cover. Instead, it is a brief portrait of the bravery and selflessness each of the men possessed.

By presenting the participants of both sides of the conflict as heroic, the film conveys the sense that the men who fought in the Civil War are worthy of being remembered for their contributions to modern day America. While the fighting at Gettysburg influenced the course of the war, it was the men who did the fighting who decided the conflict. *Gettysburg* is determined to tell a story about the people who risked their lives to win a battle. It seeks to remind its audience that the men who were killed on Little Round Top, Pickett's Charge, and other famous spots on the Gettysburg Battlefield did not die in vain. By presenting attempting to bring a few names associated with the battle to life, the film creates the impression that the men who did the fighting contributed far more than was required of them in defense of a cause, whether it be the North or the South. The film therefore creates heroes out of its characters as a way of memorializing them, preserving their contributions for future recognition.

Conclusion

The themes in *Gettysburg* reflect an effort by its producers to celebrate its characters, the men who participated in the battle. The film is meant to honor both the North and the South. While the film addresses several of the more dramatic moments of the battle, its real purpose is to remind the audience that all of the participants are Americans, and good ones at that. These men are fighting for what they believe in. They are willing to sacrifice their lives, their reputations, their futures on an idea.

By presenting most of the characters in the film as protagonists, the film shifts from an effort to tell a story with a historical angle to a means of reinforcing the wants and desires of a modern audience. *Gettysburg* is a study of one the most destructive battle in American history, in terms of human life. By casting all characters as "good guys", instead of choosing either the North or South as the heroes of the story, the audience is left to believe in the goodness of all participants. This seems to be an effective way for viewers to avoid the serious issues of the Civil War and all of the questions that come with it: race, class, sectional differences, financial power, crooked politicians, and others.

Gettysburg allows its audience to feel proud of the United States and the men who helped develop its shape. This reflects how interpretations of history can be expected to change through different eras. Historical evidence can be omitted, added, or altered to better suit the viewpoints of those who are analyzing the past. Media productions are no different. The producers of *Gettysburg* ignored large parts of the battle to tell just a few stories. While time constraints and the need to tell a traceable story are obviously huge factors, it is interesting the film consists of many important, punctuated moments. Thousands of men died at Gettysburg and as a result of

injuries sustained there. But the film treats it as a rite of passage, an unpleasant inconvenience that must be coped with by the living.

By dealing with only limited parts of the battle, the film can direct the way in which the actually fighting in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania is interpreted and remembered. Exposing an audience to tales of heroism and manhood may spark an audience to believe the fighting actually occurred this way. And by avoiding the violence, the trauma, the utter catastrophe the Civil War brought, the film allows audiences to celebrate the fighting that took place between 1861 and 1865 instead of mourning over it. By telling a story and hoping to make money, the producers of *Gettysburg* have chosen appealing storylines that appeal to the most number of people. All causes are addressed, and both sides are given the opportunity to appear in a positive light. This approach diminishes history, but also celebrates it and makes it more relevant to a present generation.

The exact impact of *Gettysburg*'s depiction of historical events needs to be discovered in future research. Quantitative research can discover how audiences react to these depictions, and gauge how much is internalized upon watching the film. The film's true impact on its audience can only be measured in this way. The qualitative portions act as a guide for future research. However, the knowledge can be greatly extended by testing the findings of this study on those who will gain information on a real event from a piece of fiction. Because *Gettysburg* addresses both sides of the Civil War in a positive light, it would be valuable to address the impact the film has on audiences from different parts of the United States. Would *Gettysburg* have the same impact on residents of the North as it does on residents of States that made up the former Confederacy? What about states that didn't exist until after the war occurred? What would foreign audiences gain from watching the film? These questions need to be addressed.

For all of the interpretations that can be made about *Gettysburg*, its impact on memory and the Civil War is apparent. The film is easily accessible and often appears on television. It offers a story about the battle, while also suggesting what the war looked like, sounded like, and felt like. The portrayal of Gettysburg is something that is not easy to find, especially when most history is limited to books. By putting the Civil War and one of its most critical battles in the foreground, *Gettysburg* creates a means through which the conflict can be remembered. The film serves a vehicle for public awareness of history, even if the information being presented is an invention or an alteration to emphasize the drama it contains. Without pieces like *Gettysburg*, the Civil War may disappear into the fringes of history. For that reason, regardless of its flaws, *Gettysburg* plays a vital role in shaping the way in which history is remembered.

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