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OUR HEROES, FILM & SOCIETY

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

If we think of the quintessential hero, who/what comes to mind?

Is it a Cowboy, riding on horseback? Digging his spurs into a speckled calico mustang horse while firing a long rifle into the sunset? Or is it perhaps a shining armor-clad Knight who battles the fire-breathing dragon to rescue the damsel in distress? Or, is the superhero, with unconventional abilities who has everything stripped away only to learn he is more than he ever thought he was before.

Hercules, Perseus, Indiana Jones, James Bond, Captain America, Iron Man?

Or is it not a man at all?

Ripley, Wonder Woman, Captain Marvel?

We have been groomed as a society to emulate and admire the hero!

Since dinosaurs walked the earth, the natural progression of society has been built upon the essence of the hero. Yes, even dinosaurs included a hero figure in their social chemistry.

A hero is defined as, *"(1) (a) a mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent endowed with great strength or ability, (b) an illustrious warrior, (c) a person admired for achievements and noble qualities, (d) one who shows great courage. (2) (a) the principal character in a literary or dramatic work – used specifically of a principal male character especially when contrasted with heroine, (b) the central figure in an event, period, or movement"* (Merriam-Webster, 2022)

In fact, the very first story written in cuneiform on a series of twelve clay tablets, was a hero's journey story. What we will explore in the coming pages is a direct link between society and the hero archetype. How and why does one influence or effect the other?

The hero often serves as the central character, whose primary purpose is to separate from the ordinary World and sacrifice himself for the service of the Journey at hand – to answer the challenge, complete the quest and restore the Ordinary World's balance. The Hero's Journey may be a challenge of personal growth: to win the competition, to heal a wound, or to find love. Heroes may also need to answer Calls to Adventure where physical lives and even the fate of the

world are at stake. These Heroes must learn to accept the sacrifice of life and limb for the service of others.

Since we experience the Journey through the eyes of the Hero, we must be able to relate to him or her on some level. The Hero must be driven by universal needs: to find love, to succeed, to right a wrong, to seek justice. These drives are connected to the Hero's Inner and Outer Problems that need to be solved. The audience can relate to a Hero's idiosyncrasies, quirks, vices, and deepest fears, while wanting to emulate the hero's admirable qualities.

The hero doesn't have to be all good. Some of our most endearing Heroes are Antiheroes, Outlaws and Loner Heroes who live by their own rules and consistently buck the system.

The hero usually grows and learn the most during the journey. And although the hero may be reluctant and make excuses, and even have to react to events that surround him, by the journey's end he has become active, driven by his undying conviction to succeed.

People and cultures usually have a clear standard and expectation for their heroes. Their presence in every aspect of our lives, stories and beyond creates an image we may hope to emulate. "*Heroes are strong and well-intentioned, even when it takes some time and effort to find or motivate them.*" (Kelly Bergstand, 2018)

Cultures are in a constant state of flux. Both acquiring and "*lose(ing) identities over times.*" (Kelly Bergstand, 2018) We will be examining the hero archetype through various films, stories, society structures and the corresponding historical events that shape the phenomenon.

For example, the recent pandemic had a major impact on more than our health and economy. It affected the role of hero in our society. In our homes. The role of hero was thrust into the spotlight. (I.V. Trotsuk, 2021) From first responders to nurses and even grocery store clerks and delivery drivers. This paradigm shift is one in a history of shifting hero characteristics for as long as dinosaurs walked the planet.

Chapter Two

Dinosaurs to Aristotle

"Name one hero who was happy."
-Madeline Miller, The Song of Achilles

If you want to learn about the make-up of a society that helped to create the essence of the hero character, you must travel back over 193 million years ago, when "*dinosaurs ruled the Earth.*" (Speilberg, 1993)

(Speilberg, 1993)

During a recent archeological dig in Southern Patagonia, archeologists closely held beliefs were obliterated with new information that re-shapes the very structure of how we initially believed dinosaurs to live. We have long considered dinosaurs to live in herds, however, scientists have uncovered fossils representing age segregation. "*Dinosaurs worked as a community, laying their eggs in a common nesting ground. Juveniles congregated in 'schools' while adults roamed and foraged for the herd.*" (Chu, 2021)

Age segregation can be proven by the uncovering of fossils that are grouped by age, uncovering three categories: eggs and hatchlings, juveniles, adults. The adult fossils were uncovered alone or in pairs surrounding the site. Protecting babies and elderly dinosaurs.
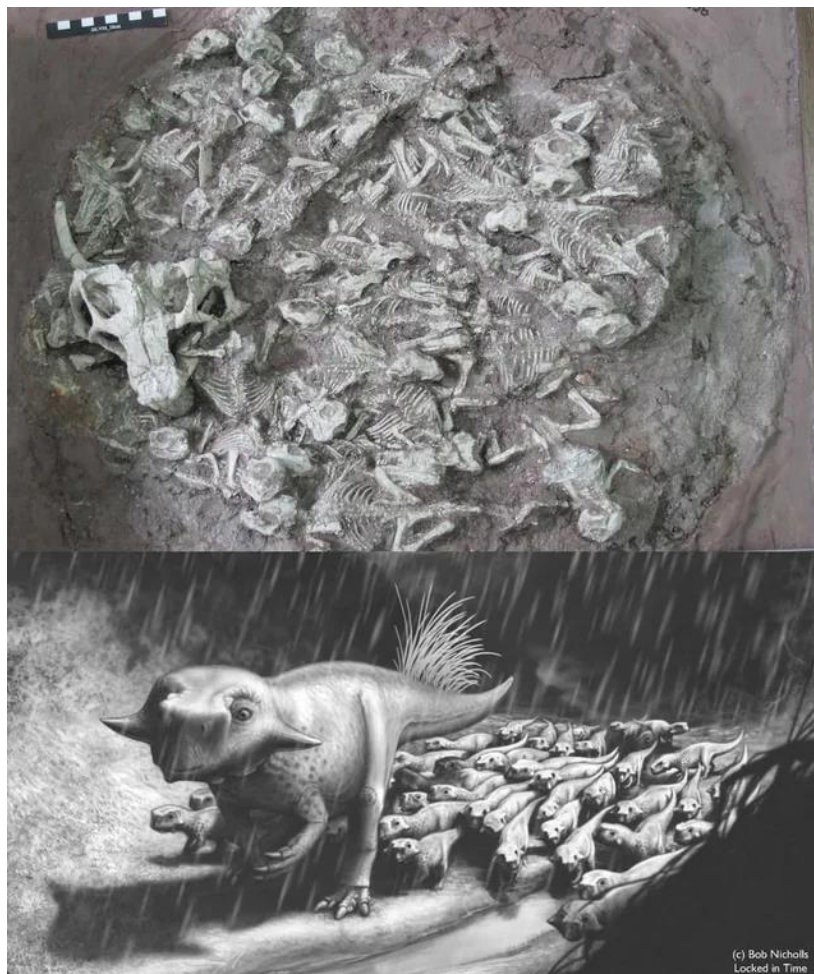
(LiveScience, 2014)

This structure lends to the belief that the adult dinosaurs represented the *hero* or protector of their community.

What do dinosaurs have to do with our modern-day heroes?

When we observe society as a construct, there are certain characteristics that society will inevitably choose to emulate. The evidence dinosaurs give us by protecting the herd serves as a vital point in our history by illuminating the importance of the hero archetype in life.

We will examine how this hero role plays a major part, not only in our lives but also in our entertainment. In fact, they create a symbiotic relationship. Ebb and flowing with the events of the world and societies in general.

Fast forward to 3400 B.C. in Ancient Mesopotamia where the Sumerian civilization first developed writing. This writing is not what we would call writing today, with words, rather a unique form of communication called cuneiform.

(cuneiform)

Cuneiform is a type of communication where images are assigned to words, names, and numerical representations. Many of the clay tablets discovered from this time period contain economic, administrative documents and the mythic poem. Some scholars and historians refer to this artform as *wisdom literature*: "*The body of religious or philosophical writings that communicate wisdom by means of proverbs or parables.*" (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2016)

Some examples of the mythic poem include the "Kesh Temple Hymn," and "Instructions of Suruppak." The most notorious cuneiform tablets come from the third millennium, around 2100 B.C.

This is the first ever story of the epic hero journey.

The Epic of Gilgamesh serves as the quintessential example of the Hero's Journey device by Joseph Campbell, a narratologist and monomyth expert. Campbell describes the narrative pattern as follows:

> "*A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.*"
> (Campbell, The Hero's Journey, 2014)

The very formula that many, if not all of hero scripts follow includes three very distinct sections. More than Act I, II and III.

- <u>Separation</u>: the hero sets out on his journey.
- <u>Initiation</u>: most of the action happens here.
- <u>Return</u>: the hero has returned home and finished whatever it was they set out to do.

One of the simplest examples of this the 1994 film by Alex Proyas, *The Crow*. (Proyas, The Crow , 1994)

<u>Separation</u>: The night before his wedding, musician Eric Draven and his fiancée are brutally murdered by members of a violent inner-city gang. On the anniversary of their death, Eric rises from the grave and assumes the gothic mantle of the Crow, a supernatural avenger.

<u>Initiation</u>: Tracking down the thugs responsible for the crimes and mercilessly murdering them, Eric eventually confronts the head gangster to complete his mission.

<u>Return</u>: Eric returns to the gravesite of his fiancée, finally having found retribution and salvation. He returns to his grave at peace.


(Proyas, The Crow , 1994)

Campbell discovered the path of the hero's journey by studying history, myths, and legends from cultures around the world. Through his life-long research,

Campbell uncovered similarities shared amongst the mythos of various cultures. Campbell refers to this congruence of characteristics as the monomyth (LibGuides, 2021).

In the twelve-steps of the Hero's Journey, Campbell is able to describe the journey of transformation that all heroes in every time and place seem to share. A path that leads these characters through great movement of separation, descent, ordeal, and return.
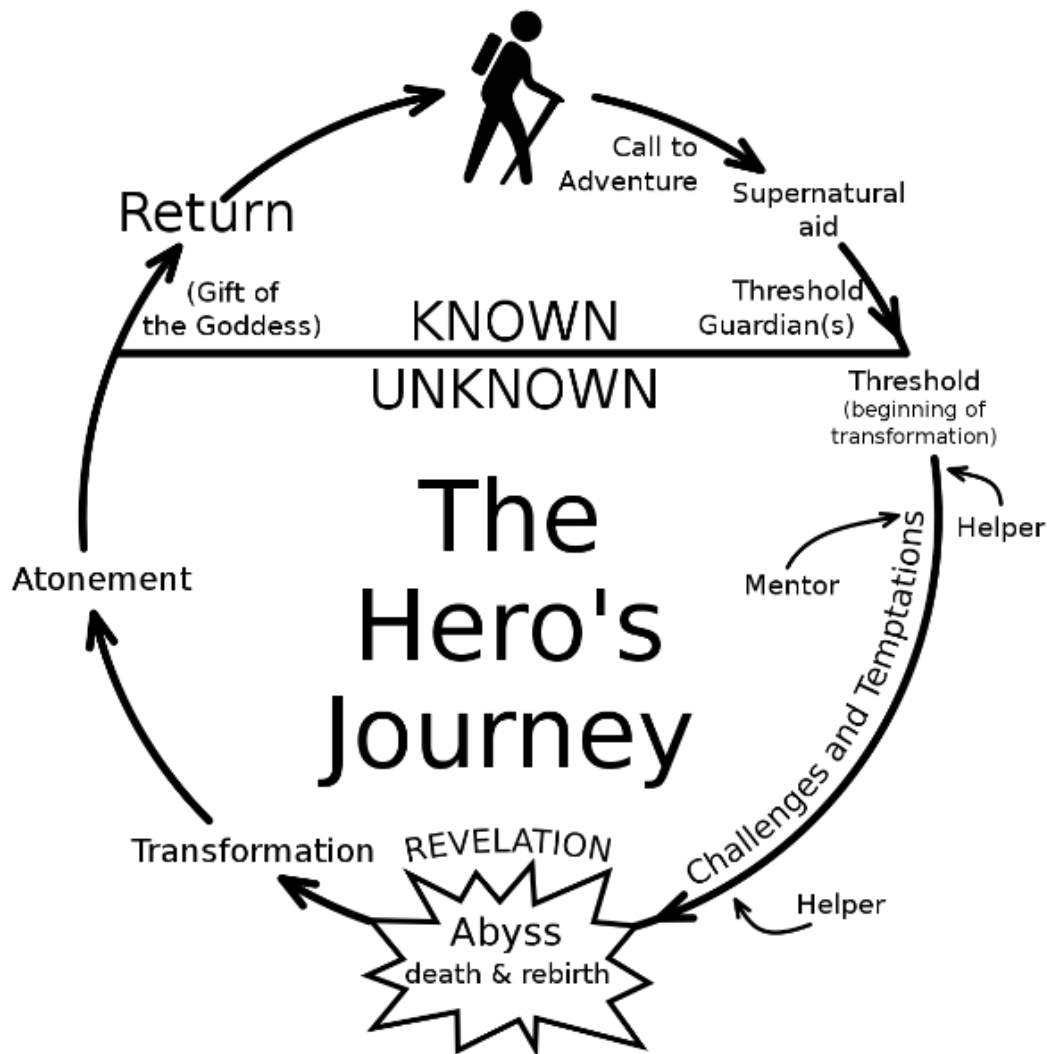
(Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1949)

If we look at Campbell's steps of <u>The Hero's Journey</u> by examining the film, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, Star Wars: The Force Awakens, 2015), the complete circular path becomes extremely evident.

1. **Ordinary World**: Luke Skywalker lives a secular life on Tatooine, but he doesn't like it. He wants to explore the stars and has goals of one day joining the rebellion to fight against the Empire.
2. **Call to Adventure**: Luke discovers that his R2 droid holds plans that could help the Rebels destroy the death-star. He is then recruited by Obi-Wan Kenobi, *"You must learn the ways of the Force if you're to come with me to Alderan."* (Lucas, 1977)
3. **Refusal of the Call**: Luke refuses the call by admitting that his responsibilities lay with his aunt and uncle on the farm.
4. **Meeting the Mentor**: When Luke arrives home to discover that his aunt and uncle have been murdered by stormtroopers from the Empire, Obi-Wan Kenobi steps into his Mentor role where Luke commits to joining the mission and learning the ways of the force.
5. **Crossing the Threshold**: In the Spaceport Mos Eisley, Luke crosses from known into the unknown.
6. **Trials, Allies and Enemies**: Luke acquires allies in Han Solo and Chewbacca and soon, Princess Leia will become an additional ally. The Empire grows into a more menacing and foreboding enemy. Trials, there are many. Surviving the trash compactor, saving Princess Leia, disabling the tractor beam, and escaping the death star, among others. Luke discovers that the leader of the Empire may be his father.
7. **The Approach**: The Death Star plans are extracted, a weakness found. Han Solo and Chewbacca leave Luke and Leia, believing more in financial gain rather than supporting the rebellions fight.
8. **Ordeal:** The rebellion mounts an attack against the Death Star and Empire. Darth Vader feels Luke's connection to the force and his old mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi.
9. **The Reward**: Luke's reward is both internal and external. Internally, Luke goes through an transformation where he

learns to master his emotions. Externally, Luke has a hand in peace across the galaxy.

10. **The Road Back**: The heroes escape the Death Star.
11. **Resurrection**: Luke is about to be destroyed when Han Solo, Chewbacca come swooping in, in the Millennium Falcon. Effectively saving Luke's ability to fire the shot that will destroy the Death Star.
12. **Return with the Elixir**: When Luke, Leia, Han and Chewie return, they bring safety and hope to the rebellion. And peace to Luke's father who transformed from Darth Vader into Anakin Skywalker in the afterlife.

This extremely basic proposal of the hero's path in stories can be applied to some of the most influential movies throughout the entire cinematic cannon.

And though there are precursors to the modern-day trope of our modern-day cinematic adventures, including magic lantern projectors, shadow puppetry, the gyroscope, and others... a short and silent film from 1896 called *Le Manior du Diable* (Meiles, 1896) or *The House of the Devil* is considered the first film to supply a narrative structure.

Many films during the early age of filmmaking consisted of a mundane representation of society. For example, a train pulling into a station, two people walking around a garden or a can-can dancer exuberantly dancing. *Le Manior du Diable* is the first narrative to follow the hero's journey.

Le Manior du Diable/The House of the Devil (Méliès, 1896)

Following the journey of the newcomers to a '*haunted*' castle in which the devil currently resides. The newcomer continually overcomes the obstacles placed before him and in the end vanquishes the devil. The protagonist follows the

structure of the hero's journey, albeit a truncated version. *Le Manoir du diable*, is often considered to be the first horror film, although it was meant to imbue a sense of humor.

Many educators believe that Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first to define the hero character. Aristotle believed that a good tragedy must evoke feelings of fear and pity, because these two emotions are fundamental to the experience of catharsis.

Think about any hero character from the last 100 years. I will bet you that there is at some point in the hero's journey some cathartic experience. Whether it is the unlikely hero righting the wrongs done to him, like we see in the 1991 film, *The Rocketeer* (Johnston J. , The Rocketeer, 1991), or the silent hero who saves us all as seen in the film, *The Imitation Game* (Tyldum M. , 2014). Catharsis is an essential element of our hero and therefore is an essential part of our hero stories.

Left: *The Rocketeer*, Billy Campbell as the Rocketeer. (Johnston J. , 1991)
Right: Benedict Cumberbatch in *The Imitation Game*. (Tyldum M. , 2014)

But catharsis is not the only foundation that Aristotle introduced us to in order to fully explain our heroes. Aristotle also describes certain traits that are common among his *tragic* heroes.

Using the Dr. Gregory House, M.D. character from the *House, M.D.* (Shore, 2004) television series as an example, we can readily see the elements of Aristotle's tragic hero and answer the question:

Will this character evoke feelings of pity?

- **The hero must suffer more than he deserves.** > House is forced to live with a medical decision that was made for him, leaving him in debilitating pain for the rest of his life.

- **Hero must be doomed from the start but bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw.** > House is a drug-addict and so reprehensible at times that he finds solace in isolation.
- **Hero must be noble in nature, but imperfect so that the audience can see themselves in him.** > House is surely imperfect. His nobility comes from his belief that he has done more good, than bad.
- **Hero must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him.** > As the story progresses, the effect of House's continuous bad decisions has a major effect on his life. Drugs, risk and reckless behavior, sabotaging relationships, fraud, theft, lying. These are all things that House does to himself, outcome be damned.
- **Hero must understand his doom, as well as the fact that his fate was discovered by his own actions.** > Having overdosed or experienced death numerous times through the series, House understands his doom… he just doesn't care.
- **Hero's story should arouse fear and empathy.** > Viewers absolutely feel empathy for his initial situation. We can relate in the premise, that we often have to live with a decision that was made outside of our control? We empathize that his only escape from this torment is drugs.
- **Hero must be physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death.** > Though House doesn't die in the end of the series, he is left alone until his best friend, Wilson, rescues him for their catharsis lies in each other.
- **The hero must be intelligent so he may learn from his mistakes**. > House is considered a genius and the top in his field. House learns to live within the system, whether that is learning or adapting – we can't be sure.
- **The hero must have a weakness, usually it is pride.** > House has many weaknesses, most sensitive is his sense of pride. He must always, without a doubt be correct. In some cases, as the detriment of other people, House will always be right.
- **He must face a profoundly serious decision.** > House is forced to deal with a variety of serious decisions. From relationships, truth versus lying, medical efficacy… it is how he decides that makes him a unique and interesting character.

There is also evidence of catharsis at the end of House's hero journey when he spends the remainder of his life traveling the world with best friend and leaving medicine behind.

(HouseTrivia, n.d.)

Aristotle has more to tell us about our heroes. Aristotle describes five specific characteristics that a tragic hero must possess. (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E.)

(1) **Hamartia**: Aristotle's word for mistake. The characters fatal or tragic flaw.
(2) **Peripeteia**: Reversal of fortune/error in judgement or change in circumstances.
(3) **Anagnorisis**: the point in a story when the protagonist makes a critical discovery.
(4) **Hubris**: excessive pride or self-confidence.
(5) **The character's fate must be greater than he/she deserves**.

Many of these characteristics can be found in a variety of outlets, but most of them can be found in the Greek tragedies. For example, *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles (Sophocles, 429) meets all of Aristotle's requirements for a tragic hero story.

Oedipus of a noble birth learns of the prophecy that he will murder his father and take his mother as his own wife, attempts to flee his fate, Hamartia. When Oedipus learns that he has killed his father and married his mother he

experiences Peripeteia, a sudden change in his situation. This action results in Anagnorisis, "*the startling discovery, that produces a change from ignorance to knowledge.*" (Brittanica, 2016) Hubris in Oedipus, his downfall, is his pride. His ignorance to consider himself a murderer. By the end of the tale, Oedipus has learned his lesson, he couldn't fight fate. Oedipus relinquished his power, he is blind and now only hopes for the peace and success of his daughters, Antigone and Ismene.

Certainly, fulfilling Aristotle's last requirement where a character's fate be greater than he deserves.

And yet, the tragic hero is only one of many types of the hero character. Philosophers, Historians, and others have created a multitude for us to explore.

(Unknown, Oedipus and the Sphinx)

Chapter 3

Shakespeare, Byron, and the Byronic Hero

"We know what we are but know not what we may be."
- William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare and Lord Byron have more in common than their penchant for love and romance. They also employ the world around them as a tool for adding scope and setting for their stores, sonnets, and plays. These literary masters often included political struggles, the fear of disease and current slang from the street in which they lived. They truly sought to mirror the world they were living in.

George Gordon Byron, Lord Byron (1788-1824) had a miserable upbringing which would shape his future. Born with a foot malady that was not correctable, Byron turned to reading. And he excelled, reading anything and everything - but adored the Bible and history. Later, Byron would attend Trinity College in Cambridge University, but academic life didn't agree with Byron.

(Lord Byron)

It is here at Cambridge that Byron fell in love with love.

Byron was garnering a reputation of a sexual devil! Pushing the limits of adulterous affairs with both females and males.

Though both Shakespeare and Byron allude to varying sexual identities in their work, it was not commonplace. "*Homosexuality was seen as a pagan behavior in the Renaissance and human sexuality was viewed on different terms altogether.*" (Driscoll, 1997) Despite all his sexual proclivities and adventures, Byron did capture the essence of Romanticism and introduced us to the romantic hero.

The role of the romantic hero would remain popular for audiences to this very day. Filling our movie and television screens with a character that is melancholy or haunted by guilt. This is one of the most popular hero character types, perhaps we feel a connection to the imperfect make-up of these characters and that is what makes them accessible. Maybe it is the hope that we want them to share that they too will find happiness or peace. The romantic hero would eventually come to be known as the Byronic Hero. And with the name change comes a slight shift in character traits.

Let's look at the Bryonic character traits (Railo, 1964) through a modern representation of the hero type with Kylo Ren from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens.* (Abrams, Star Wars: The Force Awakens, 2015)

Kylo Ren – Bryonic Hero Comparison

Cynicism	Kylo Ren is skeptical of the Jedi legacy, his mistrust of others, and his internal conflict about his own identity and purpose.
Arrogance	Overconfidence in his own abilities, his dismissiveness of others' opinions, and his willingness to use violence and intimidation to achieve his goals, Kylo Ren shows his arrogance in many ways.
Absolute disrespect for authority	Kylo openly challenges the authority of his superiors within the First Order. He believes he is better suited to lead. This superiority extends past the First Order into his personal life as Kylo disregards the

expectations of his own father, Han Solo, and mentor, Luke Skywalker.

Psychological Depth	The psychological depth of the Kylo Ren character stems from internal struggle, trauma, self-doubt and a rarely displayed vulnerability.
Emotional Moodiness	Kylo is quick to anger. Violently lashing out at the least discretion. The impulsiveness turns reckless as evident when he orders the destruction of an entire planet without respect of the repercussions. Then there are the physical mood swings from distrust to hostility to understanding and empathy.
Past Trauma	Once Luke Skywalker senses darkness in Kylo Ren and momentarily considers killing Kylo so he will not turn to the dark side, Kylo's journey through traumatic experiences explodes. This betrayal by his mentor, Luke Skywalker, serves as the jumping off point of Kylo's journey to the dark side. Supreme Commander Snoke uses these feelings of betrayal to manipulate Kylo.
Nihilism	The willingness to destroy anything that will get in his way to rule the galaxy including sacrificing those closest to him, shows Kylo Ren's nihilistic tendencies. He even murders his own father on the journey to achieve his goals.
Intelligence	Mastery of the force is one way to show Kylo's intelligence, however, Kylo is also an excellent strategic thinker as he plans the capture of Rey and Finn on Jakku.

Dark Humor	The dark humor is subtle and often under the cover of broodiness.
Self-Destructive Impulses	The entire character is a study in self-destructive impulses getting the better of a character. The impulsive decisions, lashing out and jumps to violence and anger all create a very self-destructive character.
Mysteriousness	The character's life-story is shrouded in mystery. Shrouded in a very real mask that hides Kylo's real face from the world adds a level of mystery to the character.
Sexual Attractiveness	Perhaps it is the pull to the dark side or the internal struggle of his physical appearance, but the actor (Adam Driver) more than the character can be categorized as attractive.
World-weariness	Kylo's jaded outlook on life, his path and his future drive the characters weariness.
A sense of being exiled or outcast both physically and emotionally from the larger social world.	The themes of isolation, alienation, loneliness are common throughout the Kylo Ren journey. The character's disconnection from others keep Kylo removed from the physical and emotional world.

"I like the idea that the person you thought was the villain is really the victim, and that the story is really about the villain trying to regain his humanity," George Lucas.

Adam Driver as Kylo Ren, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (TVTropes)

Shakespeare, like Byron was an advantageous reader. And just like Byron, we can examine a classic example of the romantic hero in Shakespeare's work and a modern interpretation.

But Shakespeare's romantic heroes are slightly different from Byron's romantic hero. Shakespeare's romantic heroes often employ brooding, moodiness character traits with a passionate and self-reliant make-up.

Looking at the character of Anton "Tony" Wyzek from the epic tale, *West Side Story* which is actually based on one of Shakespeare's most popular and prolific plays, *Romeo & Juliet.*

(Spielberg, West Side Story, 2021)

The doomed love of Tony and Maria is the stuff of legend. Tony, despite his past is still a starry-eyed optimist. His moodiness comes into play disagreeing with the path his best friend Riff tends to take in life. Tony has been on his own since he was a child, raised by the streets created a self-reliant character who lives a full and passionate life until the end.

Another modern-day example of the romantic hero is Harry Potter who was cast aside from society. Even his own family feel Harry is a hinderance to their lives and livelihoods, leaving Harry cynical. But Harry's passion comes to life when his heroic quest begins and learns of magic. A whole new world to be explored which transforms Harry from a brooding romantic hero into a true romantic hero who is willing to sacrifice himself for his friends and others.

(Columbus, Harry Potter and the Sorcerers Stone, 2001) Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter who was a societal outcast and a romantic hero.

We see that Shakespeare's heroes differ slightly from Byrons though they share commonalities. Together their heroes possess traits that may be a virtue in some circumstances, but when our heroes experience them become a fatal flaw.

This difference could stem from the rigorous life Shakespeare led compared to the financially affluent life of Byron. Many if not all of Shakespeare's works all deal with war, tyranny, love, politics, and the class structure in England at the time. This class structure held to the patriarchy of nobility. Poor were abhorrent, a pestilence and should remain invisible. If you were poor, it was your fault. (Picard, 2016) This societal belief will fuel a different type of hero in the future who refutes the belief that everyone knows their place but who rises above their station to save us all, usually at great risk to themselves.

"What a piece of work is man." (Shakespeare, 1603)

Chapter 4

The Everyman Hero

Following the times of literary greats Shakespeare, Byron, and the like – men were in one of the greatest transitions on our time. Males around the world would welcome the theories of Isaac Newton and Darwin and subsequently welcomed into an age of enlightenment. There was also a physical transformation as people of all ages embarked on the treacherous journey to North America. Many were escaping religious persecution or sought respite from class struggles. All brought with them the hope of building a life of great potential. And with this physical, moral, and metaphysical growth the heroes on our pages and screens were also in a state of transformation.

(Unknown, William Shakespeare) Left: William Shakespeare. Right: Men of the 1800's
(Wikipedia) shows the shift in fashion, appearance, and stature.

Soon after life in the America's started to take shape, it suffered through its' first war, lit by the fuse of politics. The American Revolutionary war ignited men with a sense of responsibility to appropriately defend the freedoms they so eagerly sought. Colonists had to take up arms and physically fight in the war to separate the America's from Great Britain's rule.

(Land of the Brave)

Though the potential for industrial progress was understood across the nation, the nation was fiercely divided into two different nations with the Southern states relying more on agricultural ploys and the Northern states welcoming in the age of industrialized society. Less than 100 years after the Revolutionary war, the America's were thrust into another battle between this growing divided nation. This battle between the Southern Confederacy and the Northern Union was about more than slavery but served as a foundation of the rights and responsibilities of this still young nation.

In both the North and the South, the belief remained that men were the stronger sex with supreme intelligent, courageous, and determined, whereas women were guided by their emotions.

Southern men followed the ideals of the Victorian male where stature was something to be upheld and aided in the creation of the Southern Gentlemen trope. These noble, well-bred men who embodied superiority of their high rank in society with chivalry.

Men across the country were learning to take on more physical roles in society. Learning to use their hands as well as their minds. As Immanuel Kant describes in his Critique of Pure Reason, "*knowledge springs from understanding the objects of experience.*" (Stanford , 2020)

Factories were built to create everything from combustion engines to our first refrigerators to mass production of food items like flour, rye, and sugar. Technology was integrating into life across the globe with inventions like the telephone, electric light bulb, phonograph and photoplates.

We are also introduced into the first commercial screening of a motion-picture film in France (1895) and thus the business, craft and importance of cinema is born.

But in the America's, Theatre Halls were abundant and filled with traveling theatre troops, ventriloquists, hypnotists, poets, comedians, choirs, orchestras, and circuses. Many of these shows crossed over ethnic and economic boundaries by welcoming as many different social groups as possible.

In the North, a block called Broadway presented it's first show, *The Black Crook*, and thus Broadway was born. The classic tale of good triumphing over evil will set the tone for years to come.

When an Evil Count wants to marry the loveliest maiden in the village who is already engaged to an artist, Rodolphe. Through less than scrupulous means, the Count tricks Rodolphe into working for Hertzog for has a pact with the devil in exchange for a yearly sacrifice, Hertzog would enjoy eternal life. But as Rodolphe is off on this ill-fated journey, he decides to save a dove rather than pick-up the treasure. The dove magically transforms into a fairy who rewards Rodolphe for rescuing her by bringing him to the fairy land and reuniting him with his betrothed. The Count is defeated, and Hertzog is dragged to hell.

(Boys, 2007) The first Broadway musical, The Black Crook, 1866.

In the South, sporting events started to grow more commonplace across all classes. Classic games of mental and physical abilities with winners and losers. Contributing to the black and white, good and evil, winners and losers of this era's modern-day heroes.

When not venturing out of their homes for entertainment, many families across the nation started to find it inside their homes with board games like cards, chess, checkers, and dominoes.

One most important form of entertainment and enlightenment came from authors who would create literature to be read aloud. In halls, theaters, group settings and in the home. This was a valuable piece of entertainment and served as an educational window to the world outside.

By examining some of the most popular books of the 1800's we will start the see the type of hero most celebrated during this time period.

1814: *History of the Expedition Under the Command of the Captains Lewis and Clark,* Meriwether. More than 20 editions appeared during the nineteenth century including German, Dutch and British. (History of the expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the sources of the Missouri, thence across the Rocky Mountains and down the river Columbia to the Pacific Ocean, 1814)

1820: *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* Washington Irving. The legend of the Headless Horseman described in the book has crossed over into film, television, stage and musical adaptations and sustained interest around the globe in popular folklore. (Irving, 1820)

1845: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* Frederick Douglass. This autobiography details the Frederick Douglass's rise from slavery to freedom, detailing how he learned to read and write while a slave in Maryland and became a testament to the need to abolish slavery. (Douglass, 1845)

1850: *The Scarlet Letter,* Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne gives us one of the earliest female heroes in Hester Prynne who is forced to wear a scarlet "A" on her chest as a result of an affair, however, through the novel a secret affair by her child's father who holds a high place in society becomes clear. (Hawthorne, 1850)

1851: *Moby-Dick,* Herman Melville. This classic story about Captain Ahab's journey to tackle a great monster holds such a place in our cultural history that it continues to be referenced in popular culture. (Melville, 1851)

1868: *Little Women,* Louisa May Alcott. Josephine March serves as our hero-protagonist and illuminates a shift in the philosophy of the role of women in

society. Examining the relationship between love, work, and a domestic life. (Alcott, 1868)

1890: *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis. This book created by a collection of pictures that exposed the deplorable living conditions in New York's Lower East Side. These abhorrent slum conditions were wildly ignored by the middle and upper classes in the city. This book brought about actually physical change. Brining sewars, plumbing and trash collection to that part of the city. (Riis, 1890)

1895: *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane. This tale about a recruit in the Civil War provides a vivid depiction of the brutality of war for those that didn't experience it first-hand. (Crane)

In addition to these great works of literature, we must also touch on the "*dime novel.*" These works are considered popular fiction and were geared toward youthful, working-class audiences. The mass distribution in newsstands and dry goods stores helped to grow the popularity of these quick and transportable reads which included Wild West adventures, detective stories, working-girl narratives – all popular genres of the time.

All these characters share common character traits. They are all everyday people, heroes that have no outstanding abilities or attributes but venture to succeed in extraordinary circumstances. Everyman heroes exhibit sound moral judgement and appear to be selfless in the face of adversity. All the above characters exhibit that trait. From Hester Prynne's bravery to accept her fate, Ichibod's perseverance, Henry Fleming's realization of war are all characters who face adversity with little to no outstanding superhero abilities.

Even more, the real-life depictions by Lewis and Clark, Frederick Douglass, and Jacob Riis, give us representations of the nation in which these men and characters lived. An essential mirror of society at the time. All the heroes from the aforementioned works of literature fulfill the remaining traits of the **everyman hero**, also referred to as the common man or citizen hero.

- They enjoy simple tastes and pleasure in life.
- Not necessarily political but believe in the concept of '*all for one and one for all.*'
- Compromise to have relationships.
- Comfortable with the status quo.
- Genuine and don't like pretense.
- Suspicious of authority figures.
- Reliable and respectable of others.

Some modern-day examples of the everyday hero in film include Sarah Conner in *The Terminator,* Frodo from *Lord of the Rings*, and even Emmet from *The Lego Movie.*

(Left to Right) *The Terminator, The Lord of the Rings, The Lego Movie* all present protagonists that are everyday heroes.

This character type continues to remain popular because they are a direct reflection of the world, we live in. Often shedding light on the unseen or disregarded. This type of hero is popular because they inspire us by providing models that cope with adversity by finding hidden strength that can be used to overcome trauma and used for good. (Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1949) They are representative of the audience because their primary motivations are to have a sense of belonging and enjoyment in life.

One of my favorite modern examples of the everyman hero character type is Arthur Dent from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Arthur Dent unknowingly escapes the destruction of Earth with a little help from his friend Ford Prefect on the morning Arthur's house is scheduled to be demolished by a construction company. Arthur is just a normal guy who works a radio station, likes tea and is just plain ordinary. With every challenge, Arthur tries to adjust to his new life and shows some real heroism and eventually saves his traveling companions in the end. Though he fails to understand the meaning of the number 42, "*the meaning of life, the universe, and everything.*"

(Jennings, 2005) Arthur Dent, *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*

"Everyman heroes are ordinary people without any apparent heroic qualities or characteristics. They are underdogs placed in extraordinary circumstances that force them to act heroically. Though lacking inherent heroic qualities, everyman character types often have a strong moral compass and act with extreme selflessness."
(MasterClass, n.d.)

Chapter 5

The Classic Hero

The 1900's up and through World War I was an extremely transformative time for the United State as the country was growing into a superpower. Motion pictures were popularized as a form of escapist entertainment and slowly we see a transition of vaudeville houses, lecture halls and assorted store fronts into nickelodeons.

The age of Industrialism brought many progressive opportunities to people around the country but also influenced the class structure. The higher your class in society, the more opportunities were presented to you. Entertainment for higher classes included opera, symphonies, and Broadway theater. Middle classes were visiting vaudeville shows and the circus. Lower classes thrived on penny arcades and nickelodeons. With an affordable entry fee, the Hollywood machine turned out more and more content to the hungry audiences.

When we examine this time through film, we begin to see the transformation of a nation, of our entertainment and the roles of men and women in the home. What few films were in existence were less for entertainment and leaned more towards the education, exposure, and enlightenment of the viewer.

For example, the 1901, President McKinley Inauguration Footage, directed by Thomas Edison was the first instance of this kind of news reel.

(Roosevelt, 1901) Footage of the President McKinley Inauguration is an example of news reels that were intended for education rather than entertainment.

Newsreels served a vital role in bringing information to people across the United States. They often served as the only recording of true-life events including sports, politics, and entertainment. The growing popularity of newsreels and the

desire to *see* our news, sparked the creation of the first daily newspaper illustrated with photographs. The New York Daily Mirror. Newspaper moguls Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst established categories that they felt would be acceptable in newsreels and in print: catastrophe, celebrities, pageantry, ceremony, sports, political, military, technology, spectacle, and novelty.

Religion was the driving force behind a major majority of the subject matter. For example, the 1902, *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ (La Vie et la Passion de Jésus Christ)* directed by Ferdinand Zecca. This film utilized a technique called protofeature, where creators strung together a collection of shorter films together to make a larger presentation.

Another recognizable protofeature is the 23-chapter film, *The Million Dollar Mystery*, (Hansel, 1914) told the story of a secret society called The Black Hundred and its attempts to gain control of a lost million dollars. This top-grossing US film of 1914 offered a $10,000 prize to whoever submitted the best solution to the mystery. Perhaps one of the first film-based promotions?

But most of the films that were seen by Americans during this time were created outside of the United States. From France, Gaston Méliès. One of the most early influential English filmmakers was William Hagger. Tsunekichi Shibata, the first film maker from Japan.

There were a few American creatives including Edwin S. Porter who introduced us to stories like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903) and one of the films that defined this time, *The Great Train Robbery* from 1903, which used the popularity of melodramatic dime store novel and combined the trope with the most popular theme of the time, Westerns.

The Great Train Robbery follows a gang of outlaws who hold-up a steam locomotive and flee across the sprawling American west only to meet their defeat by a posse of locals. This film speaks to societies infatuation with Westerns and proposes a very simple good triumphs over evil storyline.

This one-shot (shown above) of the Sheriff breaking the fourth wall and looking directly into the audience/viewer is thought to be the first of its' kind and stood as a way for films to speak directly to the viewer.

(Porter, 1903)

Morals and accepted societal ideals found a way to weave into the structure of entertainment. *A Drunkard's Reformation* in 1909 by D.W. Griffith examines the evils of drinking and the responsibility of being a male and taking care of one's family. There are examples of films that make a statement on social commentary in trying to expose the contrasts between the rich and poor, like the 1901 film by D.W. Griffith, *A Corner in Wheat,* where a greedy capitalist tries to corner the wheat market for his own profit by exploiting his workers. Cinema as an entertainment outlet was still relatively new, however, power of cinema to affect people and society is ultimately realized and will be a useful tool for years to come.

Another example where film mirrors society is the film, *The Birth of Nation.* This silent film often hailed for its technical innovations, reflects on the inherent racism in the South. Told against the backdrop of the Civil War with a positive portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The film's release sparked new interest in the KKK in the south and an influx of cross burnings and violence toward blacks and triggered protests across the Nation calling for boycotts of the film's racist tenure.

World War I pitted Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire against Great Britain, the United States, France, Russia, Italy, and Japan. New technologies resulted in death and destruction that was practically unimaginable to the citizens of the world at this time. Combine that fear with a growing xenophobia and the world was truly shifting by becoming more militant around the globe as well as inside the home.

Men could be soldiers which precluded that they are wise and strong. Men were expected to maintain status in society and make enough to provide for their

family, although they didn't take an active role in the lives of their children. This stodginess left men as a black and white carbon copy of the **classic hero**.

Classical heroes are otherwise normal people who possess a quality that distinguishes them from ordinary people. These heroes were tasked with fighting the bad guy and were willing to risk their lives to save others. Zorro's strong lines of justice and morality and dedicating to protecting innocent is supported by his physical and mental acumen.

The character of Don Diego Vega, a.k.a. Zorro, portrayed by actor Douglas Fairbanks in the quintessential example of the classic hero. A courageous character who is not afraid to stand up for what he believes in by fighting against the corrupt officials oppressing the regular citizens.

But people wanted to escape from the woes of everyday life with humor and pure entertainment giving rise of the comedy short crew in popularity. Charles 'Charlie' Chaplin was the preeminent example of this genre. His popularity grew to such heights not just in Britain but around the world. But it was his popularity in Britain that expanded during the war. Charlie was seen as a national treasure.
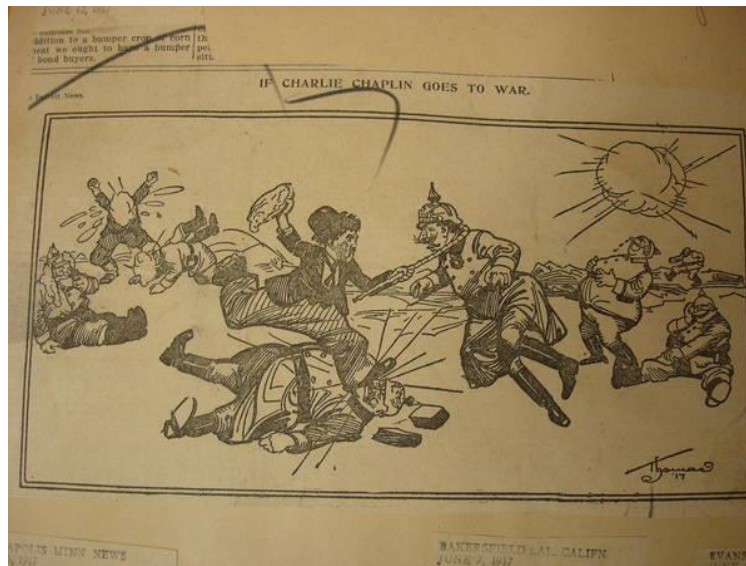
(Unknown, Horrible Possibility)

However, as the war waged on the people's idea that all men should be fighting slowly started to take over society. All men should fight even though there was no conscription at the time. Men who did not volunteer were deemed cowards and often handed white feathers to designate these men as cowards.

(Kapur S. , 2002) The Four Feathers movie tells the story of a soldier
who receives 4 feathers of cowardice after resigning his commission.

This practice is explained in the 2002 film, *The Four Feathers* (Kapur S. ,
2002)starring the late Heath Ledger who plays a British officer who resigns his
post just before battle and subsequently receives four white feathers from his
friends and fiancée as a symbol of his cowardice.

As the war waged on and Chaplin did not volunteer to fight, he was not only sent
white feathers but also threatening letters and attacks in the press.

Despite the thrashing of Chaplin in society, the true impact of his films was realized when he worked to screen his films on the battlefront, often reflected on the ceiling of military hospitals. With an audience of men that had little hope and found the slightest escape for few moments of joy, Chaplins' image started to shift. A cinema manager said, "*Last week I was showing a Charlie Chaplin and a wounded soldier laughed so much he got up and walked to the end of the hall and quite forgot he had left his crutches behind.*" (Charlie Chaplin Museum)

Chaplin signed an unprecedented deal which would forbid him from leaving the United States within the life of the contract without the permission of the Mutual Corporation, avoiding conscription for the remainder of the war. The Anti-Charlie campaign continued through the last years of the war but never affected the popularity and impact of his movies. Not even with United States entered the war in 1917.

With the Treaty of Versailles signed, the United States of America had just survived a war that took twice as many lives as the Vietnam War. America was still trying to recover as suggested by the Warren G. Harding presidential campaign slogan, "*Return to Normalcy.*" Following the war and labor unrest, race riots and the Red Scare people were very worries about joining the world stage and the dangers that it can bring. People didn't want to go to war again and started to turn their attention to their homeland rather than the world stage.

And then the world was polarized when the deadly influenza pandemic claimed over 500,000 lives in the United States alone in 1918. Everyone was making sacrifices. Schools, churches, theatres, banks, and restaurants were all closed. All from an enemy that could not be seen. The aftermath of the pandemic would be felt for years to come.

The need of entertainment to merely entertain became of pivotal importance. Audiences had a desire to see good triumph over evil, they wanted to laugh, they needed to escape.

Films by Charlie Chaplin continued to grow in popularity, as did Chaplin and his four friends Douglass Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and D.W. Griffith who formed United Artists in 1919.

Westerns and adventure films brought chivalry to the forefront where viewers could see good conquer evil. *Tarzan of the Apes* (Sidney, 1918), *Straight Shooting* (Ford, 1918), *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Neilan, 1919).

Tarzan of the Apes (Sidney, 1918), Tarzan protects his loved ones against evil with bravery. The character of Steve Hall in the 1919 western, Straight Shooting, used his keen gun skills to defend his friends and family against danger, often

standing against those who seek to exploit or harm others. Both the Tarzan character and Steve Hall character embody the selfless, bravery and morality of the classic hero.

Audiences were speaking up about what they liked and didn't like, and the movies studios were starting to listen. Understanding the impact that audience and society can have on their films and purse strings, studios and filmmakers started to show test screenings and altered their movies based on feedback.

But toward the end of the 1910's, the gender roles for men and women were changing in a post-war world. The scope of film and entertainment would soon be forever changed with sound and the creation of the *talkie*.

Socially and culturally, civil rights were thrust into the forefront. African Americans who returned from war still faced demeaning inequality and were demanding equality. Millions of women went to work, replacing men who had shipped off to war. Those women who couldn't work in factories and store fronts, worked from home, making bandages, and knitting socks. The gravitas of women in the workplace and having a direct impact on the survival of the home front was a direct correlation to President Woodrow Wilson admitting that women's suffrage was good for the war effort. And thus, women finally claiming the ability to vote.

The women's suffrage movement was depicted in many films of the early 1900's. For example, the 1912 film, *Your Girl and Mine* featured real-life footage of suffragettes marching and advocating for their cause. *The Suffragette* tells the story of woman who joins the women's suffrage movement and fights for the right to vote. (Unknown, The Sufragette, 1913) In fact, this movie and movement were so widely popular that there was a recent remake in 2015 and featured a female character classic hero when a young working mother stood up for the rights of women to vote.

(Gavron, 2015) The inspirational story of women fighting for equal rights.

The feminist movement was alive and profitable. A Woman Rebels (Sandrich, 1936) tells the story of a woman who wishes to remain independent though the path is riddled with obstacles. The hero eventually lands a job at a woman's magazine and discusses the issues of the day like gender equality.

In Heroes for Sale (Wellman, 1933) a Veteran returns home with an opium addiction and hits rock bottom only to be rescued and find purpose in supporting a female played by Loretta Young. There are examples of feminism through this time-period, proving that audiences were ready for heroines to take the lead.

Society was establishing their own moral and societal compass would serve as the precursor not only to the country's social norms, also the country's entertainment requirements. Religion played a crucial role in shaping moral values. We can clearly see the effect of religious beliefs, moral values, and social norms in what the people were seeking for their entertainment. Films like *Robin Hood, Oliver Twist* and *The Ten Commandments*.

There is one film that combines all the elements of the 1920's, *The Ten Commandments*, by Director Cecil B. DeMille. This 1923 film tells the story of two brothers and their different views on morality against the backdrop of the Roaring Twenties, also blurs the lines of class and executes the goods triumph over evil.

This is accomplished with a 2-part story. The first part tells the story of Moses leading Jewish slaves from Egypt and sets up the second part of the story set in modern (1920's) in San Francisco. The same two-brothers rival for the affection of a woman and the commandments are used to rate the moral scorecard of the brothers. Biblical tales were finding a home on the big screen. Often with tropes of betrayal, punishment, redemption, discovery, and triumph.
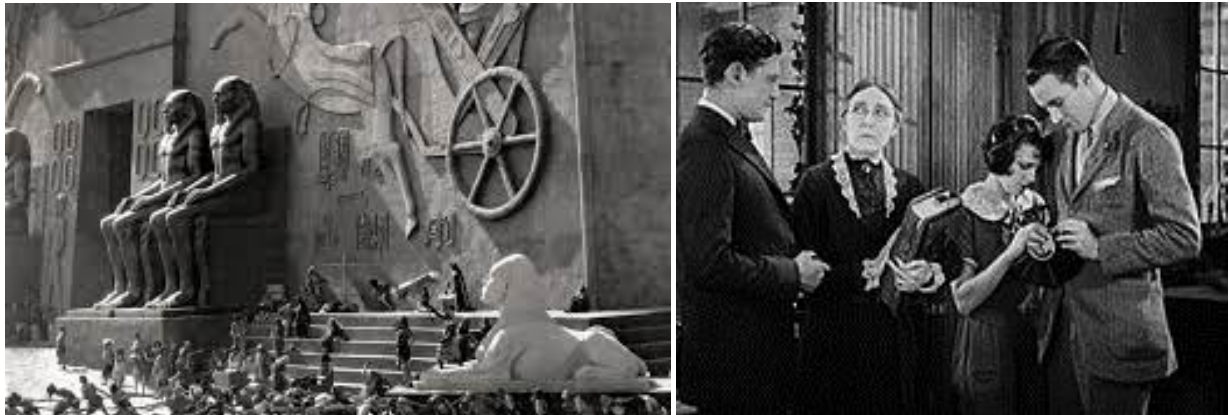
Left: The epic sets of *The Ten Commandments* with over 2,500 extras and part 1 of the story. Right: Part 2 of the 1923 Ten Commandments movie that takes place in San Francisco. (DeMille, 1923)

Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ by Fred Niblo, Charles Brabin and J.J. Cohn is another example of societies need to see their morals reflected in their entertainment. Ben Hur is betrayed by his friend and sentenced to slave labor in the Roman mines. Ben never forgets where he came from and shows kindness to his friends and defiance to his enemies which serves him well through his servitude. Eventually Ben claims victory over those who betrayed him and experiences triumph when reunited with his family.

But society (*and entertainment*) wasn't all black and white during this time of spiritualism and moral righteousness. A new trend was starting to examine equality in class segregation and the whispers that the class ceiling should be shattered were growing louder.

In the Douglas Fairbanks version of *Robin Hood*, the noble thief who steals from the rich and provides for the poor establishes the idea of good succeeding over evil, giving light to the concept of anti-establishment'ism.

In this age, heroes aren't born – they are made.

(Lundegaard, 2010)

Oliver Twist. A young boy who is born into unfortunate circumstances is orphaned at birth. Oliver struggles through most of his life but rebels against the evil deeds of his masters. Oliver learns right and wrong and is rewarded with the two things he longed for, family and fortune.

The upheaval and uneasiness, the depressing frugality were affecting society in general. People were looking for light, love. On a quest for "*fun, fashion and frolicking.*" **Invalid source specified.**

Historians have tracked the spark of the Roaring 20's to Harlem, New York, and the Harlem Renaissance. Many African Americans were traveling North to escape the Jim Crow laws of the South. This migration was most felt in Harlem where writers, musicians, artists, and thinkers began to come together to discuss their ideas and share their work.

This movement grew so powerful and countrywide that it began to shape the political and social climates and is a major reason the 1920's are considered to be a time of great social and cultural change. The shift from religious constraint to a more open society is mirrored in entertainment as well with the shift from the silent-film era to talkies.

Invalid source specified. A new era of entertainment is coming.

The Jazz Singer (Crosland, 1927) was the first feature-length film with synchronized dialogue. Its release marked the end of the silent-film era. This ground-breaking film also helped to blur color lines that many in the country were still trying to understand.

The film depicts a young man from a devout Jewish family who defies his father's wishes and religious traditions to pursue his dream of becoming a jazz singer. But when his ambition conflicts with his heritage he must find a way to make peace within himself and his career. The character of Jack Robin finds success singing jazz by performing in blackface. A tradition that changed a Caucasian person into a person of African descent.

Invalid source specified. Al Jolson performing in black face
in a scene from the 1927 film, *The Jazz Singer*.

This film was loosely based on the life of Al Jolson's life growing up in New York City. The fascination with city living and the jazz life fueled the desire for people to join in the jazz era around the country. The Jazz Singer reflected the conflict between tradition and modernity of society as people were struggling to reconcile traditional values with change inspired by urbanization, industrialization, and mass culture movements.

But the United State had no time for any movements. Women's rights, Racial equality had no place in the hearts and minds of Americans as they were pulling themselves out of the depression and into another World War.

Germany and Italy were gaining power on the world stage by invading France and England, Europe was inspired by the words of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, "We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the hills; we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe... with all its power and might, step forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old." (Churchill, 1940)

To combat the heightened fear of entering another world war, Hollywood embraced animation. Animated features such as *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Bambi* (1942) reflected societies ambition for social ambition for social change as Bambi matures through the changing seasons, so does our youthful nation fresh from the depravity of the Depression.

The Depression played absolute havoc on the roles of fathers and wives because every single person who was able to work had a responsibility to provide for the family. Ideologically the roles of fathers and sons are examined in *Pinocchio*. The tale of *Pinocchio* was also a story of rebirth and coming into one's own. To be a real boy is to be free – a hopeful goal for the nation that will soon go through a most tumultuous time.

Animation wasn't the only genre gaining audience members and making an impact in society. The larger Hollywood studios held contracts with stars, producers, and writers. They were able to create product quickly and even more importantly, make it timely. The post-Depression Hollywood rebound created some genres and films that produced icons that are still honored today. The Marx Brothers, who sought to create laughable moments often at the expense of the rich and great musicals like 42nd Street, the talents of Fred Astaire, Clarke Gable, Katherine Hepburn and more showed filmed were a true representation of the people.

Everything changed for America with the unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. For the first time, the movie industry and the entire nation had one clear, aligned goal. The industry stood up and aligned their lives to serve the war effort. The United States participation into World War II was now inescapable. The entry into another World War only exasperated the bias the people were fighting across the nation as the call for factory workers went out in support of the war effort. In the darkest time the nation has experienced until this moment, the President permitted the movie studios to remain open and operating as long as they continued to support the war effort.

Studios accomplished this Presidential imperative by creating product that would increase morale, educate the masses, and encourage patriotism and love for America. But the government was not the only thing Hollywood studios had to work with. The Bureau of Motion Pictures, a division of the Office of War Information were spouting their own form of propaganda concerning the unrealistic representation of war that the major studios were presenting to the public. They introduced the Government Information Manual for the Motion Pictures (Information, 1942) which included six themes:

I.   The Issues: Why we fight. What kind of peace will follow victory?
II.   The Enemy: Whom we fight. The nature of our adversary.
III.   The United Nations and Peoples: With whom we are allied in fighting. Our brothers-in-arms.

IV.   Work and Production: How each of us can fight. The war at home.
V.   The Home Front: What we must do. What we must give to win the fight.
VI.   The Fighting Forces: The job of fighting men at the Front

These guidelines were meant to bolder the American spirit and commitment to the war effort. The Office of War Information and Hollywood had people around the country convinced that participation and sacrifice for the war effort was the only patriotic course of action as funding the war was now the top priority of the nation. The sale of war bonds was funding everything from bullets to socks to soldiers salaries and everyone was expected to play their part.

"Daffy the Commando," was produced by Warner Brothers/Looney Tunes in 1943 depicting Daffy Duck behind the enemy lines in Nazi Germany succeeds through humor.


"Uberkomt von Vultur" from "Daffy the Commando"
(Meyer, 2017)

Yes, even the United States fell victim to propaganda. Comic books, like *Captain America*, were also used to support patriotic sale of war bonds and fuel patriotism. There are direct links between Hollywood and the war effort. There was an increase in recruitment and for the first time, films were able to reach viewers on an emotional and physical level because there was sound to go with the images creating an extremely valuable form of propaganda. Although there were restrictions on what movie studios could show, the films that were produced gave a watered-down version of reality.

Propaganda affected all of the movie studios, but Walt Disney actually started to profit from war effort despite losing a large group of animators to service. The animators that remained were given freedom to tell stories they couldn't tell in full-length feature formats but with Government oversight, shorts and military reels were giving the animation giant purpose.
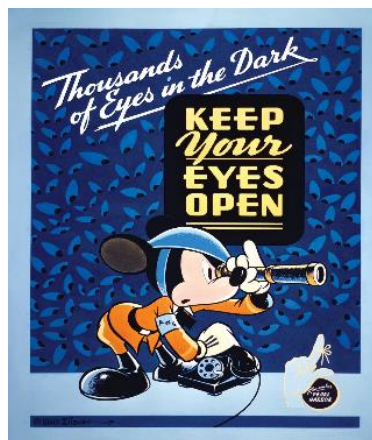
The US Government also used their might and recruited animators and other studios to create training films for the large number of recruits going through basic training. One of the most endearing examples of this collaboration is Private Snafu.

SNAFU – an acronym for <u>S</u>ituation <u>N</u>ormal <u>A</u>ll <u>F</u>ucked <u>U</u>p.

Soldiers learned from Private Snafu's bad behavior.

(Studios, 1943)

Hollywood films were being used around the world to educate and entertain soldiers. The USO and military branches used film as a way of increasing morale of the soldiers away from home.

When the Atomic bomb dropped in 1945 and persuaded Germany and Japan to surrender, the war may have been over, but a new race started. A race among the Hollywood studios to be the first to release a major motion picture bringing the story of the atomic bomb to the people. MGM and Paramount both released atom bomb films, however, MGM was able to release their version first. *The Beginning or the End* released in 1947 told the story from the perspective of a time capsule retrieved several hundred years into the future.

1945 also witnessed one of the most successful "sex hygiene" films of all time. *Mom and Dad* was condemned by the National Legion of Decency; a Catholic organization founded with the goal of promoting moral and wholesome entertainment and vowed to promote the values of Catholicism in films.

Hygiene films sought to educate the public on the dangers of promiscuous relationships, nudity and other unnatural practices that were too dangers for the moral level of the United States. The idea of sex education in film dates back to 1917, when the CTCA (Commission on Training Camp Activities) introduced a series of short films on sexually transmitted disease prevention. Mom and Dad, telling the story of a young girl who has sex with a pilot who later dies, and the young girl becomes a pariah for the pregnancy. The film has a collection of endings included depending on where the film was being played, but all show the fate of the baby either as a stillborn or being put up for adoption.

According to Kendra Cherry, "Heroism involves prosocial, altruistic actions that involve an element of personal risk or sacrifice." (Cherry, 2020) This is the type of hero that we see most in post-war America. People who perform heroic acts tend to feel confident in themselves and in their abilities. They know they possess the capability to handle any situation or crises. These **All-American heroes** tend to be positive thinkers by nature and maintain a higher tolerance for risk. These heroes are not steadfast in their ways, they change, they evolve... even after setbacks.

World War II continues to present moviegoers with some of the most memorable heroes in cinematic history. This very specific genre of hero travels through the story with a very clear line of right and wrong until they get muddled and then valor must prevail. War heroes are not always moral heroes.

The Sands of Iwo Jima, one of the first films to feature this revised war hero following World War II, stars John Wayne and depicts the Battle of Iwo Jima, and the rugged heroism of the Marines who fought there. This film not only reflected societies patriotism at the time, it also unfortunately reflects the racial segregation and discrimination in the United States at the time with the portrayal of black soldiers.

Entertainment Weekly recently ranked the "Best World War II movies of all time," and a great majority of the movies listed feature this new kind of war hero. *Saving Private Ryan* brings the viewer into the action of the invasion of Normandy. The ruthless violence and death affect men differently. *The Great Escape* tells the story of three Allied POW's planning on their escape from a German camp. *Schindler's List, The Pianist, The Imitation Game, The Bridge on the River Kwai* are some of my favorites of this genre. This consistent representation of war-heroes or All-American heroes stands the test of time.

Only two short years after the end of World War II, the United States was being swept up in another event that continues to shape society and our movies today.

June 14, 1947, rancher W.W. "Mac" Brazel and his son Vernon were driving across their land north of Roswell, New Mexico, when they came across wreckage that appeared metallic. The find was reported to the authorities and as the report made its way up chain of command, The Rosewell Army Airfields 509th Composite Group collected all of the wreckage and claimed they had captured a flying saucer!

By the end of 1947 there were nearly 300 alleged UFO sightings.

The idea of visitors from another planet were long held to be science fiction, but this discovery was bringing Science Fiction to reality. Isaac Asimov said that,

"...anyone could see that science fiction writers were not merely dreamers and crackpots after all, and that many of the motifs of that class of literature were now permanently part of the newspaper headlines." And with this popularity we welcome the Golden Age of Science Fiction and the 1950's.

> *"The whole earth is ploughed by the exploding shells and the holes are filled with water, and if you do not get killed by the shells you may drown in the craters."*
> -Rudolf Binding, German Captain, October 1914

Chapter 6

Inhuman, Scientist and Feminist Heroes

Movie-going audiences were profoundly affected by the atom bomb, the possibility that humans are not alone in the universe, the Roswell incident and like events. The Golden Age of Science Fiction also introduces us to a new types of hero characters including the **inhuman hero** and the **scientist hero**.

The Scientist hero is often misunderstood and often uses their intelligence to try and save the world by stepping into an unfamiliar role of protagonist and eventually growing into the hero. Science Fiction films started to include actual science and fostered the validity of the scientist.

Dr. Strangelove and Dr. Seth Brundle are both prime examples of the Scientist Hero.

Dr. Strangelove from *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Kubrick, Dr. Strangelove or How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb, 1964) finds a way for the human race to survive nuclear fallout. Whereas, Dr. Seth Brundle from *The Fly* ((Neuman, 1958) tries to master the art of teleportation when a common house-fly enters the pod with him and merges the scientist and fly together... when he realizes his mistakes and accepts being destroyed to protect his love and his enemy, Dr. Brundle makes the heroic choice.

Left: Dr. Strangelove and Right: Dr. Seth Brundle are examples of Scientist Heroes

A common element of the scientist hero is trying to save or better the world using their inventions which go terribly wrong and then have to step-up to sacrifice for the good of

man. There are movies like *This Island Earth* (Newman, 1955)where aliens come to Earth to recruit scientists who will help them win the war on their home planet. Even aliens need scientist heroes!

This Island Earth (Newman, 1955)

Then we come to a very unique hero ideology… **the inhuman hero**.

The inhuman hero can include animals, aliens, robots. Robots heroes are designed and built to protect humanity or can be built to accomplish tasks be it good or evil and can turn on their creators upon realizing the creators true intentions. Like many hero character types, robots learn through experience. Robby the Robot actually short-circuited when ordered to kill a human being in the 1956 film, Forbidden Planet. (Wilcox, 1956)

Forbidden Planet (Wilcox, 1956) Movie Poster

Additionally, Robbie the Robot reflected the fascination with technology, space and the possibility of space exploration during the 1950's. *Forbidden Planet* was set in the future and depicted a time when humans were capable of traveling to other planets and encountering alien life forms. Robbie was a product of this futuristic vision and represented the possibilities of space exploration. Society during the 1950's was experiencing a period of technological advancement and people believed that science could solve society's problems.

These stories have an uncanny ability to reflect the fears of society. Take for example, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, which echoes society's desire for peace after a long and brutal war. *Planet of the Apes*, explores what could a post-nuclear Earth, mirroring the fears of a country that lived through the arms race. Some consider the topsy-turvey society presented in the film serves as a mirror of the ongoing fight for Civil Rights in America. Another brilliant example of how Science Fiction serves as a true reflection of society in the film is *The Time Machine*. By traveling to other time periods, one must realize that if we do not change mistakes of the past, we are doomed to repeat them.

This reflection of society is what creates accessible and relatable hero characters, however, critically acclaimed often do not reach success in the box office. There was however one successful Science Fiction film that also mirrored the fears, expectations, and beliefs of society, *2001: A Space Odyssey* was one of the 10 most profitable films of the 1960's and explored the relationship between humans and technology. A computer named HAL 9000 with artificial intelligence has the ability to both help and harm humans. This belief reflected societal concerns of the time about the increasing reliance on technology and the potential dangers of technological advancement.

The early years of the Golden Age of Science Fiction were not kind to women. Women were often portrayed as secondary characters or as damsels in distress, while men were the heroes who saved the day. This reflects the traditional interpretation of gender roles of the time.

Society was certainly experiencing one its greatest challenges. A profound cultural and ideological shift. From a conservative society to one with greater forms of free expression. Look at the hero character types in some of the top films of the 1960'swhich show the widening gap between the classes and the generations. The generation gap is evident in films like *Easy Rider* and *The Graduate*. These films highlight the changing social, political, ideological, and religious shifts younger generations were experiencing. These new ideas also us a new kind of hero, **the feminist!**

Four of the top ten grossing films of the 1960's introduces us to strong female heroic characters. *The Sound of Music, My Fair Lady, Cleopatra* and *Funny Girl* were all critical and financial successes and more importantly, brought strong heroic female characters

to the masses. All of these women wanted to make their voices louder and step up from the perceived victimhood to be a more vital part of society… many of these women heroes who hailed from negative social backgrounds, growing up in low-income areas and family histories that were psychologically painful and tormenting. Women were becoming seen as equals, for better or worse.

Left to Right: Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison in *My Fair Lady*, Elizabeth Taylor as *Cleopatra* and Barbara Streisand in F*unny Girl* are all examples of women taking the lead in films.

In *Bonne and Clyde*, Bonnie Parker was a true equal member of society.

One film that portrays the cultural and generational gap between white and black Americans during the 1960's is *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Released during the Civil Rights movement, which aimed to end racial segregation and discrimination in the United States, the film presents an interracial couple. John Prentice and Joanna Drayton's relationship is tested, and the film explores these challenges and prejudices the couple faces from their families and society as a whole. On top of these representations the film also supports the growing importance of strong female characters. Joanna Drayton played by Katherine Houghton is strong and independent. She defies social norms and stands up for her beliefs. The hero of the film is Mr. Drayton, Joanna's father who changes from abhorrent behavior to standing up and supporting the relationship. Love can conquer all is pivotal theme and the heroes that emulate are a direct reflection of the society of the time.

People were searching for their American dream.

People were searching for their version of freedom, saying no to materialistic wealth and overall peace. The youth of the 1960's was searching for their individualism while pursuing happiness and freedom. The hippie movement as it would come to be known was full of young adults who were escaping what they felt was ideological entrapment. Youth wanted to escape reform and seek change.

Look at some films that speak to the heroes of the youth during this time period. *Bye Bye Birdie, Beach Blanket Bingo, Where the Boys Are* and *Beach Party*. Musicals in general offer the viewer a window showing us just not how things are but the internal emotions and how things are experienced but how they are perceived.

Bye Bye Birdie is among the most widely receive movie musicals from this period. In this story, youth in a suburban town are being affected by technology and Rock N' Roll music while parents are trying to foster their children into respectable adults.

Mirroring the feeling, emotions, and stresses that this new form of Rock N' Roll is having on youth and parents who believed that America was changing for the worse. The ideological trajectory of America was in fact shifting to include new ideals and opening the doors of acceptance. Americans wanted to be free from war, free from violence. *Bye Bye Birdie* is a reflection of those wants and desires. *Bye Bye Birdie* presents this is a novel way… a super-popular rock n' roll star is drafted by the Army; his managers convince him to make a trip to a small town in Ohio and bid farewell to his biggest fan on the Ed Sullivan show. This story deals with racism, sexism and many other societal constraints that are still plaguing society today.

Other movie musicals reflect society's cultural climate include *The Sound of Music* and *West Side Story* exploring themes of civil rights, feminism, and the Vietnam War.

In a New Yorker article from October 13, 1967, movie reviewer Pauline Kael describes film's ability to reflect society while reviewing the monster-hit *Bonnie and Clyde*. "*Our best movies have always made entertainment our anti-heroism of American life; they bring to the surface what, in its newest forms and fashions, is always just below the surface.*" She further explains, "*You only live once, the theme was an indictment of society, the forces of order will not give the outcast a chance – We have the right to live!*"

These cultural shifts towards gender roles and sexuality sum up the themes of the latter half of the 1960's. The outcasts who were long remanded to the shadows were now stepping into the light, for better or worse.

Chapter 7

Social Heroes and Feminist Heroes

> *"War may sometimes be a necessary evil, but no matter how necessary, it is always evil, never good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children."* - President Jimmy Carter

These words from President Jimmy Carter in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize sum up the essence of the 1970's. People learning how to be live, love and move-on in a post-war world.

Society was growing very anti-government mainly due to the United States controversial involvement in Vietnam. As the war dragged on, the loss of life was significant. People were frustrated with government, especially the White House after the Watergate scandal, which led to the downfall of Richard Nixon. There was little to no confidence in the institution of government which was further exploited by the growing economic inequality, the growing high levels of poverty and unemployment believing that government wasn't doing enough to help the people.

Personal liberation and rebellion against authority are major themes of the 1970's. With a greater acceptance of the immorality of racial segregation, marginalized people continued the fight for equality led by militant groups like the Black Panther Party.

These paradigm shifts and acceptance of the African American Experience introduced us to movies like *Shaft* (Parks, 1971), *Sounder* (Ritt, 1972) and *Blacula* (Crain, 1972)that celebrated the black equality movement. Other movies like *Superfly* were reflecting the harsh realities of urban poverty and crime.

The 1972 film was set in Harlem, New York which was one of the most segregated and poor neighborhoods in New York City ripped the veil off the poverty, violence, drug addiction, systemic racism and discrimination African Americans were experiencing at the time. Superfly depicted a world in which the police and other authorities were largely ineffective or corrupt. In which people were forced to take matters into their own hands to survive so this community worked together to create opportunities where none existed before by starting businesses,

advocating for better schools, housing, and job opportunities as well as other forms of discrimination and police brutality.

Brutality and violence were a sign of the times as the harsh realities of the Vietnam War were being broadcast on screens across America. People were morally opposed to America's involvement in the war because there was lack of clarity of why America was there. Some people believed that the war was a waste of resources. But the largest impact the use of chemical weapons on soldiers and lack of support for the soldiers upon their return home. Vietnam War movies such as *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, Apocalypse Now, 1979) and *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978) depicted the horrors of the war and the toll it took on soldiers and civilians alike. Francis Ford Coppola directed a surreal journey into the horror and madness of the Vietnam War in *Apocalypse Now* whereas, *The Deer Hunter*, directed by Michael Cimino, follows the lives of three steelworkers from Pennsylvania who are drafted to fight. The movie exposes the mental and psychological told that war takes on soldiers and their difficulty of reintegrating into society after they return home.

The use of conscription was extremely controversial, and many saw it as a violation of their rights which led to protests and demonstrations against the war. The anti-war movement was fueled in part by the activism of college and university students, who organized protests, sit-ins, and other forms of civil disobedience. They were motivated by a sense of idealism and a desire for social change and believed that the Vietnam War represented everything that was wrong with American society and politics.

The end of the Vietnam War served as a profound turning point in American society. A new mistrust of the government and military served a stark contrast to the military heroes from World War I and World War II. The war exposed the deep divisions in society and challenged traditional attitudes an sparked the counterculture movement.

This counterculture movement and sexual liberation movement that grew out of the anti-war movement was reflected in films such as *Hair* (Forman, Hair, 1979)and *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Brooks R. , Looking for Mr. Goodbar, 1977).

"*We believe ordinary people can do extraordinary things. We believe most of the heroes in the world are everyday people, just like you.*" The Heroic Imagination Project believes that it is possible to train people to act in more heroic ways by taking on bullying, improving workplace culture or confronting discrimination. (Heroic Imagination Project) When you take into consideration all the anti-Government, anti-war and counterculture movements you see that everyday people were taking on the mantle of hero in their own way. Standing up against

the Government, against war against whatever injustices they felt were being thrust upon them.

Looking for Mr. Goodbar (Brooks R. , Looking for Mr. Goodbar, 1977) tells the story of Theresa Dunn who is searching for meaning and fulfillment in her life but also serves as a warning against the darker side of this new sexual revolution and the dangers of absolute freedom.

Richard Gere and Diane Keaton in *Looking For Mr. Goodbar* is an example of the counterculture movement in film. **Invalid source specified.**

The counterculture movement following the end of the Vietnam War helped bring attention to feminist issues including reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and sexual harassment. Films including *Norma Rae* and *Kramer vs. Kramer* tackle the issues of the day by exploring the changing social values of the time.

In the 1979 movie *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Benton, 1979) directed by Robert Benton explored how changing gender roles were affecting the family unit at home and in the workplace, when Ted Kramer is forced to take on the role of single father after his wife leaves him. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the divorce rather in the United States increased from 2.6 per 1,000 people in 1960 to 5.3 per 1,000 people in 1970. With the growing divorce rate *Kramer vs. Kramer* is one of the first films to address the issue of parental rights in custody disputes.

But divorce wasn't the only issue being debating in the courts, in society and on our film screens. The 1978 film, *An Unmarried Woman* (Mazursky, 1978) directed by Paul Mazursky, reflected the growing feminist movement that was challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. This groundbreaking film tells the story of a strong and independent female protagonist who doesn't need a man to

define her identity but also a female who is sexually liberated and unapologetic about her desires.

The strong female was growing in popularity in society and on the screen with films across multiple genres and give us roles for females that are still regarded as groundbreaking to this day.

Strong female character in film during the 1970's

Klute, 1971, mystery thriller. A call girl helps a private investigator solve a missing persons case. (Pakula, 1971)

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, 1975. Nurse Ratched stands her own ground against a rebellious male protagonist. (Forman, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, 1974)

Annie Hall, 1977, romantic comedy. An independent woman who challenges traditional gender roles. (Allen, 1977)

Alien, 1979, science fiction. Ripley battles a deadly lifeform in space. (Scott R. , Alien, 1979)

The general sense of disillusionment in society was playing the leading role on our movies throughout the 1970's. Movies like the *Godfather* (Coppola, The Godfather, 1973)and *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, Taxi Driver, 1976) reflect this corruption and decay that was pervasive in many areas of life.

There is one satirical comedy released in 1974 that includes all the prejudices and stereotypes that society was fighting for. *Blazing Saddles* (Brooks M. , Blazing Saddles, 1974) takes on racism, political correctness, and the Hollywood machine by exposing and satirizing the growing sensitivity and political correctness of the time.

Cleavon Little and Gene Wilder break
stereotypes in Mel Brooks Blazing Saddles
(Brooks M. , Blazing Saddles, 1974)

All these trends in society and in our movies was not being widely accepted across all cultures and groups. The 1970's saw far-right groups were gaining ground by exploiting grievances about economic inequality, crime, and corruption. More conservative people were upset about the decline in traditional values and family roles. Some conservatives accused Hollywood of being part of the liberal conspiracy to undermine traditional values and promote a leftist

agenda and fought to cut arts funding, including movies. To combat this perceived growing liberalism, conservatives fought for and established the modern ratings system of the Motion Picture Association of America which was intended to provide guidance to parents about the content of movies and to prevent children from seeing movies that were deemed too violent or sexual.

This period of social and economic change that challenged traditional norms and values would soon face new technologies, social movements and growing forms of inequality and division.

"Be your own hero, it's cheaper than a movie ticket."
– Douglas Horton

Chapter 8

The Action Hero

> *"A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer."*   - Ralph Waldo Emerson

And now… one of my most treasured time-periods in film-history.

Why? We are always enamored with the heroes of our formative years. Though I will concede that the 1980's birthed a machine to create movies for the masses, high-concept films that had skyrocketing budgets and even larger returns and would set the foundation for Hollywood film standards for years to come.

Many aspects of this mass appeal machine can be attributed to a new phenomenon call MTV. What the All-Music Television Network created was a outlet for sheer entertainment without the need for a higher-class education. Originally pitched to executives as "*radio with pictures,*" MTV was eventually given the green light because recording companies would supply the music videos for free! Midnight on August 1, 1981, MTV officially launched and with this new genre launched the careers of some Hollywood heavyweights including David Fincher and Michael Bay.

Highlighting artists from around the world MTV served as a cultural springboard for what younger members of society wanted to see. This new style of filmmaking emphasized music, fast-paced editing, and a fresher visual style. Films like *Flashdance* (Lyne, Flashdance, 1983), *Footloose* (Ross H. , Footloose, 1984), and *Top Gun* (Scott T. , 1986) all feature music-video style sequences that were incorporated into the story.

Flashdance and *Footloose* not only embraced this new MTV style of editing and featuring music as a prominent aspect of storytelling, but they also represented a rising subculture of the working class and someone who could find success despite humble beginnings. *Footloose* also highlights the rise of the female protagonist in film and in society.

In the film *Flashdance*, Alex, is a strong, independent woman who dreams of becoming a professional dancer while working as a welder in a Pittsburgh steel mill and is determined to succeed on her own terms. Whereas, *Footloose* explores the growing tension between the city and suburbia when protagonist Ren moves from the city to a small Midwest town where dancing and rock music are banned. *Footloose* also explores the widening generation gap where youth were viewed as rebelling against the traditional values of their parents.

Left: *Flashdance* (Lyne, Flashdance, 1983), Right*: Footloose* (Ross H. , Footloose, 1984)

These themes would remain prevalent throughout the 1980's and introduce us to our main hero character of this generation, the **action hero** and the **unlikely hero**. Every archetype has a pivotal role to play both in our entertainment but also in our society. The heroes in our movie's express societies consensus of the human condition. "*They have a part to play in institutions, movements, political regimes, historical periods and everyday life.*" (Klapp, 1954) Heroes indicate our societies approval or disapproval of the role itself.

Take a look at the Top 10 Grossing Movies of the 1980's. (www.imdb.com)

1. *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* - Budget 10.5 million - Gross 796 million
2. *Star Wars: Episode V* - The Empire Strikes Back - Budget 33 million - Gross 538.3 million
3. *Star Wars: Episode VI* - Return of the Jedi - Budget 32.5 million - Gross 475.3 million
4. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* - Budget 48 million - Gross 474.3 million
5. *Batman* - Budget 35 million - Gross 411.5 million
6. *Indiana Jones & the Raiders of the Lost Ark* - Budget 18 million - Gross 390 million
7. *Back to the Future* - Budget 19 million - Gross 381 million
8. *Top Gun* - Budget 15 million - Gross 356.8 million
9. *Rain Man* - Budget 25 million - Gross 354 million
10. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* - Budget 28 million - Gross 333 million

Most of these films feature a tough hero character that was capable of taking on any challenge or obstacle. John McClane (McTiernan, 1988), Indiana Jones ((Spielberg, Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, 1981), Martin Riggs (Donner, Lethal Weapon, 1987), RoboCop (Verhoeven, RoboCop, 1987) all represent these often gruff heroes who are able to succeed through strength and perseverance.

These heroes all share certain similarities that we see in movies across the 1980's. Unlikely heroes are often forced into a plan of action/journey by circumstances in which they have no say. Often these characters do not seek out fame, fortune or being the hero but eventually emerge triumphant.

In a recent online article, A. Featherquill further separates the unlikely hero in 7 smaller subsets of the archetype. (Featherquill, 2013)

7. **The Villain turned hero**. Whereas villains are supposed to be the cause of problems, this villain transforms into a hero albeit unwittingly. For example, Batman or Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker from the *Star Wars* series.

6. **The Accidental Hero who carries "unassuming brilliance."** Accidental heroes are usually presented in some humorous way or with a humorous stripe that makes up their whole person. They are often an 'every-man' type of character that is relatable and often stumbles into a heroic situation. Axel Foley from the soon to be reprised *Beverly Hills Cop* (Brest, Beverly Hills Cop, 1984) franchise fits into this hero mold. The character Axel Foley was first a criminal before straightening himself out and joining the NYPD. Continuously breaking the rules which eventually helps him track down and find retribution in saving his childhood friend who is being blackmailed and finding the persons responsible for the murder of another childhood friend.

Eddie Murphy as Axel Foley, an accidental hero
in *Beverly Hills Cop* (Brest, Beverly Hills Cop, 1984)

This blue-collar class of hero is extremely popular during this time period due to the disintegration of the middle class into lower classes. "*The safety net of social programs for the nation's poor were replaced by a safety net for the rich, speeding the decline of the middle class.*" (Morin, 1991) The countries financial and cultural find an odd battleground on the steps of the Hollywood movie studios.

Heroes like Axel Foley exhibit sound moral judgement and selflessness in the face of adversity. They served as a representation of the working and disappearing middle-class in America. It was the first time in many decades where children were not in a better place than their parents. "*Only those who start out at the top are likely to continue making good money throughout their working lives.*" (Semuels, 2016) This income inequality can be attributed to a decline in the power of unions who are finding it increasingly difficult to levy their combined power to pay raises for their members.

5. **The kid who beats them all.** Throughout the history of time, children have an uncanny belief that they are older and more mature than they really are. We all dream of the fun and excitement of having the run of the house by yourself – but in *Home Alone* (Columbus, Home Alone, 1990), a child is left to take on the mantle of protector. Perhaps a play on the adage of children growing up to fast but in a more juvenile way than in films like *Red Dawn* (Milius, 1984) and *Home Alone* highlight the plight of those who are often overlooked, forgotten, and taken for granted. There are even deeper meanings to this movie including Kevin's ability to "*do extraordinary things when there's no one around to tell him he can't.*" (Pai, 2017)

Other films that exemplify the child hero trope from the 1980's include, *The Goonies* (Donner, The Goonies, 1985), *The Outsiders* (Coppola, The Outsiders , 1983), and *Stand by Me* (Reiner, 1986).

4. **The Woman Warrior.** The 1980's present us with the first bevy of female warrior but interestingly they cover the physical warrior profile, this film era presents us with non-warrior type female heroes including Tess McGill from *Working Girl* (Nichols, Working Girl , 1988), Beth Horman from *Missing* (Costa-Gavras, 1982) and Dian Fossey from *Gorillas in the Mist* (Apted, 1988)

Gorillas in the Mist is based on the real-life and death of gorilla researcher, primatologist, and conservationist Dian Fossey. Through the character we learn of a staunch heroism that combines activist with organizational leadership for a specific cause.

Another real-life character of Beth Horman from the movie *Missing* details the journey of a wife searching for her journalist husband who was kidnapped while covering a coup in Chile. Similarly, Beth Horman is also an activist but uses her passion to enlist the help of those around her when confronted with resistance.

Then there's Tess McGill from Working Girl who is often taken advantage of in the world of business, takes her future into her own hands.

Now we can move on to the more physical (bad ass) female characters of the 1980's and one of my favorite female characters, Ellen Ripley from *Aliens* (Cameron, aliens, 1986). Cool headed, resilient, the character of Ripley has become an icon of female badassery because she never asked to be the hero but surpasses all expectations when she steps into those hero shoes.

Sigourney Weaver as Ripley in the film *Aliens*. (Cameron, aliens, 1986)

Additionally, there is Sarah Conner from *The Terminator* and Princess Leia from the *Star Wars* franchise who embody the physicality and mental aptitude to lead an army. All these women embody the shift of the increased number of women in the workplace. "*The participation in the work force of women between the ages of twenty-five and fourty-four soared from 15 to 71%*" according to research presented in The Atlantic. (Guilder, 1986) This paradigm shift included roles throughout the workforce from blue-collar work to management and roles traditionally occupied by men. This increased power move by women in society during the 1980's is also being felt in the education and at home.

At home, men were increasingly in support of stepping into the home maker role while mothers stepped into the role of bread winner. This is perfectly examined in the John Hughes movie *Mr. Mom* (Dragoti, 1983) where family man Jack Butler is laid off and switches roles to become a stay-at-home dad. This film illuminates the struggles of both roles and the shift of roles itself.

Left to Right: Teri Garr, Frederick Koehler,
Michael Keaton, Taliesin Jaffe, Courtney White
in *Mr. Mom* (Dragoti, 1983)

Women were becoming stronger as a group, battling for equality in pay, healthcare, and access. Many of these struggles continue to this day, but in Hollywood, the inference of a stronger female character permeates the landscape and continues to shape the role of women at work and at home.

Working Girl (Nichols, Working Girl , 1988) is a snapshot of the female empowerment movement of the 1980's, from the fashion to the music to the work itself. Writer Kevin Wade did such a great job exposing the world of business and the pitfalls that many women find themselves in from two very different perspectives. From the character Cyn, Tess McGill's longtime friend and co-worker comes a complacency to stay where you are. "*Sometimes I sing and dance around the house in my underwear. Doesn't make me Madonna. Never will."* Of course, by the end of the film, even Cyn wants to climb the corporate ladder. Whereas Tess McGill wants to improve herself and move forward for the whole sex, "*I'm trying to make it better! I'm not gonna spend the rest of my life working my mass off and getting nowhere just because I followed rules that I had nothing to do with setting up, OK?*"

3.**The Adorable Animal Savior** – Though not officially an Adorable Animal Savior, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Spielberg, E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, 1982) brings the American people an end to the innocence of their children, reflecting societies growing number of marriages ending in divorce and separation as the family. Elliott, Michael and Gertie struggle to find their place in the midst of their parents' divorce. Peter Bradshaw writes, "*A brilliant film about the alienated and powerless experience of being a child forced to absorb the scalding ironies of divorce; it works as a brilliant metaphor for this pain as well as a superb sci-fi adventure.*" (Bradshaw, 2002)

E.T. examines the search for belonging and purpose through the eyes of a child and an alien who is stranded on Earth and desperate to return home and in the end and wind-up rescuing each other. This film is able to capture the atmosphere of the suburban home during the early 1980's and presents us with the battle of innocent youth fighting

against the over-reaching government that wants to capture and destroy E.T. Up until this time, aliens were presented as evil creatures arriving on Earth to destroy and assimilate the human race. With this film we entertain the notion that we actually can be kind to each other without discrimination.

More traditional **Adorable Animal Savior** films include *An American Tail* (Bluth, An American Tail, 1986), *The Land Before Time* (Bluth, The Land Before Time, 1988), *K-9* (Daniel, 1989), *The Never-Ending Story* (Petersen, 1984), *Gremlins* (Dante, 1984) and making it in before 1990, *The Little Mermaid* (Clements, 1989).

Though these stories were intended for entertainment, they carried serious messages. *An American Tail* tackles racism and persecution, reflecting the wave of European immigrants traversing the oceans for a chance at a better life in America. Director Don Bluth was a staple of animated features of the 1980's with films including *All Dogs Go to Heaven* and *The Land Before Time*. Bluth also created the popular video games *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* which were among the first games where the player could control the animation. Although his films were never a critical success, his works are considered a staple of the 1980's animation movement.

Director, Animator and Storyteller, Don Bluth.

The Never-Ending Story compels the viewer to recognize that we cannot have imagination without reality. *Gremlins,* which won accolades for the animatronics proposes that American culture has a habit of destroying things that are innocent and pure, like a Mogwai. Mistakenly turning innocence into a monster, a Gremlin.

Then there is *The Little Mermaid*. On the surface you can say that *The Little Mermaid* examines the old questions, "*What do I want to be when I grow up?*" But this film also delves deeper into many societal issues. On one hand you have a young woman coming into her own, making her own decisions about her path in life and on the other hand you have the subjugation of the female race to the overbearing and patriarchal role of the man. There is the battle between siblings, challenges to the freedom of expression and the use of empathy, compassion and being aware of the big picture.

2. **Too extraordinary to become a hero (but think again!)** *Indiana Jones* (Spielberg, Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, 1981)*, Howard the Duck* (Huyck, 1986)*, The Punisher* (Goldblatt, 1989)*, Swamp Thing* (Craven, 1982)*, The Toxic Avenger* (1984, Michael Herz and Lloyd Kaufman)*, Robocop* (Verhoeven, RoboCop, 1987).

Though this trope includes a variety of genres including the superhero comedy… they all have similar heroes character types.

Melvin was a nerd, working at the local carwash and constantly bullied by the local gang until he is pushing into a vat of toxic waste, changing him, and creating *The Toxic Avenger*. A superhero who conquers the bad guys throughout the town. Like another comical hero, Howard, a duck from a planet in another dimension where intelligent life evolved from waterfowl instead of primates. Howard is a disappointment to his family and has no friends, like Melvin, Howard is also searching for his place in the world. *Howard the Duc*k also serves as the first full-length theatrical film starring a Marvel character!

Based on a comic book, Howard the Duck features a storyline that reflects society's the counterculture movement and touches on themes of sexuality, feminism, consumerism, and commercialization. All in critical flop but an audience favorite.

Howard is struggling in a world he doesn't understand which is similar to the feelings of many youths during the 1980's who felt disillusioned and lost in the face of growing economic fears. In fact, Howard often comments on the absurdities of human behavior and society. "*No duck is an island. And if fate sent me here to save Earth, then Howard the Duck is ready to fight!*" (Huyck, 1986)

We also see the shift in women's willingness to settle for characters that simply objects of desire. The character Beverly is depicted as a strong, independent woman who refused to be objectified. *Howard the Duck* is also able to capture the fears of society during the 1980's as the quest for material possessions, consuming goods and services was mirrored in the villains of the movie were a group who sought to use the Earth as a source for entertainment and profit.

Lea Thompson and Chip Zein in the Sci-Fi Cult
Classic, *Howard the Duck.*

Then there are the more dramatic **extraordinary heroes** like Officer Alex James Murphy's character in the science-fiction action movie, *Robocop.*

Officer Murphy was an ordinary cop who tries to battle the enemies of Detroit from small time thugs to major gangs. Murphy is tricked and mortally injured and is transformed into a cyborg crime fighting machine, the ED-209. But the double-crosses don't end there. The Robocop program employee Dick Jones is playing both sides (crime and law) to ensure there is always crime in Detroit. Eventually we see that Murphy's humanity and cyborg sides combine into the perfect hero who protects and serves the city of Detroit.

Peter Weller as the extraordinary
hero character Robocop. (Verhoeven, RoboCop, 1987)

Robocop is not only an example of the "too extraordinary to become a hero" trope. The film also reflects the very real issues of urban decay, corporate power and the militarization of the police force during the 1980's. Cities across the nation were declining due to corporate greed and growing poverty and unemployment numbers. In times of crises we look to law enforcement, however, the militarization of law enforcement as displayed in the film *Robocop* is also being explored as a growing number of instances of the police using excessive force are being reported.

1. **From weakling to badass**! There are many films from various genres whose heroes can align to this trope. *From The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, The Breakfast Club, 1985)to *St. Elmo's Fire* (Schumacher, St. Elmo's Fire, 1985)to *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Hughes, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, 1986), to *Sixteen Candles* (Hughes, Sixteen Candles, 1984)*, The Karate Kid* (Avildsen, 1984) and *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher, The Lost Boys, 1987) All these coming-of-age films are imbued with class structure struggles and the ideal that there are heroes in all of us.

The United States was desperately searching for heroes to emerge as is navigated a trepid 'Cold War' battle with the Soviet Union. The USSR served as the United States

largest villain and adversary. And the film world helped us to realize our fears and view the insurmountable obstacles of World War III in all genres.

The drama/action film, *Red Dawn* (1984) leveled the playing field of what war would look like if it happened to take place in our own back yard. Dan Aykroyd gave us the comedy, *Spies Like Us* (1985) about two U.S. government officials who stop a nuclear war. There's the classic Russian strength versus American courage tale in *Rocky IV* (1985). One of my favorite films that re-invigorates our fascination with the scientist 'nerd' hero character, *War Games* (1983), when "*a young man finds a back door into a military central computer in which reality is confused with game-playing, possibly starting World War III.*" This aspect of War being a game in which there are no winners is a trope carried through many of the war movies during the 1980's.

There was a very real fear of nuclear war during the 1980's and the film *War Games* reflects that fear felt by the United States. *War Games* also highlights the youth movement as the young people were gaining influence and importance in society. Young people were starting to realize the power they had in their voices and actions which are similar to the character of David Lightman played by Matthew Broderick who is often overlooked, misunderstood and ignored but uses his skillset to inflict change… for better or for worse.

The entire world was reeling from the this imposed fear of another World War.   What better way to escape the possibility of history repeating itself? Examine the failures and successes of the past.

Films like *Platoon* (Stone, Platoon, 1986), *Empire of the Sun* (Spielberg, Empire of the Sun, 1987), *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick, Full Metal Jacket, 1987), *Good Morning Vietnam* (Levinson, Good Morning, Vietnam, 1987), *Glory* (Zwick, 1989), *Born on the Fourth of July* (Stone, Born on the Fourth of July, 1989) and *Stripes* (Reitman I. , 1981) all take a different approach to the trope that war is devastating, destructive and should never be repeated.

In general, films of the 1980's served the cultural shifts including changes to gender roles, the family unit against a backdrop of nostalgia and a resurgence of traditional family values of the Regan years. The government sought to rekindle American's faith in their country. Hollywood captures this patriotism in films like *Top Gun, Glory* and *Rocky IV* where iconic where Americans must overcome adversity on their journey to becoming iconic American heroes.

Joseph Campbells heroes' journey is exemplified in the 1989 biographical anti-war drama, *Born on the Fourth of July*. This gripping drama written by Ron Kovic and directed by Oliver Stone details the life of Kovic's journey from patriotic youth to Vietnam War hero to dissuaded Veteran to anti-war activist.

Born on the Fourth of July examined with Campbell's Heroes Journey

Ordinary World: Kovic's upbringing in a very patriotic town were acts of war are glorified, celebrated and respected.

Call to Adventure: After two Marines speak at Kovic's High School on a recruiting campaign, Kovic enlists.

Refusal of the Call: Kovic's father tries to dissuade his son from enlisting because he is worried for his son's safety.

Meeting With the Mentor: Kovic's mother assures her son that he is doing the right thing.

Crosses the Threshold: Kovic's entry into the Vietnam war.

Tests, Allies and Enemies: Kovic's lines of right and wrong begin to blur.

Approach: Kovic struggles to find his purpose in Vietnam after an attack on an innocent village full of woman and children.

Ordeal: Kovic is wounded as he tries to rescue a baby from village that is being destroyed but is eventually saves and returns to the United States paralyzed.

Reward: At an anti-war rally, Kovic comes to understand that the American government and military that he worked his whole live to be a part of had deceived him.

The Road Back: Kovic learns he has a new path.

Resurrection: Kovic apologizes for the death of a soldier he mistakingly killed in battle.

Return with Elixir: Kovic realizes he can still make a difference in the world without being a soldier, joins an anti-war platform and eventually speaks at the Democratic National Convention.

Though this film journeys through a time before the 1980's, it absolutely reflects the morals and values of the American hero portrayed in the films and society of the time period.

> *"Today's classroom is less than ever insulated from the cultural environment, and we cannot ignore the pervasiveness of electronic mass media. Think about which has made a greater impression on the mass consciousness, myriad scholarly studies of the Normandy invasion or Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan?"* (Weinstein, 2001)

Chapter 9

The Unlikely Hero, Modern Hero, Anti-Hero, and Everyman Hero

History refers to the 1990's as the decade of peace, prosperity, and Internet! (Channel, 2023) Ironically, it also includes events that are still shaping the world we live in today. The Columbine shooting, Los Angeles Riots, Oklahoma City bombing, Waco, and Ruby Ridge. It was the decade of Disney's revival and introduced us to a new company called DreamWorks (SKG). Audiences demanded major blockbusters with ever improving special effects and ever-growing budgets. And there was new competition from independent production companies to win critical acclaim and audience favor. It was the decade of mega-stars, mega-demands, and mega-salaries for the likes of Sandra Bullock, Tom Cruise, and Tom Hanks.

Violence was more prevalent and graphic than ever before. There was backlash from educators, politicians and society in general who were seeing a rise in violent tendencies. Parents were starting to blame Hollywood for the connection between violence on screen and increasing violent behavior in schools and on the streets. By the mid-1990's, movie violence was being targeted and Congress tried to propose various bills that would ban violence on screen, introduce government approved warnings and restrict the use of federally held properties for filming violent scenes. Hollywood revolted against any form of restriction and instead started to create movies that showed American politics in a negative light.

The film *JFK* (Stone, JFK, 1991) proposed that financial and government leaders conspired to assassinate President Kennedy because he was planning on pulling troops out of the Vietnam War.

Falling Down (Schumacher, Falling Down , 1993) an ordinary man violently lashes out against flaws he sees in society.

Wag the Dog (Levinson, Wag the Dog, 1997), a media heavyweight and Hollywood producer join forces to fabricate a war in order to cover up a Presidential sex scandal shortly before an election.

And then there is *Natural Born Killers* by Oliver Stone (Stone, Natural Born Killers, 1994) who created this movie to highlight the fascination that Americans

had with celebrity, however art may have imitated life in a deadly way when Sarah Edmondson and Benjamin Darras embarked on a copycat killing spree. Victims of the killing spree filed lawsuits against the two assailants, but also included lawsuits against the film's director Oliver Stone and distributor Time Warner. (Thornton, 2022) Eventually, the suits against Oliver Stone and Time Warner were dismissed because there was no evidence that the director or film incited the violent acts of Benjamin Darras and Sarah Edmondson.

The 1990's was the decade of the **unlikely hero** and the **modern hero**.

These hero character types cover numerous genres including action, comedy, horror, family-friendly pictures, and drama and the like. But all these heroes share commonalities. The characters of the 1990's helped us escape a world where we were struggling with anxieties of global threats, the looming AIDS virus and terrorist attacks while trying remaining hopeful that the heroes we were seeing on the big screen could be any one of us. We wanted to be heroes in our own way.

Women would play a prominent role in society and also in the film. More women were pursuing higher education, joining the workforce, and finding their own identities outside of the home. In Hollywood, there was a growing number of females in decision-making and creative positions. Directors like Sofia Coppola, Kathryn Bigelow and writer, Jane Champion were able to imbue their feminine influence seen in 1990's movies that explored the female perspective and situations. *The Joy Luck Club* (Wang, 1993), *A League of Their Own* (Marshall P. , 1992), *Themla & Louise* (Scott R. , Thelma & Louise, 1991) and *Pretty Woman* (Marshall G. , 1990) all speak to feminist themes including gender equality and women's empowerment.

Women weren't the only societal group that was seeing growth and acceptance in society and on the big screen, the LGBT cinematic movement was born during the 1990's. Often refered to as the Gay 90's, Hollywood produced films LGBT friendly films like The Crying Game which played in direct response to the still lingering reach of The Hayes Code.

Many of the LGBT movies of the time were dramas, however, the real levee broke in Hollywood with the 1996 film, *The Birdcage* (Nichols, The Birdcage, 1996). This film by critically acclaimed and publicly respected director Mike Nichols (*Working Girl, The Graduate*) mirrored societies growing acceptance of homosexuality. The resulting mass appeal of *The Bird Cage* had to do with the universally accepted message… it's hard to raise children, rather than the characters within it. We have seen queer characters in film for years, but with

these characters there was no need to read between the lines. They were unforgiving and eventually learned that being true themselves was enough.

Left to Right: Christine Baranski, Robin Wililams,
Nathan Lane, Calista Flockhart and Dan Futterman
in the 1996 comedy smash, *The Birdcage*.

But there was also a darker, more invasive side to the Gay 90's in Hollywood. HIV & AIDS is thrust into pop culture in 1991 when Earvin "Magic" Johnson, professional NBA superstar announces he is HIV positive. This story takes the country by storm because AIDS/HIV was considered by the masses to be a disease of homosexual and drug addicted lives. Here is an International Superstar who contracted HIV from unprotected heterosexual sex. Cookie Johnson, Magic Johnson's wife reflects on the time before the famous press conference, "*At that time, people weren't educated. So they thought you couldn't touch people, you couldn't hug people*," she said, "*And I didn't want people to treat us like we were lepers.*" (Grove, 2021) This change to the trope of how AIDS/HIV can affect everyone, no matter your status or socio-economic class created a large shift in society's understanding of the disease. In the 1990's knowing someone who was HIV positive or had died of AIDS was commonplace. However, Magic Johnson, with his popularity became the first household name to bring these challenges into the homes of Americans of all classes and exposed to this death sentence.

In 1991, following the death of Freddy Mercury from AIDS-related illness at 45 years old and the creation of the Magic Johnson Foundation, the Freddy Mercury Foundation, the AIDS quilt there was enough power to start affecting change in the White House. This shift of inclusion of the HIV/AIDS in our society leads to the film, *Philadelphia* (Demme, Philadelphia, 1993). The first Hollywood film to foster AIDS empathy for the masses signaled a shift in Hollywood films towards

a more realistic depiction of people in the LGBT community was helmed by Hollywood heavyweights, Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington, which also could have added to the mass appeal of the film.

(Demme, Philadelphia, 1993) Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington (left to right)

"In this courtroom, Mr. Miller, justice is blind to matters of race, creed, color, religion, and sexual orientation. "

"With all due respect, your honor, we don't live in this courtroom though, do we?"
–Philadelphia

"Earning $200 million at the box office and several Oscar nods, the film was a catalyst for conversations, acceptance and other film projects that might never have made it out of the closet." (Millea, 2019)

By 1994, AIDS became the leading cause of death for <u>all</u> Americans aged 25-44 years old. (American Psychological Association, n.d.) The rising death toll leads to HIV/AIDS storylines being included in other projects on the television series *Will & Grace, Ellen* and the inclusion of AIDS/HIV, LGBT characters and topics of homophobia in many prime-time serials including *21 Jumpstreet, Beverly Hills 90210, Law & Order, Northern Exposure, NYPD Blue, ER, My So Called Life* and so many more.

Much of the 1990's was about doing something new on screen and in society. Trailblazing directors made their directorial debuts with experimental films that grew in popularity to become mainstream successes. Quentin Tarantino, David Russell, Noah Baumback, Wes Anderson, Sam Mendes, Todd Haynes. Anna Bogutskaya, "*Nineties cinema is not just Titanic and The Mummy and things that*

get put on TV on Saturday afternoons. There are so many interesting peaks and moments, and so many new voices and interesting young voices breaking through." (BFI) Representation on the screen was changing and becoming more inclusive.

Mirroring the AIDS/HIV crises was the drug epidemic. Methamphetamine use reaches epidemic proportions across the country. One in every 16 students entering high school had tried MDMA, one-quarter of students were daily cigarette smokers and one third were frequent binge drinkers. (Kaplan, 1998) The popularity of drug use led to mainstream movies that moved away from trafficking stories to drug use stories with films like *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996) and *The Basketball Diaries* (Kalvert, 1995).

Films about drugs can be categorized throughout the history of time. However, the physical act of drug use included in films was extremely rare and often edited to the point where it was merely a suggestion. *Trainspotting* shows the graphic, grotesque battle of someone's heroin journey. There was such high expectation with the arrival of *Trainspotting* that it appeared on influential industry magazine covers prior to the movies release. This film proved to audiences around the world that the heroin epidemic was not a secluded issue to lower class communities or other countries (Dublin) but was a worldwide, multi-cultural, multi-class level and supports the popularity of the everyman hero. (Byrne, 1996) We all experience degradation of some sort in our lives but it is our choice to climb out of the darkness that makes us who will be in the future.


Left: Ewan McGregor in Trainspotting (Boyle, 1996) Right: Leonardo DiCaprio in Basketball Diaries (Kalvert, 1995)Images like these were now being unedited in films and television.

The Basketball Diaries is based on the autobiographical writings of Jim Carroll, who vividly chronicled his disintegration from New York City high school basketball star to Bowery heroin addict and street hustler and the road back from ruin to acclaim as a writer and rocker.

The redemption of the **anti-hero/everyman hero** that fulfill the remaining hero character tropes of the 1990's.

There were a variety of genres that presented smart, yet accessible heroic characters that served a direct contrast to the supposed peace and prosperity of the 1990's. Films including *Flatliners* (Schumacher, Flatliners, 1990), *Jumanji* (Johnston J. , Jumanji, 1995), *Jurassic Park* (Speilberg, 1993)and *The Cro*w (Proyas, The Crow , 1994).

The Crow is a dark, action-filled film about revenge, justice and love and amazingly reflected the angst of young adults and the seismic shift of music during the 1990s. The film premiered after the highly successful *Batman* movie and one-week after Kurt Cobain's death, creating a perfect atmosphere for this cult classic. Additionally, there was the passing of Brandon Lee who was killed in an on-set accident with 3-days left to film. *The Crow* captured the emotional coldness of alienated youth and the rise of alternative, grunge music. Including bands like Nine Inch Nails, The Cure, Joy Division, Stone Temple Pilots, Violent Femmes and more. The music that played to the generation was now fueling stories on the big screen. The gloomy nature of the cinematography gave validity to the underserved alternative niche of society, plus the killer soundtrack boosted the popularity of this movie.
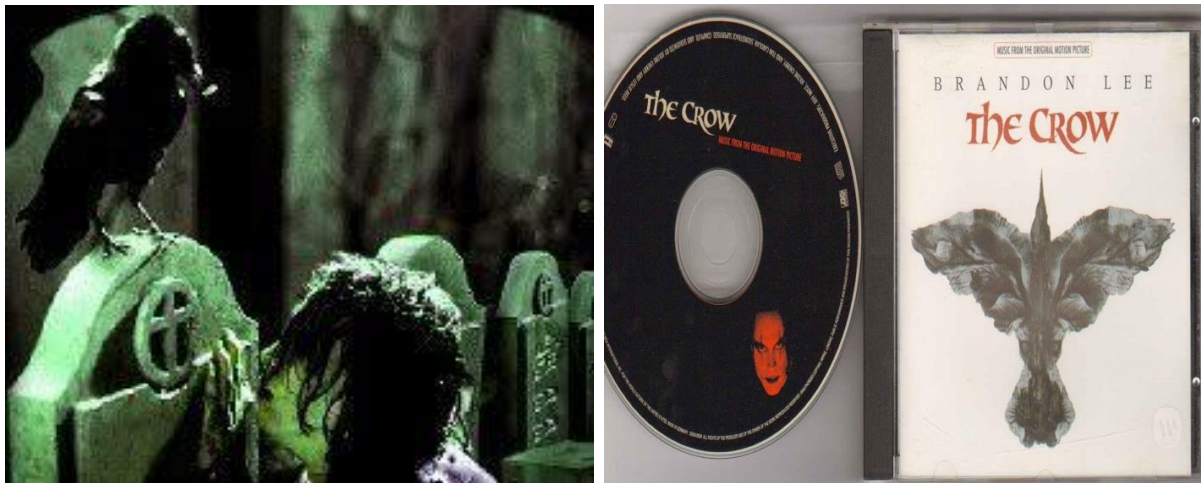
The Crow (Proyas, The Crow , 1994), *The Crow* Motion Picture Soundtrack

Aiding the push to include alternative lifestyles into mainstream society is the resurgence of Shakespeare and his works into modern-day films. *10 Things I Hate About You* (Junger, 1999), *Lion King* (Minkoff, 1994), *Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, 1996) and a unique film called *Shakespeare In Love* (Madden, 1998)

Baz Luhrman's epic *Romeo + Juliet* was completely modernized by replacing swords with guns and even updated the story to include drug use, rave parties and modern-day firefights that reflected the world of the time.

Harold Perrineau, Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes represents modern images in the 16th Century Shakespeare play. (Luhrmann, 1996)

This push of Shakespeare in the 1990's can be attributed to the baby boomer generation who benefited from universal public education, now holding positions in creative and decision-making roles. Or it could be that major studios connected major stars power to attract mass audiences. Most likely it is a combination of both. It wasn't just Shakespeare that did well in the 1990's, smaller studios were creating arthouse films. Indies were moving from the arthouse to the mainstream.

An 'Indie' movie or independent film are films that are produced outside of the major studios. With movie theatres now a vital part of the mall expansion of the 1980's and 1990's, adults were looking to avoid teenagers and found comfort in small, independently run theaters away from the mainstream.

The rise in popularity of the independent movies reflects several cultural and societal trends of the 1990's. Some audience members were trying to move away from the Hollywood formula. In a move against big-budget blockbusters, filmgoers were eager for more story in their storytelling. This desire to step-away from the large business model is a societal reflection of the political uneasiness of the time. The 1990's in general saw a renewed interest in exploring interest in issues of race, gender, and sexuality and many independent films of this time were telling stories with those themes.

Hollywood studios jumped onboard and created independent production studios like Fox Searchlight, Focus Features, etc. These small off-shoots of the major picture studios produced a variety of films that spoke to smaller niches of the mass market and introduced us to some of today's producing heavyweights and created some critically acclaimed and box-office breaking hits.

The Blair Witch Project, (Sanchez, 1999) the home video, found footage has altered mainstream horror movies for years to come. This type of film was fueled by changes in technology that made it more affordable for filmmakers to produce and distribute their own work and mirrored societies growing desire for reality television including programs like *The Real World* and *Big Brother*. The filmmakers were able to tap into the anxieties that many younger Americans felt during the late 1990's. The uncertainty about the world and sense that something was lurking just beyond the edges of our perception are perfectly reflected in the unseen foe in the woods.

The shift of independent movies struggling to find their place in the larger Hollywood machine is also reflected in the hero character types of these films. Whereas Hollywood heroes are often strong and confident, independent film heroes were often more flawed, complex, vulnerable, and struggling to find their place in the world. In general, the hero archetype in independent films is maturing as they gain a greater sense of self-confidence and self-awareness. They are learning to take responsibility for their actions and decisions.

Jay and Silent Bob, *Clerks* (Smith, 1994).

Then there is an odd transition from independent art film to mainstream art film. Indie movies that walked the tightrope with larger budgets, bigger stars, and major studio support. Case in point, *Starship Troopers* (Verhoeven, Starship Troopers, 1997) which reflected the millennial angst and political paranoia of the time.

(Verhoeven, Starship Troopers, 1997) "Humans in a fascist, militaristic
future wage war with giant alien bugs." (IMDB, 1997)

The films reflection of Americas ability to glorify war and violence was felt throughout many in the United States as young people across the country were being sent to fight on foreign soil in the Gulf War and the ongoing conflict in the Balkans. The American people were all too eager to celebrate those that served in the military – in the film – only those who serve as valued as 'Citizens,' emphasizing the importance of patriotism and sacrifice.

But not all reflections are negative. In *Starship Troopers* specifically, there is a positive depiction of diversity with people of different races and nationalities working together. People. People are the most unlikely of unlikely heroes. The **unlikely hero** is someone whose heroic acts come as a surprise. We aren't expecting any heroism and often when these characters exhibit their hero bravado – it can often be misinterpreted as just, 'getting the job done.'

Getting the Job done is the credo of 1990's. People were holding a growing cynicism towards traditional authority figures and yearned for more realistic portrayals of heroism.

The Top Grossing Movies of the 1990s include:

1. Titanic
2. Jurassic Park
3. The Lion King
4. Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace
5. Independence Day
6. Forrest Gump
7. The Sixth Sense
8. The Lost World: Jurassic Park
9. Men in Black
10. Armageddon
11. Terminator 2: Judgement Day
12. Ghost
13. Aladdin
14. Toy Story 2
15. Twister

Overall, the end of the 1990's was a time of great change and innovation in Hollywood as filmmakers and studios sought to adapt stories and their heroes to rapidly evolving audience tastes and desires.

> *"If a Million people see my movie, I hope they see a million different movies."* – Quentin Tarantino

Chapter 10

Modern Times and the Modern Hero

> *"A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically expresses his biography, character, powers, or origin."*
> (Coogan, 2006)

The 2000's are a pivotal and often groundbreaking time for the Hollywood machine. With the continued advancement in digital technology leading to new forms of storytelling and filmmaking and new, **unlikely heroes**. Digital cameras and new editing software are making it easier and more cost-effective for creators to create high-quality works. This accessibility is breading new diverse creators who are willing to include diverse storytelling and casts that better represent society.

Films like *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001) and yes, even *Wall-E* (Stanton, 2008)are providing modern unlikely heroes that reflect society.

The character Frodo, in *The Lord of the Rings* has an incredible senese of responsibility when tasked with carrying the One Ring to the fiery pits of Mordor. The same way society was kindling a responsibility towards caring for the environment. This is reflected in the growing interest in issues like climate change. The animated feature *Wall-E* also gives a character who warns against our growing technological dependence and growing concerns about climate change, pollution, and sustainability.

Frodo's journey also reflects the sense of resistance against oppression that many people in the 2000's struggled against looming government and oppression in general through activism, political resistance, or cultural movements. Whereas *Wall-E* teaches us the importance of conservation and teamwork.

Wall-E finding life on the abandoned planet Earth. (Stanton, 2008)

In the 2000's we move from the unlikely hero to the **modern hero**. These individuals display qualities that inspire and positively impact others. They are not limited to the traditional characteristics of strength, bravery, or intelligence. Modern heroes can include characters of all classes and genders, though the majority still adhere to the classic male character.

Generally, a modern hero is someone who risks a great deal to challenge the status quo in pursuit of their values and/or ideals. Many have endured great hardship, self-sacrifice and while they are flawed, they are considered virtuous and moral, making the audience empathetic to their plight and journey.

Audiences were looking for moral victories and a clear delineation between right and wrong in a world that was embroiled in a War on Terror. This global conflict was costing lives, money, and belief in the American dream. Films like *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow, The Hurt Locker, 2008) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow, Zero Dark Thirty , 2012)dealt with themes of terrorism, war, and served as a direct reflection of the political climate of the time and gave us memorable stoic and fearless heroes who were focused solely on the task at hand.

L to R: The Hurt Locker, Zero Dark Thirty. (Bigelow, The Hurt Locker, 2008) (Bigelow, Zero Dark Thirty , 2012)

Both films portray heroes that are willing to take extreme risks to accomplish their missions and highlight the psychological and emotional trauma that soldiers were experiencing in war zones. This growing concern and awareness of mental health disorders in soldiers during and after the Iraq war is a direct reflection of the time.

Audiences were eager for these visceral hero character types and fueled the growing number of war heroes in films including *Black Hawk Down* (Scott R. , Black Hawk Down , 2001) which depicted soldiers as heroes who were willing to sacrifice everything for their country.

These brave hero character types stepped into roles far beyond the war movie genre to include action heroes from movies including *The Bourne Identity* (Liman, 2002), *Live Free or Die Hard* (Wiseman, 2007) and *Kill Bill* (Tarantino, 2003) where skilled heroes could handle dangerous situations while dealing with personal and emotional struggles.

Emotional distress that would soon affect the entire nation when the 9/11 Attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon invigorated distrust of the looming and far-reaching power of government. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, many studios postponed or canceled film releases that featured themes of terrorism or destruction. Films like Spider-Man had to make significant changes as an original action sequence in which Spider-Man created a web between the Twin Towers.

But as we have witness following catastrophic events, films help guide us through as movies started to explore the events of 9/11 and the aftermath including United 93, World Trade Center and television shows like 24 and Homeland.

Characters like Jack Bauer who used extreme measure to protect the United States were popular because there was a hero fighting against the larger government machine and protect innocent lives and reflected the heightened sense of fear and anxiety that many people were experiencing following the 9/11 attacked.

This sense of disillusionment and mistrust of governmental authority was growing. Particularly with controversies involving America's reason for entering the Iraq War and the Enron scandal. This uneasiness can be seen in movies like The Dark Knight in which our unlikely superhero hero struggles to fight corruption within the very institutions he is trying to protect. We can see both sides of this uneasiness in the characters of the Joker and Batman from the film The Dark Knight.

Heath Ledger as The Joker and Christian Bale as Batman. (Nolan, 2008)

Batman is supposed to be a symbol of justice who stands for the principals of law and order in a corrupt and violent world. Batman is willing to continuously put his life on the line and do whatever it takes to keep people safe. His largest foe is against corruption and the abuse of power by those in authority. Batman stands up to those in power and fights for justice just like the whistleblowers and people who stand up and fight against government cover-ups at Abu Grabi, the Enron Scandal and testifying against criminals like Bernie Madoff. The Joker character embodies all the fears, anxieties, and uncertainties of the early 2000's, as well as a commentary on the changing nature of power and authority in an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced world.

This technologically advanced world seemed more like science-fiction than reality. With the rise of technology and the internet, the Mars Rover, the Human Genome Experiment, and science disasters like the Challenger explosion… these new technologies were being incorporated into our movies and our movie heroes. For example, Neo from *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999) was a hacker who through the heroes' journey winds up using his hacking skills to conquer the machines that have taken over the world. Contemporary issues and concerns related to technology, surveillance is explored in films including *Avatar* (Cameron, Avatar, 2009), *Minority Report* (Spielberg, Minority Report, 2002), and *I Robot* (Proyas, I Robot, 2004). These heroes' journey through ethical and moral dilemmas of potential dangers that many people in the United States were also feeling. People across the country were growing more anxious about the expanding government oversight and feared their civil lienteries and privacy were being abused.

Following the events of 9/11, the United States introduced the USA Patriot Act which granted law enforcement and intelligence agencies new powers to conduct surveillance, detain suspects without charge, and share information with each other. There was a very real fear that these new options would be abused and that innocent individuals would be unfairly targeted or have their privacy invaded. Some people feared that these were the first steps to the degradation of our inalienable individual rights.

Left: *Avatar* uses technology to aid a paralyzed soldier into a new body. (Cameron, Avatar, 2009)
Middle: *Minority Report* used advanced technology can predict crimes before they are
committed. (Spielberg, Minority Report, 2002) Right: *I, Robot* asks questions of sentience and the
laws of robotics. (Proyas, I Robot, 2004)

But through this time of uncertainty, darkness, and mistrust – we come to revere probably the most popular hero character type of our age… **the Superhero!**

The superhero character is not perfect, in fact with greater flaws come finer retribution. These hero tropes thread the delicate balance between strength and weakness, failure, and success. In a changing society, people wanted to see their heroes change as well. The days of the "white knight" archetype were giving way

for the introduction of heroes that reflected the increased awareness of diversity and representation in society.

Welcome to the era of Superheroes and Super Villains. have made it their mission to dissect the minds of these heroes and villain. "*The hero is the character in a storyline that is followed most closely by the audience, and the character that has both a) make the hardest decision, and b) deal with the positive and negative consequences of these decisions.*" (Rider, 2016)

The popularity of the superhero film genre brought these characters to the forefront of popular culture. Spider-Man, the X-Men and Batman paved the way for more superhero movies to be made. It was more than the groundbreaking special effects; people were interested in the characters and their stories. These films influenced popular culture through fashion, merchandising, toys, music and more. Audience members saw themselves in these superheroes and wanted to emulate superhero-like qualities in their own lives. This mass appeal also included positive portrayals of diversity and representation with characters from different races, genders, and backgrounds, helping to increase the visibility of the underrepresented groups in popular culture.

These heroes were a direct reflection of the lives people were living at the time. The desire for justice in the wake of 9/11 were themes found in Spider-Man and the Batman movies whose hero characters were dedicated to fighting crime and bringing criminals to justice.

Movies like *Blade* (Norrington, 1998) and *X-Men* (Singer, X-Men, 2000) featured diverse casts and explored issues of race and identity. *Blade* was one of the first films to feature a superhero protagonist that was black. An outsider who rebels against corruption and oppression spoke to communities across the country who were experiencing a heightened awareness of the abuses of power by those in authority.

Whereas *Iron man* (Favreau, 2008) for example, highlighted the importance of technology and engineering in modern society. Tony Stark aka Iron Man was portrayed as a brilliant inventor who through his heroes' journey learns to use modern technology to fight crime.

Shortly before *Iron Man* was released, Americans were worried about the lack of transparency in the acquisition of private contractors who were outsourced by the military. Many people believed that these moves were motivated by profit and not national interest and would eventually compromise the security of the nation. Companies like Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Northrop Grumman were responsible for the development and production of high-tech weaponry, however,

critics raised concerns about the potential for conflicts of interest and corruption. Americans learned along with Tony Stark that the potential for abuses of power were not to be ignored.

Superheroes embody three core features or moral psychology:

> 1) third-party judgement
> 2) moralistic punishment
> 3) moral impartiality
> (Peter DeScioli, 2008)

We can see these features in our modern superhero characters and the desire of society to see them not only reflected on our screens but also in the mirror.

However, many people who were living and working through the first 10-years of the new millennium were facing economic fears and uncertainty.

In 2008, the United States was confronted with yet, another financial crisis. This crisis was triggered by the collapse of the mortgage market, which led to a widespread credit crunch and a sharp decline in economic activity. This led to mass layoffs, home foreclosures, a major decline in savings and investments, a reduction in credit availability and a general sense of economic insecurity. Movies were used to explore these topics.

Up in the Air (Reitman J. , 2009) tells the story of a corporate downsizing expert who travels around the country firing people! The movie uses societal anxieties and fears into an effective storytelling tool.

Inside Job (Ferguson, 2009) based upon a book by Michael Lewis, tells the story of the people who saw it coming and profited from it. The film highlights the corruption and greed in the financial industry that led to the crises, which was a major issue that inspired the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2010.

Too Big to Fail (Hanson, 2011)explores the high-stakes negotiations between government officials and Wall Street Executives.

Margin Call (Chandor, 2011)takes place over a 24-hour period in the lives of bank employees in the early stages of the financial crisis.

These economic downturns had a prominent effect on film revenue as people didn't have expendable income to spend on entertainment. But when people did go to the movies, they yearned for more escapist themes with superhero movies and fantasy films growing in popularity.

With less access to financing, the major studios were more likely to invest in films with proven franchises and established stars marking a drastic decline in the independent movie market. Studios placed a greater emphasis on digital marketing, using social media and we see major studios start to release movies directly to video-on-demand platforms in order to reach a wider audience and try to recoup some of their financial investments.

Top Grossing Films of the 2000's

1. Avatar
2. The Dark Knight
3. Shrek 2
4. Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest
5. Toy Story 3
6. Spider-Man
7. Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
8. Finding Nemo
9. Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith
10. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

"A filmmaker's most important tool is humanity. You want to be able to capture humanity in your stories and bring out humanity in your characters." – Ryan Coogler

Chapter 11

Calling All Heroes!

Bergstrand and Jasper, contributors to the Social Psychology Quartely, presented narrative theory as useful tool to ensure writers are engaging their audiences with meaningful stories. "*Narratives can paint details about abstract, distant issues and help them resonate with everyday lives. They bring tension and suspense, compelling notice and interest.*" **Invalid source specified.** Focusing on plot, character, theme, point of view and genre, narrative theory can be applied to analyze the ways in which stories are constructed and how they influence individuals and society.

These narratives tools are wound through the stories of 2010 and continue to this day. Moving away from a specific hero character type to a more nuanced style of storytelling. Our breadth of what's acceptable has been expounded by the years and years of stories that came before us. And though we learn, we continue to struggle… so do our heroes. Hero characters today often explore themes of community and collective action rather than relying on a single hero to save the day.

The "Occupy Wallstreet" movement in 2011 set a tone for the time. People were taking a stand against income inequality and the influence of money in politics. The financial system had failed them. The movement spread via social media and thousand more people joined the movement in cities across America.

The Wolf of Wall Street (Scorsese, The Wolf of Wall Street, 2013) is set in the 1980's and expounds on the link between power and corruption in the financial sector. Themes of moral compromise and ethical lapses continue to be relevant today particularly in light of the ongoing debates of income inequality, corporate influence on politics and systemic racism.

Financial inequality served as a main theme for many movies from 2010 and I presume that this theme will continue for years to come. *Elysium* (Blomkamp, 2013) brings the audience on a journey to 2159 where the ultra-rich live abroad in a luxurious space station called Elysium and the rest of humanity lives a downtrodden existence on Earth.

Another film that combines the financial and class struggle with another main theme of the time period… environmental conservation – is the science-fiction, cult-classic *Snowpiercer* (Joon-ho, 2013)

Directed by Bong Joon-ho, *Snowpiercer* is set in a dystopian future where the only remaining survivors of the man-made ecological disaster live on a train that constantly circles the globe with a rigid hierarchy that reflects the inequalities of the pre-apocalyptic world.

The lowest class of passengers on the train are forced to physically
support the classes above them. (Joon-ho, 2013)

This thought-provoking critique of the social, economic, and environmental issues that people were facing in real-life were being examined on the big screen and shouted a call to action for greater equality, justice, and sustainability.

The passengers from the back of the train led by the everyman hero, Curtis Everett, played by Chris Evans, stage a rebellion against the ruling class in the front of the train, who have access to more resources and privileges than those in the back. The character yearns to create a more equitable society for all passengers with assistance from other lower-class passengers.

Unfortunately, rebellion is a recurring theme during this time.

V for Vendetta (McTeigue, 2005) is a film set in a dystopian future where a totalitarian government has taken control of the United Kingdom. The story follows a masked revolutionary named "V" who seeks to overthrow the government through acts of terrorism and public protests. People during the early to mid-2000's were concerned about the erosion of their personal privacy in a post-9/11 era. This film also does a really good job highlighting the dangers of political dissent and consequences of speaking out against the government. The themes of anti-war and anti-establishment were very popular in the early 2000's following the aftermath of the Iraq War. People felt betrayed after being told the reasons the United States went to fight in Iraq were not true. *V for Vendetta* also gives a glimpse into the powerful engine that would become social media. In the age of the 24-hour news cycle, media has the power to sway public opinion. Just look at the 2022 election and the influence that Fox News had on spewing a lyre full of lies to the people.

Based on the best-selling young adult novel, *The Hunger Games* (Ross G. , 2012) takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where a totalitarian government controls the population through an annual televised fight to the death. The story follows a young firl named Katniss who defies the government by volunteering to participate in the games and leads a rebellion against the oppressive regime. The Hunger Games reflects the new wave of young activism and highlights the importance that young people can have in reshaping the future really speaks to the time period when there was growing engagement of young adults especially around issues like climate change, gun violence and police brutality.

Our entertainment continues to reflect our lives and vice vera. (Ross G. , 2012) (Press)

The 3-finger salute used in *The Hunger Games* was adopted by protestors around the world and used as a symbol of freedom, equality, and solidarity. We see these themes highlighted in books, film and across media platforms. The political and social concerns continue on and off the screen.

Another example? *Children of Men* (Cuaron, 2006) is set in a dystopian future where all human beings have become infertile, and the world is on the brink of collapse. The story follows a disillusioned bureaucrat named Theo who is enlisted by a group of rebels to help transport a pregnant woman to safety which ultimately leads to a rebellion against the oppressive government.

Our entertainment is now taking on the mantle of warning and education. By showing what 'could' happen if we don't take steps to change, society will face impending doom. Two examples of this predictive nature are based on books. *The Handmaids Tale* (Miller, 2017) based on the book of the same name (Atwood, 1998) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004)based on The Coming Global Superstorm (Strieber, 2000).

The Handmaids Tale is filled with themes of inequality, authoritarianism, and reproductive rights. Women in this world are treated as property and forced to bear children for infertile couples. There is one rule in this world which is reflected in society as government seems to control every aspect of society. This narrative serves as a warning and reflects stories we are seeing in courtrooms across the nation.

Based on the theory of abrupt climate change as a result of global warming, The Day After Tomorrow dramatizes the fears and concerns that society have about climate change and its potential impacts. People around the globe are experiencing the impacts of climate change including rising sea levels, more frequent and severe weather events, and displacement from their homes. Though this is a work of fiction, the warning is very real.

In the early 2010's, refugees were fleeing their homeland due to war or persecution. Thousands of refugees were traveling to the United States to start a new life. However, the country was not (and *is* not) equipped to handle the influx of people and conversations. Governments and people didn't know what to do and started to include the idea of closing the borders of the country to all immigrants. Unfortunately, these tropes are also reflected in our movies.

Children of Men (Cuaron, 2006) takes place in the UK, which closed its borders to immigrants and refugees, and show the brutal and inhumane treatment of refugees by the government.

The Children of Men (Cuaron, 2006)showing immigrants and refugees in cages.
Right: Children in cages at a refugee camp in Des Moines in 2020. (CNN, 2020)

The world was changing, and movies were making efforts to join in the revolution, finding inspiration from one of the largest movements of the 2000's – Black Lives Matter. Across multiple genres, films detailing the struggles, successes, and failures of society were appealing to audiences around the world.

Get Out (Peele, 2017) a ground-breaking movie by director Jordan Peele that uses horror elements to explore the issues of racism and white supremacy in modern America. Where movies like *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen, 2013)and *Selma* (DuVernay, 2014) tell the historical stories of black men who fought for freedom in their respective times.

The struggles for equality throughout time are once again becoming commonplace. Violence is growing into a normal part of life in America in the 2000's. Mass shootings were becoming all to commonplace. There have been a range of films that have tried to make some sense of these violent acts from Michael Moore's 2002 documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (Moore, 2002) which sought to examine Columbine through the lens of gun violence in the United States. And the films that take a look at mass shooting through the lens of the parents like *Mass* (Kranz, 2021) or the highly controversial, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Ramsay, 2011) in which a mother is trying to come to terms that her son is a psychopathic murderer.

Audiences are now accepting narratives that include mass shootings and school shootings in movies, television and across all media platforms.

And those platforms now include a major emphasis on social media. The era of streaming services pushing out major cable networks in homes across the country who were offering a wide variety of programs and topics for niches and sub-cultures has become the norm after 2010. Streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu rely on social media to engage with their audiences and have disrupted the traditional Hollywood model of movie production and distribution.

The use of platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are allowing creatives the opportunity to showcase their work and gain recognition from industry professionals. All the major Hollywood studios understand that the use of social media is a powerful tool for promoting movies with platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram allowing for more targeted marketing and a wider reach than traditional advertising methods. Hollywood has fully embraced social media and highlighting the positive and negative aspects in their films that cross multiple genres.

The biographical film, *The Social Network* (Fincher, 2010), explores the founding of Facebook and highlights society's concerns about security and privacy and the dangers of data mining, surveillance, and the manipulation of user data.

There is the documentary film, *Catfish* (Joost, 2010), that highlights the dangers of developing a romantic relationship on social media.

A science-fiction film, *HER* (Jonze, 2013), explores the relationship between a man and artificially intelligent operating system and illuminates' society's growing awareness of the impact of technology on mental health.

There is even a thriller! In *The Circle* (Ponsoldt, 2017), a young woman lands her dream job with the world's most powerful technology and social media company learns that her decisions start to affect the lives and futures of her friends, family and humanity.

The dangers of social media are understood by many but heeded by few. There are also films that were highlighting the negative and dark side of social media with topics including cyberbullying, addiction, and the pressure to present a perfect image online. *The Social Dilemma* (Orlowski, 2020), a documentary that explores the negative effects of social media on society including addiction, misinformation, and the erosion of privacy. Overall, movies about social media were reflecting the attitudes and concerns of society after 2010 and provide commentary on the ways in which technology is shaping our lives and our relationships.

But with all the negatives about this time in the United States, there were also positives that were gracing screens around the world. Diverse audiences were demanding to see themselves in characters in *all* genres.

Movies such as *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), *Moonlight* (Jenkins B. , 2017), *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Bob Persichetti, 2018) were attracting mass audiences with non-Caucasian stars. *Black Panther* challenged the status-quo of Hollywood by proving that films with diverse casts and stories were commercially viable.

With strong black women characters and showcasing African culture in a positive light, black culture was at the front of mainstream media paving the way for more representation and inclusivity in storytelling.

Women's rights, gender equality, STEM education, diversity and historical representation are all reflected in the drama, *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016). Telling the true story of a group of African American women who worked at NASA during the space race in the 1960's. The film highlighted the discrimination and prejudice these women faced because of their gender and race, reflecting the ongoing push for women's rights and gender equality.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens (Abrams, Star Wars: The Force Awakens Episode VII, 2015) found more room for women and nonwhite characters reflecting the social trends including gender representation and diversity. Rey, a strong, intelligent, and capable female lead character represented the growing push for gender equality and female empowerment in society.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens brings strong female characters to the leading role.
(Abrams, Star Wars: The Force Awakens Episode VII, 2015)

The #MeToo movement which sought to raise awareness of sexual harassment and assault had a significant impact on Hollywood and the film industry. Many films after 2017 reflected the ideals of this movement and the issues it brought to light. One example is the film *Bombshell* (Roach, 2019) which tells the true story of women who came forward to accuse Fox News CEO Roger Ailes of sexual harassment.

LGBTQ+ found increasing representation in characters and stories in film after 2010. *Moonlight* (Jenkins B. , 2017), which won the Best Picture Oscar tells the story of young black man's coming of age and struggles with his sexuality. *The Danish Girl* (Hooper, 2015) based on the true story of Lili Elbe who was one of the first people to undergo gender confirmation surgery. And *Love, Simon* (Berlanti) tells the story of a high school student who is struggling to come out to his family and friends. These films reflect the LGBTQ+ ongoing fight for equality.

Powerhouse Disney was creating animated features that were a true reflection of the social trends and issues that emerged after 2010. Both *Moana* (Musker, 2016) and (Unkrich, 2017) emphasized the importance of diversity and representation in media, celebrating different cultures and identities while avoiding stereotypes and offensive cultural depictions.

Left: *Moana* (Musker, 2016) Right: *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017)

One of the largest trends in society and in film were superhero films. This will one-day be referred to as the Marvel millennium. Marvel and DC dominated the box office with films like *The Avengers* (Whedon, 2012), *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), and *Wonder Woman* (Jenkins P. , 2017). These films capitalized on the public's love for comic book heroes and provide a form of escapism from a plethora of real-world issues.

Films like *Black Panther* and *Wonder Woman* tackled issues of race and gender, while *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Russo, 2014) and *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Singer, X-Men: Days of Future Past, 2014) explored issues of government surveillance and discrimination.

Superhero movies after 2010 also reflected society's growing fascination with moral ambiguity. Films like *The Dark Knight* and *Logan* (Mangold, 2017) explored the darker, more complex sides of heroism, challenging the traditional hero/villain dichotomy. Superhero movies after 2010 reflect several societal trends and issues and provide a window into the evolving role of media in shaping our understanding of the world.

The future of the hero character type will continue to evolve and be a part of the society they reflect as culture shifts and society changes. One thing that will continue is inclusive representation of women, people of color, LGBTQ+, characters with disabilities in storytelling. We will continue to blur the lines of hero and anti-hero characters with morally ambiguous characters that challenge the traditional forms of heroism reflecting the realistic portrayals of human behavior. We will continue to create more visually stunning and fantastical heroes as technology advancements emerge to create new opportunities for audience engagement.

Chapter 12

Afterword: The Heroine

The portrayal and representation of the female character has absolutely matured throughout the history of film.

During the Silent Era, women were strong, capable, and independent reflecting the moral and physical aptitude of females at the time.

The Golden Age of Hollywood presented female characters that reflected more traditional gender roles. Heroines were typically portrayed as passive and in need of rescue by their male hero counterparts.

The 1960's and 1970's saw the rise of the female protagonist with characters like Ripley from *Aliens* and Bonnie from *Bonnie and Clyde*. These characters were strong, assertive, and often challenged the traditional gender roles of their predecessors.

The character, Ellen Ripley portrayed by Sigourney Weaver in the 1979 science-fiction film *Alien*, was third-in-command on the spaceship she was assigned to and reflected the growing number of women entering male-dominated fields and started to assert themselves into positions of power.

The 1980's and 1990's saw a rise in the female action hero. *The Terminator*, *Tomb Raider* are examples of female led action films where characters were strong, independent, and capable.

In recent years, there has been greater emphasis placed on diversity and inclusion, especially among female characters. This has led to more realistic representation in film.

Take films from the last 5 years including *Captain Marvel, The Woman King, Blank Panther: Wakanda Forever* and television programs like *The Handmaid's Tale, Chicago Fire* and the like are exemplifying female in strong, protagonist and hero roles to the delight of audiences around the globe.

Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn in *Suicide Squad*,
Scarlett Johansson as Black Widow in the Marvel Universe,
Gal Godot as Wonder Woman in *Wonder Woman*,
Brie Larson as Carol Danvers/Capt. Marvel in the Marvel Universe
are all modern female superheroes.

This representation ebbs and flows with the shifts in culture and society. But as society continues to challenge traditional gender roles, the representation will surely follow suit.

"To a female superhero her sexiness is not the most is not the most important thing about her, it's her mind, her spirit, and when I look at that character that to me is an example of characters that I like to play, and I think it does a great thing for women." – Jessica Chastain

Conclusion

There is and perhaps always will be a fascination with the hero archetype. Because we long to see ourselves in the heroes we choose to emulate and hope that placed in the same situations, we would also choose the brave and courageous path.

Currently, the top 10 grossing movies of all time all feature hero archetypes in their storytelling:

1. Avatar
2. Avengers: Endgame
3. Titanic
4. Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens
5. Avengers: Infinity War
6. Spider-Man: No Way Home
7. Jurassic World
8. The Lion King
9. The Avengers
10. Furious7

Some of these heroes may be flawed, but all of them make great sacrifices on their journey.

The future of film will continue to reflect society. Film will continue to be shaped by social and political issues of the time. As society changes, so too will the stories we tell through film.

Modern heroes include all genres, all backgrounds and with increased representation and diversity on our movie screens, we will see a greater focus on heroes from different perspectives that feature characters from different identities.

Films will continue to tackle contemporary issues as society continues to grapple with issues such as climate change, inequality, and discrimination.

We will continue to see stories with an emphasis on technology and innovation as these elements continue to evolve how movies are made and distributed. We may even see fully immersive stories told through virtual reality.

Society as a whole will continue to influence what we see on our screens.

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