

RULING IDEAS AND CULTURE:  
MILITARY IDEOLOGY IN SUPERHERO FILMS

A Thesis

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by

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Abstract  
of  
RULING IDEAS AND CULTURE:  
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Films tend toward the socialization of audiences in terms of culture. The symbolism and abstraction invoked by films suggests an exchange of ideas and beliefs, i.e. ideologies. This thesis seeks to explore and understand the avenues of ideological hegemony, particularly U.S. military ideology, through two popular superhero film franchises. These two films highlight U.S. military involvement in portrayal and effect. The methodology developed will generate an index of the depth and a breakdown of the reach of influence. This thesis found that the initial films in the franchises did showcase U.S. military ideology and exemplified very effective U.S. military involvement before replacing the U.S. military with the obscurely-owned S.H.I.E.L.D. agency and its own militancy.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
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## Chapter 1

## IDEOLOGY AND MILITARY IN FILM

“ Opinion, Queen of the World, is not subject to the power of kings; they are themselves its first slaves. ”

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INFLUENCE IN CULTURE

*The Relevance of Cultural Ideation*

American attitudes, ideas, and products have significant influence in the global market and global politics. Even outside of large frequented cities, American cultural products like movies reach deep into many other countries. Many international communications outlets distribute American media, making American television programming, motion pictures, and music some of the main sources of American cultural influence and socialization outside of the United States (Hoynes, Croteau, and Milan 2011:333; Shin and Namkung 2008:116). This global distribution of American culture is pervasive and helps reveal many of the avenues of American cultural hegemony. This thesis seeks to gain an explicit understanding from questioning how the messages, themes, and imagery inherent in American film, as cultural products manufactured by ideological groups, have at their core the capacity to subject audiences towards a dominant/popular ideology that, in this case, through filmic recreation and interpretation, glorifies the American war machine.

Within the United States, propaganda bombards consumers with depictions of, oftentimes, contrived ideas of an “American Dream” or representations of the nation that

are favorable or preferred. Almost all forms of mass communication, i.e. media (press, music, film, television, etc.), fall under the charge of private companies and organize themselves as such within the economy (Wells 1979, x). There is something more that drives mass media's relations of power and mental and material production; for instance, studies of Disney critique much of the content as harboring prevailing ideology, such as capitalism and gender roles (Dorfman and Mattelart 1984). The aim of this thesis considers the guiding research question: How does the hegemonic ideology of the American military operate through Superhero American films, its portrayal of the U.S. military, and the nation's coinciding military preoccupation?

An ideology is a collection of beliefs and ideas about the world and of people; in the current sense, the ideological consciousness persuasively offered to consenting consumers cultivates a specific arrangement of beliefs and ideas. Hegemony, simply put, is a prevailing cultural similarity introduced to others; more relevant is that it describes an attraction, even seizure, of a population's "spontaneous" consent to an ideological consciousness. Dominating classes maintain this ideology in virtue of the population's function as consumers in the system of production where their own preferential choices exist in a realm of multitudinous predefined options (Gramsci et al. 1971:12). Hegemony is a function of the American capitalist nation and a part of its political and cultural apparatus. In essence, the American capitalist nation must preserve a certain level of superior influence within the culture to continue leadership domestically and internationally; building on Nye's discussion of power (Nye 2004), this takes place through

cultural hegemony via American “soft power”. Hence, exercising this power through culture, ideology, and institutions, dominant groups (powerful classes) perpetuate their preferred and then delivered ideology.

Antonio Gramsci provided the insight when he expanded the ideas of hegemony with “cultural” hegemony suggested in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971) that those in power boast an authority and a hold on the status quo through their position in the system of production and their influence on the population. From that position of authority, their creation and employment of symbolically ideological language (values, morals, ideas, representations, etc.) and social constructs (institutions, practices, communication, etc.) evoke the consent of the population. Furthermore, author of *Propaganda* (1928) and *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), Edward Bernays, drew the attention of audiences through public communication and social events using advertising and symbolic action (spectacles); benefiting from this success were the dominant classes (i.e. their prevailing ideology). Marx and Engels’ prediction suggests, “the ideas of the ruling [dominant] class are in every epoch the ruling [dominant] ideas...”. These ruling ideas make their way into institutions, like public communication, where the system of production supports a maintenance of what Gramsci sees as ideological hegemony.

*Intimacy of American motion picture and warfare.* The American motion picture industry is a powerful productive force rolling out films into the United States and abroad. According to the leading online box-office reporting service, Box Office Mojo, the United States has released on average 640 movies every year for the last ten years. Every production provides opportunities for producers to improve the quality, and quantities, of film, not to mention imbue symbolism into every element of its creation and filmic depictions.

Due to this kind of dominion over motion picture films, the influence of American values permeates nearly all media in near every corner of the globe. Quite possibly the collaboration among government and media is mutually advantageous, for instance, what films represent and how films represent it. This combination has the mental and material resources to project a situation, a people, or the world in a certain way with certain characteristics.

Hollywood and the Pentagon have worked together for years. As early as 1917, the two have had a mutual association when it comes to their work with the inception of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to influence public opinion in support of World War I. Not only was opinion influenced for WWI, yet again the U.S. government had instituted through the Office of War Information (OWI) the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) during the years of World War II. Consequently, Hollywood gave the BMP some control in terms of censorship, story conferences, and script writing (Koppes and Black 1977:103).

Although OWI was dissolved in 1945 after an “outstanding contribution to victory [of world war II]” (Winkler 1978:149), the military-industrial complex’s collaboration with Hollywood cannot be concluded so easily, especially not after the effect of the 1986 movie *Top Gun*. About forty years after Hollywood and the Pentagon stopped working together, the release and critical success of *Top Gun*, in which Tom Cruise joins the Navy’s TOPGUN program to train as a fighter and strike aircraft pilot, brought some popularity back to the U.S. military. The United States Navy was later flooded with new recruits (Robb 2004:181) during a time when the United States, while not at war, conducted a number of Air Force and Navy operations globally such as the 1986 bombing of Libya. When one thinks about the American war machine, it is hard to deny the American fascination with militarism or the drive to keep a powerful military force and use it at will.

Today, many films consist of intense visual action and affectual impact, as well as some advertising, and continue to portray U.S. military resources, from vehicles to laptops used for directing explosive warheads. American film does well to represent the extent of American military-industrial prowess what with action and war films becoming more commonplace, but in light of the research question: How (in what ways) may American military ideology operate through film and how is its portrayal of the American military associated with American preoccupation with the military industry? This will concern not what are only simple depictions, but films’ formation and utilization of ideology or ideological symbolism in relation to the nation’s military.

*American motion picture's role in culture.* Often products of fiction purely for entertainment, films hold a great deal of attention over viewers. The persuasion summoned through the production and symbolism inherent in motion pictures suggests films' underlying capacity for socialization. The production of films' artistically persuasive messages and themes directly influences the drawing out of viewers' consent and may facilitate the transferring of dominant narratives and conceptions. This notion of the function of film invokes the ideas of Robert K. Merton (Merton 1968). In this way, Merton's latent function would suggest that films maintain the ability to enculturate – learning of a group's (usually dominant) culture, as opposed to its supposed manifest function, to entertain.

Starting from this point, this thesis investigates that underlying nature – how hegemonic ideology functions in culture, specifically by way of American movies. Through the data collected by the examination detailed below of America's top grossing Superhero film franchises, *Iron Man* and *Captain America*, and its portrayal of the U.S. military; in combination with existing information pertaining to the productive forces, i.e. structures of distribution and consumption of the films, this thesis examines how American military ideology in popular films may help in maintaining American ideological hegemony.

This thesis will explore, via a content analysis, the named films. By seeking to uncover the connection between ideology, hegemony, and film, this thesis uses a structured two-pronged approach in methodical replication of previous studies into ideology,

hegemony, and film (Shin and Namkung 2008): The operation of American hegemonic ideology “outside” and “inside” the films. What follows is a breakdown of this approach:

- 1) Constituting that which is categorically “inside” the films will be a collection and analysis of suggestive power and depth of influence through the portrayal (length of screen time) and overall plot impact of the U.S. military as well as embedded symbolism dealing with ideology pulled from these depictions revealing the incarnation of American values.
- 2) In the second category, that which stands “outside” the film will be a collection and analysis of the diffusive power and influential reach of these films dealing precisely with countries where released, release dates, and consumption (revenue); this will establish the structure of production, or those productive forces, for the motion picture films.

The state of war seems to engross, or otherwise completely preoccupy, the nation’s resources and its officials through the American military-industrial complex at the cost of the population. One look at the nation’s budget for 2017 shows that the “National Defense” is allowed roughly 16 percent while “Education, Training, Employment, and Social Services” is allowed four percent (U.S. Government Publishing Office). Since resurgence of participation that benefited the American military after the release of films like *Top Gun*, America has been involved in a number of military engagements (since *Top Gun: Tanker War* ’87-88; *Inv. Of Panama* ’88-90; *Gulf War* ’90-91; etc. to this very day) and continues

to advertise their military throughout national and international culture and physical nature, respectively, by way of film and war.

The films being studied serve as good examples of movies that have reached major audiences, seen constant popularity and sequels, and have been greatly consumed/viewed. Both films represent dominant American military ideals and values. Literature concerning the cultural and power-based analysis of motion pictures, or more specifically how it relates to class conflict or cultural hegemony, is very light, however researchers have studied media, propaganda, and hegemony before and have provided some of the foundation for this work in furthering the quest of understanding regarding cultural hegemony, overall freedom, and sources of socialization in everyday life. This leads to a review of those insights that, by virtue of their extent and detail, have set the precedent for future studies.

## Chapter 2

## PRECEDENTIAL INSIGHTS

## TRAJECTORY OF IDEAS

*Establishing Power and Culture*

The research question asks how American cultural hegemony and military ideology operate through the association of American films and the U.S. military further maintaining a “status quo” of American military perceived leadership and global presence. According to Shin and Namkung, it is difficult for others who would influence an artist’s work to intervene in the development and production of film as an artistic medium (2008:140). Yet, concerning film’s potential messages and overall productive forces, namely the industrial structure (release dates and locations, funding, etc.) that drives film production, films have the powerful capability to act as socializing agents especially due to the inherent nature of the motion picture. That nature being the sophisticated interaction between the art’s message and film as art – that is, between dominant ideological symbolism and this legitimized form of public communication, that help to facilitate and intensify the influential effects of film on viewers.

With little modification dealt in terms of editing and compliancy, films reach audiences domestically, even internationally, cementing their influence as a local and global medium. Considering films’ strength as cultural products, in most globalized nations, they are easily pushed onto and accessed by consumers (consenting audiences) when they are not obviously ideological. Not to mention, the artistic realism of motion

pictures inspires the audience into believing the cinematic settings are real or that their origin of creation lie in the realm of a factual, empirical reality reminiscent of their own (ibid.). The core of this thesis is concerned with Shin and Namkung's suggested "filmic" hegemony – an aspect of hegemony dealing with how dominant films draw the consent of viewers. The implication of this consent indicates a legitimization of those dominant products. Researchers have studied associations between media and power before. In film theory, researchers wanted to learn how films helped to sustain dominant structures and what would be its antithesis. In communication studies, when information technology spread globally it invited researchers to study differences in power of information and media, introducing concepts like "cultural" and "media" imperialism. The study of this new tool of dominant ideologies and its effect on consumers (audiences) became grave matters to scholars (ibid.:121-2).

According to Ikenberry and Kupchan, socialization is an intangible power of hegemony (1990:295) and similar to the Gramscian tradition, socialization directly relates to the spontaneous consent given by the public to hegemonic structures, ideas, traditions, etc. concurrently legitimizing the latter's (those hegemonic structures) resulting ideological hegemony. American hegemony operating through film in this way remains this thesis' foundational and crucial exposition. The controlling power of material resources whereby dominant ideological hegemons originate must begin in the realm of the material structuring of society with those ideas of the relations of production.

*Development of the classics.* To understand some notion of the evolution of power and structure, it is important to start with the “first premise of all human history, [...] the existence of living human individuals” and their relations of physical organization, put forth by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels introducing their mid-1800s book *The German Ideology*. Marx phrased that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas...” (Marx, Engels, and Tucker 1978:172) and after what he saw at the beginning of the turn of the century what with humanity’s collapse into the industrial age, he was very right in saying so when class stratification, industry, and material wealth become pillars of society during society’s industrial revolution. Any judgement made in current times would point to some degree of material control and dominant power within major class-based societies. Pursuant to Marx’s passage of the German Ideology in R.C. Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader* (1978):

The whole internal structure of a nation itself depends on the stage of development reached by *its production* and *its internal and external intercourse*. How far the productive forces of a nation are developed is shown most manifestly by the degree to which *the division of labour* has been carried. (P. 150)

The structure of an aggregate of people - a nation, remains primarily in its development by those forces and commodities of production and by the symbolic communication and financial exchanges between populations. As nations continue to cultivate their productive forces and continue to expand their business exchanges internally and externally, their internal structures will continue to develop.

More importantly, that which defines this structure lies solely in the developmental extent of those productive forces relating to the divisions of its labor by the owners of

production, the ruling class. Owners divide their workers (labor force) to intensify their productive force. This divides (alienates) workers from their work and stratifies populations, meaning it divides people according to what is done, how, and by whom. In this way, a nation divided in its labor, beset by class stratification, entails more developed productive forces and a more unequal society. The material productive forces possessed by the ruling classes through the above means allows them control of the production of mentality, namely, the production of consciousness.

Through the lens of class, power, and production, this thesis weaves together its mission: Per the ruling classes' involvement in and their capacity for the production of ideology in "those who lack the means of mental production" (ibid.:172), a pre-defined cultural ideological consciousness, comparable to a national belief (say, of one's own national military force), remains in continual development (production). Those other subjected minds (lesser bourgeois producers and managers; "the dominant group's" 'deputies'" Gramsci et al. 1971:12) who are simultaneously those productive forces at the disposal of the greater ruling classes, help the production owners maintain this status quo and their own place in the social hierarchy. This leaves little room for difference in ideological production. Marx concludes the former phrase, "... in essence, the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (ibid.:172).

Moving from the production of materiality to the production of mentality involves detailing the ways in which the forces of production under the ruling classes may influence

or suggest a pre-defined consciousness or perspective on subordinate classes. As Marx made way for the analysis of both economic materialism and the political structure of capitalism, he developed a dialectical model for the apprehension of the two in his book, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In his book, Marx uses a feedback loop to define two distinctive elements of capitalist society: The economic and productive foundation (the base) and that which includes the political, legal, religious, cultural, ideas and systems, i.e. ideologies (the superstructure) (Marx 1904:11).

Marx was mainly concerned with the forces and relations of production, the economic system, and social consciousness. His theorizing proposes that any movement in the foundation will lead to movement in the systems of ideology. In this instance, changes in the means or relations of production (the base) like class mobility or invention will shape the ideology surrounding social institutions (the superstructure) and related consciousness. Engels furthers that although this base-superstructure relationship is correlative, only in the end does the base have prerogative – the foundation of production and power ultimately effects the superstructure of social institutions (Engel's letter Conrad Schmidt).

In this way, Marx marked the path for the conceptions and studies of class conflicts, yet he did so only through the lens that posits the base as the origin. Change within the superstructure (systems of ideology) could be the catalyst for changes in the base (the productive foundation); conversely, the base may obviously have the ability to manipulate the superstructure. It is a reality that any dominant group can consolidate enough wealth, property, and power (the command of material resources) to appropriate considerable

leverage in social affairs, industries, and the forces of production, i.e., in ideology. The kind of control and power of not only material production, but also of mental production found its most in-depth analysis through an Italian Marxist imprisoned by his fascist government at the height of cultural ideological manipulation.

*Structuring ideology through culture.* Antonio Gramsci understood where Marx and Engels had been taking the study of historical materialism and economic capitalist control and thought further how the superstructure ought to be of significant importance as a means of stimulating ideology, or a consciousness, in the minds of the people. Gramsci thought that ideology developed from within the superstructure has a direct impact on society and in that way ideology cultivated there and put into action upon the base could give rise to revolution for the working classes or an emancipation from capitalism – at least from economic struggle.

During his internment, Gramsci wrote his *Prison Notebooks*, where he elaborated the concept of the superstructure by breaking it out into two levels, civil and political society. To him, “political society” included the state and its direct (e.g. military) coercion, while on the other hand “civil society” will oftentimes accord with intuitions of ideology, like family and religion, etc., what he considers to be or be developed in private. He claims that these two systems are consistent with the functions of both “hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society... [and of the] direct domination or command exercised through the state and juridical government” (Gramsci, Hoare, and Smith 1971:12).

In this sense, the use of any institution by the ruling classes, inundated with their symbolism, sets the stage for inconspicuous ideological development in the minds of consenting audiences. Audiences as consumers of their culture and society, make choices in line with their preferences. The systems of ideology, rather than the use of force, draw out the consent, like affection or attraction, from audiences by pandering to them and offering a controlled reality. This spontaneous consent, Gramsci highlights, is “given by the great masses... to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group...” (ibid.:12). Concerning this spontaneity, those same institutions manufacture in audiences the consent that they extort.

The institutions of culture include the mechanisms of mass communication, i.e. motion picture. Cultivated there is a specific ideology, joined together in ways that are artistically persuasive and culturally symbolic, rife with a value- and moral-laden worldview. In terms of mass communication, consent is created and drawn out in five ways: 1) the media select information based on the interests of their owners in order to maximize profit, this presents a controlled reality in biased and subjective ways; 2) the media use appeal by way of advertising to attract audiences and funding, this has put out subaltern voices contrary to the dominant ideology they help to maintain; 3) the media avoid information that could harm their integrity by sourcing their information from only those trusted by, and who protect, their owners; 4) the media functions to suppress those who disagree with their supporting the dominant ideology, this has shrouded and limited the amount of available public information; 5) the media use sensational and emotion-

inducing content to capture audiences, this almost always appears as some fear-evoking reality, “mobilizing the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody [threatening the dominant ideology]” (Herman and Chomsky, 2002:3-29).

For the moment this thesis shall readdress the research question that asks, “How does the hegemonic ideology of the American military operate through culture (films), its portrayal of the military (its technology, its progress), and the nation’s military preoccupation (its constant military engagements worldwide)?” by apprehending the complex relationship between the intrinsic elements of the dominant classes and its forces of production. The dominant classes, possessing the means of material production, have at the same time those methods that both produce and impart a mentality (the production of mentality) in the minds of consenting audiences via cultural products and related institutions of ideology.

The premise of this research proposes that the military-industrial complex and pertinent dominant classes, knowing the impact cultural products like film have on influencing audiences, assist with the associated forces of production to arm mediums of mass communication (television, advertisements, movies, etc.) with symbolism. This symbolism imposes ideologies on audiences in a persuasive attempt to attain their consent to the status quo of a heavily funded, heavily engaged, gung-ho American military industry. Ideologies that both exemplify and glorify the nation’s military and suggest the nation’s continual preoccupation with worldwide military operations. The cultural consciousness

produced therein further reduces audiences' overall freedom or control over what is "information" and preserving the overall structure of society, its inequitable power-relations, and its preoccupation with the military industry.

Under Gramsci's "civil society" with accord to ideological inundation and Marx's production of mentality, and evident of power controlling ideology, Edward Bernays, the "father of public relations", practiced the manipulation of peoples' mentality through their culture at the whim of those dominant productive forces of his time, specifically the power of the upper classes. Backed by powerful tobacco capitalists, Bernays attended the Easter Day parade of 1929 to demonstrate his ideas. He had "rich debutantes" and "women's rights activists" (all of whom models he had hired) march during the parade and when he gave the cue, all of the women lit cigarettes, their "torches of freedom" (which Bernays had publically sensationalized through the media) in clear view of camera operators and reporters (Brandt 1996:63-6).

Powerful tobacco industries had shifted the ideology of the culture to their satisfaction reporting rising sales as many women picked up smoking publicly during a time when it was taboo for women to smoke. This is an example of how the use of media can instill in the minds of people certain perceptions as well as mold existing preconceptions. Bernays had linked media (mass communication) and power (dominant groups) through his campaigns for cigarettes (Studlar 2002:55) and his association and development of public relations in a society becoming increasingly more connected and receptive to media productions.

Author of *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), Bernays stated in his most seminal work *Propaganda* (1928) his guiding thesis:

The ... manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, [minds molded, tastes formed, and ideas suggested], largely by [people] we have never heard of... It is they who pull the wires that control the public mind. (P. 9)

What Bernays had defined was a process of engineering consent, of deliberately directing the public mindset through propaganda in aid to upper class capitalism all in service to the economy and the persistence of a balanced society, adding, “If we understand ... the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it?” (ibid.:47) He provides the example of an expensive factory that cannot wait for the public to ask for their product, but instead must keep in touch by enticing the public through advertising and propaganda to ensure its profitable continuity (ibid.:63).

Bernays was primed to use the development and control of symbolic action, including all of the tools concomitant with public communication (i.e. mass media) under “civil society”, to formulate some kind of cultivated image of life and of objects – namely to produce a mentality, in order to influence change in the social consciousness of people or some modification in the general culture or mores of a society. This is a model of how ideological manipulation is oftentimes intentional and although Bernays had been occupied by advertising, the overarching power heading advertising and film remains, just as often, the same between the two. While advertising has to do with suggesting to consumers reasons or ideas that align them to the order of the producer in maintenance of the status

quo, it is through stories and symbolism that films influence consumers' (audiences) frames of reference, usually, in promotion of or adherence to the status quo. Therefore, depending on whether the nature of the film is that of complete absurdity or true-to-life military combat, the cultural product of film becomes an advertisement.

Mass media in general tends to exploit stories for “sensationalization” in capitalist societies where espoused is the exploitation of people, stories, and lives. Film producers and relevant parties – not unlike Bernays and tobacco capitalists – want to use these sensational “spectacles” in combination with support from influential dominant powers to provide enticing and provoking stories and emotions. What they are dealing with is an intimate operationalization of the concept of the *spectacle* and a pivotal turning point in industry of which capitalists move to exploit. Before this concept receives its spotlight, it is important to begin with that industry which employs it.

## FILM SPECTACLES AND IDEOLOGICAL HEGEMONY

### *Contemporary Reapplication*

Nations whose ruling producers have divided their labor enough to intensify their productive efforts have progressively moved the world more into a technological realm. The world then becomes inviting of innovative spheres of public communication during which the culture of today grows obviously more into a media culture. A culture through which mass media use public communication (linear one-way communication i.e. “public telling”) with an audience who have no ability to interact with the source. This will permit the introduction of “the culture industry” whose operation lies in those with the greatest

economic power (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999:121). This “industry” produces standardized cultural products, like film, all in a homogenized matter under the supervision of the dominant hegemonizing classes in order to pacify the public to the opiate of their production, drawing out their preferences and eliciting their consent to the status quo. This is a part of the ideological hegemony. Claimed as satisfying consumers based on what the dominant classes consider as the needs of the public, consumers legitimize and accept these products in a cycle of “manipulation and retroactive need” (ibid.). In the case of film, becoming indistinguishable from real life and leaving no room for imagination or the critique of its accuracy the productive detail in film used to reflect reality makes it a reality easily imposed on viewers (ibid.:126). Everything produced passes through the culture industry.

In this manner, producers procure the attention of consumers at all times as they access the former’s products through the engineering of their consent, as Bernays had earlier employed; this consenting and convenient access based on supposed needs indeed develops in consumers’ minds psychological needs that are satisfied by compliance with and acceptance of what is produced, ergo, legitimizing the system and its products (of domination). This compliance is what allows for a transference of symbolism and messages that embody ideological conceptions in the minds of tuned-in, listening, watching, audiences. Set on this manipulative capacity, this thesis readdresses the research question, “How does the hegemonic ideology of the American military operate through American Superhero films, its portrayal of the U.S. military, and the nation’s coinciding military

preoccupation”, proposing that dominant classes and their institutions of power (i.e. the military industry) utilize the cultural displays, or spectacles, inherent in film to promote an ideology within an audience made compliant through a manufacturing of their consent to the system by accepting its products, an ideology that continues to promote the American military-industrial machine and America as a global superpower.

Society moves now into what theorist Guy Debord has called a “society of the spectacle” (Kellner 2003:2). Doug Kellner further explains this in terms of mass media with “media spectacles” as those phenomena that manifest a culture’s values, introduce others to a culture, and sensationalize stories; for instance, those gratuitous displays of media, sports, political, and social happenings. Media spectacles in this sense have “a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations...” (ibid.) and because of this makes media a powerful tool under “civil society” to produce a mentality in people, per se a culture, within a society. Through these means, the dominant upper classes operating the reins of media and civil society maintain the status quo that has kept them in dominant positions. Kellner’s 1995 study of mass media suggests that media culture plays an important role in socialization today providing cultural perceptions of gender, behavior, style, and role models (ibid.:viii) and thus enables cultural products like film to transmit through this interaction a manufactured (produced) hegemonizing ideology.

*Hegemonic power and its employment.* Heretofore, this thesis loosely handled the definition of hegemony. Its true significance has even more to do with political communication than is previously defined; to Laclau and Mouffe, hegemony supposes a field dominated by an articulatory practice, namely, the articulation of political discourse and of military, political, and economic relations making hegemony a political relationship of power (1985:93). Capitalism has given rise to more accumulated power by which the fragmentation of society and its social tasks have paved the way for the articulatory practices of imperialist-based ideological hegemony, hence, “the ultimate core of a hegemonic force consists of a fundamental class” (ibid.:134).

Film as a means of representing ideology under the guise of what producers think consumers want gives considerable power to those authorities whom control the economy (that which is produced), reiterating Horkheimer and Adorno’s view on the operation of the culture industry. However, according to Laclau and Mouffe, “power is constructed in a pragmatic way and internally... power is never foundational” (ibid.:142). Problematizing power with reference to any single class or discursive antagonistic formation cannot pinpoint accurately any source of power; nor is the claim of the total diffusion of power completely valid. The case of films presents ample room for the investigation of silos of power together with the operation of ideological hegemony, given that; it is not a class nor a total diffused power who have control of the content of the media, but possibly an amalgamation of different powers, i.e., of corporations and politics. Those controlling silos contain on the one hand the dominant classes and their institutions and related parties, they

include the military-industrial complex through the government and its association with war-as-business producers, and on the other, those forces of production associated with the film surely some of those same lesser dominant managers and producers working under the pressure of those superior – those who pull more strings. Consenting to the guise of support, producers work beside the budgets and compliances of more dominant producers to complete their projects with some piece of originality.

Previously mentioned was the notion of dominant ideological control in terms of “soft power”. For Nye, the capacity to obtain desired results by influencing behavior in others is power (Nye 2004), he furthers:

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants... because other countries – admiring its [values, example, and level of prosperity] – want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others... This soft power... co-opts people rather than coerces them (P. 5)

However, the state (any government) does not hold this power in its entirety; international institutions, private corporations, and non-government organizations attract others to their own preferences and opinions using the same methods related to soft power (ibid.). Films’ structure of production is no exception. The content that they produce and distribute in their power is far-reaching. Although India may produce more movies per year, much of the world’s films and television programs indicate a dominance of the entertainment and media industries by United States’ productive efforts (Rosendorf 2000:117). In fact, the United States is among the top three nations for feature films production between India and China (UNESCO). As of 2016, North America (the United States and Canada) has garnered

the most revenue in box office ticket sales than all other nations, albeit films in the more populous nations (China and India) tend to have more admissions (MPAA).

*The function and risk of motion pictures.* American motion picture films together with their global reach and their popularity, laden with internally produced symbolism about the United States or of its military, have the capacity for ideological transference suggests that films serve a function. Robert K. Merton, responsible for concepts like reference groups (and role models) and the founding of the sociology of science, lends to this thesis the dichotomous terms of latent and manifest functions in his 1968 book, *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

Manifest functions are those “objective (actual) consequences” of something (a system, person, or process), that supports its readaptation. The public knows and understands these functions, such as schools serving the function of educating the public, thus the public consents. Conversely, latent functions refer to those “unintended and unrecognized consequences” (ibid.:117), such as schools’ unrecognized function of serving as the heart of socialization opportunities, social ties, identity, and belonging. Merton further developed ideas of propaganda analysis and studies of mass media. What he says regarding film could not be said any simpler, “Films showing battle scenes or bombings prove effective if they focus on the details of the operation rather than stressing the direct propaganda ‘message’ for the audiences” (ibid.:579). Adopting this further insight, this thesis intends to build an analysis around the latent functions of motion picture films, that films have alongside their apparent - the manifest - function of entertaining, the

additional ulterior - the latent - function of enculturating audiences. If films have the ability to enculturate, concurrently they have ability to socialize a distinct, if fragmented or contrived – indeed produced, understanding of reality and of American reality or of its military. This thesis will deal with the latter function in addition to how, by way of film, hegemonic ideology of the American military operates.

The risk of mass communication (mass media) remains one of the most significant curiosities found within academia. Mass media continues to pierce all life with its influences and thrives integrally within the economy and society. There are characteristics that make mass media especially distinct from general public discourse: a) only a powerful few produce and distribute opinion to the great masses; b) those powerless masses cannot respond to the messages they are receiving; c) any opinion produced by the powerless cannot find footing in powerful systems; and, d) while institutions normally do not interfere with public discourse, they play an important role in influencing the discussion of certain opinions, thus reducing the autonomy of a people (Mills 1999:304). It is this quality of power and influence within current, what Mills considers, “mass society” that marks the reason why it is important to study any phenomena whereby few may influence, or hegemonize, a great many. Following the guiding research question, this thesis focuses on the operation of American ideological hegemony in some of the nation’s top grossing films and its portrayal of the American military with regard to contemporary American military preoccupation.

The concept of the military-industrial complex is significant to this thesis because of its idea of the interconnectedness of military, political, and economic (corporate) leaders. For Mills, there are dominating groups whose power of decision affects not only the U.S. population, but “[has] enormous consequence[s] for the underlying population” of the world (ibid.:12). The power elite, as Mills puts it, hold strategic positions in society and command the “dominant institutions of a dominant nation” (ibid.:287). These political and productive ideological forces have at their foundation a capability to assert their will in whatever manipulative capacity; such is the case with U.S. military promotion in U.S. films. The military-industrial complex deciphers the “war as business” attitude that tends to exist in the dominant American culture by clarifying how a nation’s military leaders work together with their nation’s defense industry leaders perpetuating the preoccupation with war.

Considering the global reach and consumption of American film, associated with all the values and cues inserted into the products that audiences pick up wishing to experience American culture through its media, it appears that the need to explore the ideology and hegemony (i.e. ideological hegemony of the U.S. military) behind film is becoming more significant and relevant in our increasingly globalizing and technologizing world. In an effort to study ideological hegemony in film, this thesis will guide us through the systematic content analysis that will attempt to highlight American ideological hegemony in film.

## Chapter 3

## DESIGN: HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGY IN FILM

## METHODOLOGICAL STANDING

*Research Strategy*

This study will systematically explore via the following content analysis the research question, “how does the hegemonic ideology of the American military operate through American Superhero films, its portrayal of the U.S. military, and the nation’s coinciding military preoccupation?” The overall purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationships surrounding cultural hegemony (i.e. ideological inculcation) and its operation in American film, concerning its representation of the American military and its capacity for promoting a defined outlook or mentality of the nation’s military forces. Similar to studies of film and hegemony (Shin and Namkung 2008), this analysis is concerned with the two categories of studying filmic hegemony: promotion of ideology inside – both, the plot impact/importance and depictions of U.S. military; and promotion of ideology outside – the productive structure i.e. distribution, revenue, etc., of the films.

Two top-grossing Superhero film franchises, particularly the *Iron Man* and *Captain America* film franchises, will serve as units of analysis. The reasons for this are that a) films grossing the highest worldwide box office revenues often accompany high viewer turnout (many consumers); b) superhero films are one of the most recent popular film genres in the last ten years; and c) these two film franchises represent plots tied closely with the U.S. military and military intervention. This thesis investigates the possibility for

avenues of ideological hegemony associated with the U.S. military to act on viewers in the named films.

Hegemony may function at two distinct levels, according to both Nye (1990) and Gramsci (et al. 1971) that may act in a suggestive or a coercive manner. Because of motion pictures aforementioned role in socialization (see Merton), its operation of hegemony exists to suggest ideas, values, tastes, and emotions by way of constructed symbolism and messages. The proposed methodology will illustrate findings in tabular form divided by film. To elucidate clearly this operation within motion pictures, this thesis shall analyze hegemony both inside and outside the films, as had been the nature of previous studies into filmic hegemony and is thus broken down:

*Avenue of ideological preparation inside films.* Analysis of hegemonic ideologies through studies of (1) U.S. military portrayal (length of screen time), (2) overall plot impact of depicted U.S. military, and (3) visual ideological themes pertaining to the U.S. military.

To examine these popular American movies as hegemonic ideological apparatuses, this methodology compiles three aspects relating to portrayal and symbolism that together form the capability for promoting ideology in film. This will show the depth of influence. The data gathered inside consists of foremost the lengths (in minutes) of screen time for the portrayal of the American military.

Secondly, this thesis will examine the plot impact for each film based on a degree-of-impact rating scale developed through the methodology (see Table 1). This scale will

act as a metric of the quality of impact, such as that impact having a lasting effect that changed the narrative for the pro/antagonist and will break down the level of the United States' military involvement in relation to the progress of the story. The five degrees pertaining to the plot impact scale will classify military involvement in five ways – limited, exemplary, conspicuous, prominent, and absolute – and whether that military involvement supported the protagonist by adjusting the plot. Each degree is associated with a score (1-5) whose location of central tendency is a measure of the represented effectiveness of the United States military as it relates to plot impact.

Table 1: Plot Degree-of-Impact Scale

Degree*	U.S. Military Involvement
1 Limited	Sparsely present, served no purpose, and had nothing to do with the plot or protagonist.
2 Exemplary	Typically present, had a function or purpose unrelated to the story, but did not move the plot or help the protagonist succeed.
3 Conspicuous	Obviously present, had a function or purpose roughly related to the story, but did not move the plot or help the protagonist succeed.
4 Prominent	Generously present, had a function or purpose generally related to the story, and did move the plot in some way, but did not help the protagonist succeed.
5 Absolute	Predominantly present, had a powerful and lasting impact, had a function or purpose primarily related to the story, moved the plot, and helped the protagonist succeed.

\*Each degree is associated with a score whose location of central tendency is a measure of the represented effectiveness of the United States military as it relates to plot impact.

Lastly, the themes and symbols woven into the imagery; do those have promoting/protesting implications for the U.S. military? This method translates themes into ideologically visual patterning. The visual patterning of military involvement builds upon an index of collected images, like light military vehicles, uniformed personnel, automatic firearms, etc. This will show how the films may create and/or maintain hegemony among viewers.

*Avenue of ideological preparation outside films.* Analysis of the productive structure's diffusive power and influence with regard to (1) countries where distributed, (2) how much of this medium is accessed in terms of worldwide box office revenue (gross consumption), and (3) product release time.

To address how and if these popular American movies have the potential to promote ideology externally of the symbolism on screen, this methodology will bring together three aspects of the productive structure. This will explain the reach of influence – the encompassing character of these films and their role in socializing viewers. The data gathered outside will consist of, at first, a catalog of locations (countries) where distributed and in what languages for each film; secondly, the overall viewing (consumption) of these films (products) suggested by their overall revenue; and lastly, the release dates for each film.

This thesis examines films' capability for socialization; that is, the ability to impart ideas to viewers on a mass scale. By the structured two-pronged approach, this thesis will help elucidate how certain films can promote a specific representation of the American military-industrial system. This research hopes to investigate films' capability as tools of socialization.

## Chapter 4

## DISCOVERY: IDEOLOGICAL PROPAGANDA

## RESEARCH

*Methods and Significance*

This study explored via a systematic process of analysis the content within two top-grossing Superhero film franchises, particularly the *Iron Man* and *Captain America* film franchises. The aforementioned analysis followed the research question, “how does the hegemonic ideology of the American military operate through American Superhero films, its portrayal of the U.S. military, and the nation’s coinciding military preoccupation?” in an attempt to highlight the relationships encompassing cultural hegemony (i.e. ideological inculcation) and its operation through American film.

This study paid close attention to the depiction of the American military and its capacity for promoting a prescribed outlook or understanding of the nation’s military forces. The method mentioned above reflects similar studies into filmic hegemony and as such arranges the analysis of ideological hegemony in film into a two-pronged approach.

*The logic and process defined.* The films are significant because they are two of the highest grossing film franchises serving a worldwide audience and represent the first generation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe films. These films typify one of the most popular genres within the last ten years and whose plots are comprised of ideas and events related to the U.S. military and its eventual intervention or involvement. This thesis investigates the selected films' potential effect on viewers as avenues of ideological hegemony associated with the U.S. military in the manner detailed below. It is important to elucidate this operation inside and out because of hegemony's operation at two distinct levels, suggestive and coercive. In this way, the suggestive fashion by which film operates may be isolated.

*Avenues of ideological preparation inside and outside films.* Findings that exist inside of these films will demonstrate the depth of influence through the compilation of three aspects relating to portrayal and symbolism, such as the U.S. military length of screen time, the degree of plot impact, and visual themes. Findings that exist outside will demonstrate the productive structure, namely, the reach of influence, through the compilation of three additional aspects; this includes a catalog of release locations, overall consumption, and release dates. This approach will allow the collection of analytical elements that will help describe film's capability for mass socialization.

The collection, calculation, and evaluation involved in this analysis required emergent reconfiguration in the method of processing data, allowing the analytical elements contained within to support the premise and investigation of this thesis. As

follows, the analysis catalogues elements to provide a classification of military thematics, or those ideologically visual patterns of military involvement. Condensed into military thematics are both the involvement and representation of specific U.S. military personnel and machinery, like soldiers, fighter aircraft, armored tanks, etc., excluding the general portrayal of weaponry. These will serve as thematics that promote an ideological involvement and representation of U.S. military. The productive structure analysis of films referred to above mainly attempts to define the structure of production, or that system of what the structure produces and how it reaches audiences, focusing on the exact reach to other global audiences and just how much of that medium viewers are accessing.

This analysis includes aggregate time, which is the cumulative length of screen time; ratio denotes elapsed time percentage; and impact captures the plot impact of military involvement. In addition to the above are the top five international countries, which lists the five countries grossing the highest box office revenue; gross consumption acts as an indication of the extent audience members are accessing and viewing this medium; and release time specifies the total number of weeks and days the films have been in theaters. Each film contained a plethora of military symbolism and representation – including weaponry, flags, and uniforms. Notwithstanding, the purpose of this thesis focuses primarily on the representation of U.S. military personnel and machinery. Attention, readers, spoilers ahead.

## REPORT: IRON MAN

### *Iron Man (2008)*

*Iron Man* (2008) was a U.S. film positing that a man named Tony Stark, a capitalist, industrialist, and U.S. defense contractor, becomes a superhero. After finding his company's (Stark Industries) intensely powerful weaponry in the hands of the enemy (terrorists in this case) and being used to kill American soldiers, Stark declares that he will no longer produce weaponry. During the film, Stark builds a suit of powered armor to help him escape terrorists, discovers that his company manager is selling arms to the enemy, destroys that weaponry and saves villagers, and defeats his company manager-turned-villain, eventually saving the world.

*Avenue of ideology inside Iron Man (2008).* U.S. manufactured firearms were generally observed sprinkled throughout the film in almost every scene with soldiers or officers, specifically during scenes of action, like Browning M2HB machine guns, M61 Vulcan cannons, Javelin portable missiles, BGM 71 TOW rockets, and M4A1 assault rifles, showcase well U.S. military ideology, particularly U.S. weaponry.

In terms of the above described military thematics (see Table 2.1a), in a 126-minute film, a proportion of duration of thirty-four minutes (27.3%) exhibited U.S. military involvement. The U.S. Air Force Airmen and U.S. Army and Air Force Officers received the largest aggregate screen times (about 6% each of the proportion of duration) and both made significant impact on the plot (absolute and prominent, respectively). Those airmen and officers were responsible for serving and saving Tony Stark, yet for nearly half of the

proportion of duration (fifteen minutes) these two thematics made up the highest ratio of the film's U.S. military portrayal (about 12%).

Table 2.1a: Ideological Preparation "Inside" Film 1: Iron Man

Film 1:

**Iron Man**, 2008 (MCU Phase 1)

Duration (mm): 126

Military Thematics	Aggregate	Ratio	Impact
1. U.S. Air Force Airmen	07:40	6.08	Absolute
2. U.S. Army and Air Force Officers	07:28	5.93	Prominent
3. U.S. Air Force Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor	04:42	3.73	Prominent
4. U.S. Army Soldiers	04:27	3.53	Prominent
5. U.S. Army HMMWV (Humvee)	03:30	2.78	Exemplary
6. U.S. Air Force Boeing C-17 Globemaster III	03:09	2.50	Conspicuous
7. U.S. Air Force Northrop Grumman RQ4 Global Hawk	01:35	1.26	Limited
8. U.S. Air Force Sikorsky HH-60 Pave Hawk	01:02	0.82	Prominent
9. U.S. Army M1 Abrams Tank	00:27	0.36	Limited
10. U.S. Army Boeing CH-47 Chinook	00:21	0.28	Limited
Proportion of Duration: (mm):	0:34:21 34	(27.3)	Effect: 3.5

The film highlighted the F-22 Raptor for about five minutes having a prominent impact on the plot, both by shooting at the in-flight Iron Man and by forcing Tony Stark to reveal himself to the U.S. Air Force that he was Iron Man. Moreover, U.S. Army Soldiers received a three-and-a-half percent ratio of the total proportion of duration and while they were not integral to the story, they did pose some sort of supportive role pointing to a prominent impact on the plot.

The overall represented effectiveness rating in the above table, based on scores associated with the plot degree-of-impact scale detailed in chapter three, yields a median effect score of 3.50 for the ten U.S. military thematics. This score signifies a more prominent U.S. military involvement, however conspicuous, in that the U.S. military involvement was generously present in an obvious fashion, served a function or purpose generally related to the story, moved the plot in some way, but did not help the protagonist succeed. The examination of the diffusive power of the *Iron Man* (2008) film will shed light on the dominant reach of this film, that is, the film's efficacy in reaching many audiences.

*Avenue of ideology outside Iron Man (2008).* The productive structure analysis of ideological hegemony in the selected film shows the extensive means by which U.S. military ideology diffuses (see Table 3.1a). In over seventy international countries where the film was distributed, the top countries grossing the highest revenue were 1) United Kingdom, 2) South Korea, 3) Mexico, 4) France, and 5) Argentina.

Table 3.1a: Ideological Preparation “Outside” Film 1: Iron Man

Film 1:

**Iron Man**, 2008 (MCU Phase 1)

Produced by Marvel Studios and Distributed by Paramount Pictures

Top Five International Countries	Gross Consumption			Release Time	
1. United Kingdom	Domestic:	\$318,412,101	54%	Released:	May, 2008
2. South Korea	Foreign:	\$266,762,121	46%	Closed:	Oct, 2008
3. Mexico					
4. France	Total:	\$585,174,222		Total:	153 days
5. Argentina	Theaters:	4,154		or	22 weeks
Total Countries: 70	Opening:	\$98,618,668			

Source: Box Office Mojo, 2018

Regarding worldwide box office revenue, the selected film grossed nearly \$600 million, with a little over half of that coming from domestic viewers (54% or \$318 million) and the other from foreign viewers (46% or \$266 million) from over four thousand movie theaters worldwide. This film ran for one hundred fifty-three days, which is twenty-two weeks or just shy of half a year; during the opening weekend alone, this film grossed ninety-eight million.

*Iron Man 2 (2010)*

*Iron Man 2* (2010) was a U.S. film focusing on Tony Stark, known as Iron Man, as he attempts to keep his technology from the hands of the U.S. government, battle his declining health, and defend against a vendetta from a rogue Russian scientist. During the

film, Stark, accepting his impending death due to poisoning by the palladium core of his arc reactor keeping him alive, behaves recklessly ending with U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel James Rhodes confiscating one of Stark's iron man suits. Stark donning a new Iron Man suit learns of the rogue scientist's intentions, battles Rhodes whose suit is being hacked by the scientist only to join forces with Rhodes after breaking the hack, and defeats the scientist, saving the world.

*Avenue of ideology inside Iron Man 2 (2010).* Firearms manufactured by the United States were observed scattered throughout the film in scenes with action, like FIM-92 Stinger missile launchers, M242 Bushmaster autocannons, GUA-19 Gatling guns, and M4A1 assault rifles to name a few, exemplifying U.S. weaponry.

In terms of the above described military thematics (see Table 2.2a), in a 125-minute film, a proportion of duration of eleven minutes and sixteen seconds (9%) exhibited U.S. military involvement. The U.S. Army and Air Force Officers received the largest aggregate screen time (about 6%), making an obvious appearance roughly related to the plot without providing much impact, thus signifying conspicuous U.S. military involvement. U.S. Army and Air Force Officers were common in courtroom and military air bases totaling only seven minutes and fifteen second while U.S. Air Force Airmen received nearly two minutes (1.5%).

Table 2.2a: Ideological Preparation “Inside” Film 3: Iron Man 2

Film 3:

**Iron Man 2**, 2010 (MCU Phase 1)

Duration (mm): 125

Military Thematics	Aggregate	Ratio	Impact
1. U.S. Army and Air Force Officers	07:15	5.80	Conspicuous
2. U.S. Air Force Airmen	01:53	1.51	Exemplary
3. U.S. Air Force Lockheed Martin F-16 Fighting Falcon	00:48	0.64	Limited
4. U.S. Air Force Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor	00:28	0.37	Limited
5. U.S. Air Force Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit	00:27	0.36	Limited
6. U.S. Air Force Boeing C-17 Globemaster III	00:14	0.19	Limited
7. U.S. Air Force Rockwell B-1B Lancer	00:08	0.11	Limited
8. U.S. Air Force Boeing B-52H Stratofortress	00:03	0.04	Limited
Proportion of Duration: (mm):	0:11:16 11	(9.0)	Effect: 1

The film highlighted a plethora of U.S. Air Force aircraft thematics, like the Lockheed Martin F-16 Fighting Falcon and F-22 Raptor, the Boeing C-17 Globemaster III and B-52H Stratofortress, the Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit, and the Rockwell B-1B Lancer. Each of these thematics exerted limited impact on the plot for they served no purpose other than setting the scene practically and symbolically. These thematics received a fraction of aggregate time altogether accumulating nearly two percent ratio of total proportion of duration (1.71%).

The overall represented effectiveness rating in the above table, based on scores associated with the plot degree-of-impact scale detailed in chapter three, yields a median

effect score of 1.00 for the eight U.S. military thematics. This score signifies a limited U.S. military involvement. Any representation of the U.S. military was merely for scene setting and little to do with the plot. The inspection of the diffusion of the Iron Man 2 (2010) film should help identify the reach of this film to many audiences.

*Avenue of ideology outside Iron Man 2 (2010).* The productive structure analysis of ideological hegemony in the selected film shows the extensive means by which U.S. military ideology diffuses (see Table 3.2a). In sixty-five international countries where the film was distributed, the top countries grossing the highest revenue were 1) United Kingdom, 2) South Korea, 3) Australia, 4) France, and 5) Mexico.

Table 3.2a: Ideological Preparation “Outside” Film 3: Iron Man 2

Film 3:

**Iron Man 2, 2010 (MCU Phase 1)**

Produced by Marvel Studios and Distributed by Paramount Pictures

Top Five International Countries	Gross Consumption			Release Time
1. United Kingdom	Domestic:	\$312,433,331	50%	Released: May, 2010
2. South Korea	Foreign:	\$311,500,000	50%	Closed: Aug, 2010
3. Australia				
4. France	Total:	\$623,933,331		Total: 104 days
5. Mexico	Theaters:	4,380		or 15 weeks
Total Countries: 65	Opening:	\$128,122,480		

Source: Box Office Mojo, 2018

Regarding worldwide box office revenue, the selected film grossed just over \$620 million, with equal portions coming from both domestic and foreign box offices (50% each or about \$310 million each) from almost four thousand four hundred movie theaters worldwide. This film ran for one hundred four days, or fifteen weeks; during the opening weekend alone, this film grossed one hundred twenty-eight million.

*Iron Man 3 (2013)*

*Iron Man 3* (2013) was a U.S. film following Tony Stark, or Iron Man, as he deals with posttraumatic stress disorder and a series of terrorist attacks. Stark deals with his stress by building many new Iron Man suits, but it is not until a terrorist attack injures his friend and security chief that he threatens the terrorist known as the Mandarin. During the film, Stark survives a provoked terrorist attack that left his private estate destroyed, discovers that the terrorist is only a political puppet manipulated by an evil scientist, rescues falling passengers from Air Force One, joins with friend James Rhodes (now War Machine/Iron Patriot), defeats the evil scientist, rescues the U.S. president and his secretary and industry successor Pepper Potts, and saves the world.

*Avenue of ideology inside Iron Man 3 (2013).* U.S. manufactured firearms were generally observed lightly throughout the film, they include Mac-10 machine pistols, Remington 870 shotguns, M4A1 assault rifles, Kimber Custom M1911 pistols, and M2 flamethrowers, showcasing lightly U.S. weaponry.

In terms of the above described military thematics, there were little to no distinguishable U.S. military thematics exhibited in this film. No longer observed are U.S. military personnel and vehicles, but U.S. intelligence agents and operatives from S.H.I.E.L.D., or the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division, some affiliate of the U.S. government and the United Nations.

Although not directly related to the U.S. military or to ideology surrounding the U.S. military, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agency points to some significance between international, or even extraterrestrial, conflict and the United States ideological apparatus. This facet will receive further examination in chapter five.

*Avenue of ideology outside Iron Man 3 (2013).* The productive structure analysis of ideological hegemony in the selected film shows the extensive means by which U.S. military ideology diffuses (see Table 3.3a). In fifty-four international countries where the film was distributed, the top countries grossing the highest revenue were 1) China, 2) South Korea, 3) United Kingdom, 4) Mexico, and 5) Russia.

Table 3.3a: Ideological Preparation “Outside” Film 5: Iron Man 3

Film 5:

**Iron Man 3**, 2013 (MCU Phase 2)

Produced by Marvel Studios and Distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

Top Five International Countries	Gross Consumption			Release Time
1. China	Domestic:	\$409,013,994	34%	Released: May, 2013
2. South Korea	Foreign:	\$805,797,258	66%	Closed: Sep, 2013
3. United Kingdom				
4. Mexico	Total:	\$1,214,811,252		Total: 132 days
5. Russia	Theaters:	4,253		or 19 weeks
Total Countries: 54	Opening:	\$174,144,585		

Source: Box Office Mojo, 2018

Regarding worldwide box office revenue, the selected film grossed just over \$1.21 billion, with a over half of that coming from foreign viewers (66% or \$805 million) and the other from domestic viewers (34% or \$409 million) from about four thousand two hundred movie theaters worldwide. This film ran for one hundred thirty-two days, which is nineteen weeks; during the opening weekend alone, this film grossed one hundred seventy-four million.

## REPORT: CAPTAIN AMERICA

### *Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)*

*Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) was a U.S. film supposing that a man named Steve Rodgers, whom beset with health problems and constantly rejected by the U.S. military, becomes a superhero. Rodgers accepts an offer to undergo an experimental mix of chemicals developed to aid the U.S. military during World War II; this makes him a super soldier functioning at the peak of human physical and mental perfection. Rodgers later joins the U.S. military in the European theatre in a combatant function, rescues his friend and other prisoners from behind enemy lines, and discovers, challenges, and defeats the villain who is himself a defective super soldier, saving the world.

*Avenue of ideology inside Captain America: The First Avenger (2011).* General observation concludes that in just about every single scene of this film, U.S. manufactured firearms are extensively showcased and while the film does take place during World War II between several different armies, a myriad of U.S. produced and operated firearms take center stage, including M1 Garand rifles, Mk2 grenades, M1921 Thompson submachine guns, Colt 1911 pistols, Colt M1917 revolvers, M1 Carbine rifles, M1921 Johnson rifles, M1903 Springfield sniper rifles, Winchester 1897 shotguns, and Browning M1919 machine guns.

In terms of military thematics (see Table 2.1b), in a 124-minute film, a proportion of duration of one hundred sixteen minutes, or one hour and fifty-six minutes, exhibited U.S. military involvement. Not coincidentally, U.S. Army Officers and U.S. Army Soldiers

received the largest aggregate screen time (33% and 28% of the proportion of duration respectively); this represented a large piece of the ideological apparatus totaling one hour fifteen minutes and seven seconds, or a sixty percent ratio of the proportion of duration. These two U.S. military thematics had an absolute impact on the plot, as they would, considering this a film depicting World War II from the American perspective. This is significant because it provides the perfect grounds for the reproduction and promotion of U.S. military involvement and representation.

Table 2.1b: Ideological Preparation “Inside” Film 2: Captain America: TFA

Film 2:

**Captain America: The First Avenger, 2011 (MCU Phase 1)**

Duration (mm): 124

Military Thematics	Aggregate	Ratio	Impact
1. U.S. Army Officer	40:51	32.89	Absolute
2. U.S. Army Soldiers	34:16	27.59	Absolute
3. U.S. Army Super Soldier (Captain America)	26:46	21.55	Absolute
4. U.S. Army Willys MB Jeep	12:48	10.31	Conspicuous
5. U.S. Army M4 Sherman	00:53	0.71	Limited
6. U.S. Army M36 Tank Destroyer	00:53	0.71	Limited
Proportion of Duration: (mm):	1:56:27 116	(93.8)	Effect: 4

Steve Rodgers did not fully embody the U.S. military until about half way into the film when he officially took on a combatant function and planned to go behind enemy lines and face the enemy. For a twenty percent ratio of the proportion of duration, Captain

America (Captain Rodgers) received nearly half an hour of screen time (26 minutes) highlighting the prowess and cunning given to him by U.S. government military experiments.

The overall represented effectiveness based on scores associated with the plot degree-of-impact scale yields a median effect score of 4.00 for the six U.S. military thematics. This score signifies a more absolute U.S. military involvement, however prominent, in that the U.S. military involvement was predominantly present in a generous fashion, served a function or purpose primarily related to the story, moved the plot in some way, had a powerful and lasting impact, and did help the protagonist succeed. An analysis of the diffusive power of this film will uncover its reach toward audiences.

*Avenue of ideology outside Captain America: The First Avenger (2011).* An analysis of the productive structure of the selected film as it relates to ideological hegemony shows the exhaustive means whereby the U.S. military ideology distributes (see Table 3.1b). Out of sixty-four international countries where this film was distributed, the top countries grossing the highest revenue were 1) Brazil, 2) Mexico, 3) United Kingdom, 4) Australia, and 5) France.

Table 3.1b: Ideological Preparation “Outside” Film 2: Captain America: TFA

Film 2:

**Captain America: The First Avenger, 2011 (MCU Phase 1)**

Produced by Marvel Studios and Distributed by Paramount Pictures

Top Five International Countries	Gross Consumption		Release Time	
1. Brazil	Domestic:	\$176,654,505	48%	Released: Jul, 2011
2. Mexico	Foreign:	\$193,915,269	52%	Closed: Nov, 2011
3. United Kingdom				
4. Australia	Total:	\$370,569,774		Total: 111 days
5. France	Theaters:	3,715		or 16 weeks
Total Countries: 64	Opening:	\$65,058,524		

Source: Box Office Mojo, 2018

With regard to worldwide box office revenue, the selected film grossed nearly \$400 million, with a larger portion of that coming from international theaters and foreign viewers (52% or \$193 million) and the other from domestic viewers (48% or \$176 million) from three thousand seven hundred theaters worldwide. This film ran for one hundred eleven days, which is sixteen weeks. During just the opening weekend, this film grossed sixty-five million.

*Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)*

*Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) was a U.S. film following Steve Rodgers, known as Captain America, as he joins forces with others (Black Widow and Falcon) to explore and remove spies from within S.H.I.E.L.D. and confronts the Winter

Soldier assassin, originally Rodger's friend, Bucky Barnes. Rodgers learns of a conspiracy within S.H.I.E.L.D. and becomes suspicious of the agency after S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Fury warns him of an infiltration. During the uncovering of spies in the agency, Rodgers finds a mole and from him learns that the infiltration of the agency resulted in a weapons' algorithm that targets those who would resist the infiltrating body, Hydra, and its eventual control. On the run from S.H.I.E.L.D. agents ordered to eliminate him, the now-fugitive Rodgers, along with Black Widow and Falcon, try to escape an attack made by the Winter Soldier. Rodgers restores control to S.H.I.E.L.D. by exposing the infiltration, stops two flying aircraft carriers from attacking the public, fights the Winter Soldier who in turn saves an unconscious Rodgers before vanishing into the woods, and saves the world.

*Avenue of ideology inside Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014).* General observation shows that in many scenes, U.S. manufactured firearms are showcased, including, but not limited to, Smith & Wesson M&P pistols, Mac-10 machine pistols, M3 submachine guns, Winchester 1897 shotguns, M4A1 assault rifles, M1 Garand rifles, and Barrett M82 sniper rifle.

In terms of military thematics (see Table 2.2b), in a 136-minute film, a proportion of duration of twenty-five seconds (0.3%) exhibited U.S. military involvement. The film depicts only U.S. Army and Air Force Officers during the scenes of a hearing toward the end of the film.

Table 2.2b: Ideological Preparation “Inside” Film 4: Captain America: TWS

Film 4:

**Captain America: The Winter Soldier**, 2014 (MCU Phase 2)

Duration (mm): 136

Military Thematics	Aggregate	Ratio	Impact
1. U.S. Army and Air Force Officers	00:25	0.31	Conspicuous
Proportion of Duration: (mm):	0:00:25 0	(0.3)	Effect: 3

The overall represented effectiveness based on scores associated with the plot degree-of-impact scale yields a median effect score of 3.00 for the one U.S. military thematic. This score signifies a conspicuous U.S. military involvement, in that the U.S. military involvement was obviously present and served a function or purpose roughly related to the story. An analysis of the diffusive power of this film will uncover its influential reach.

*Avenue of ideology outside Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014).*

An analysis of the productive structure of the selected film as it relates to ideological hegemony shows the exhaustive means whereby the U.S. military ideology distributes (see Table 3.2b). Out of fifty-four international countries where this film was distributed, the top countries grossing the highest revenue were 1) China, 2) United Kingdom, 3) South Korea, 4) Brazil, and 5) Mexico.

Table 3.2b: Ideological Preparation “Outside” Film 4: Captain America: TWS

Film 4:

**Captain America: The Winter Soldier**, 2014 (MCU Phase 2)

Produced by Marvel Studios and Distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

Top Five International Countries	Gross Consumption			Release Time	
1. China	Domestic:	\$259,766,572	36%	Released:	Apr, 2014
2. United Kingdom	Foreign:	\$454,497,695	64%	Closed:	Aug, 2014
3. South Korea					
4. Brazil	Total:	\$714,264,267		Total:	139 days
5. Mexico	Theaters:	3,938		or	20 weeks
Total Countries: 54		Opening:	\$95,023,721		

Source: Box Office Mojo, 2018

With regard to worldwide box office revenue, the selected film grossed just over \$710 million, with a larger portion of that coming from international theaters and foreign viewers (64% or \$454 million) and the other from domestic viewers (36% or \$259 million) from about four thousand theaters worldwide. This film ran for one hundred thirty-nine

days, which is twenty weeks. During just the opening weekend, this film grossed ninety-five million.

*Captain America: Civil War (2016)*

*Captain America: Civil War* (2016) was a U.S. film focusing on Steve Rodgers, or Captain America, and a disagreement over the international policy of the “Avengers” who make up a team of superheroes working alongside S.H.I.E.L.D. Rodgers and Stark form two parties with opposing interests. During this, an infiltrator enters S.H.I.E.L.D. and reactivates the Winter Soldier assassin’s primary objective. He fights with Rodgers before regaining his thoughts and the two escape. They meet up with Stark’s opposing party and they engage in combat. Stark becomes infuriated with Rodgers and the Winter Soldier after finding out that the latter was responsible for the deaths of his parents. Their fight stalemates and they part ways. The world appears saved.

*Avenue of ideology inside Captain America: Civil War (2016).* General observation determines that U.S. manufactured firearms are lightly showcased, such as Smith & Wesson 6906 pistols, Remington 870 shotguns, Kel-Tec KSG shotguns, M4A1 assault rifles, M-19 grenade launchers, and M67 hand grenades.

In terms of military thematics, there were little to no distinguishable U.S. military thematics exhibited in this film. No longer observed are U.S. military personnel and vehicles, but U.S. intelligence agents and operatives from S.H.I.E.L.D., who appear somehow under the order of the U.S. government and the United Nations.

*Avenue of ideology outside Captain America: Civil War (2016).*

An analysis of the productive structure of the selected film as it relates to ideological hegemony shows the exhaustive means whereby the U.S. military ideology distributes (see Table 3.3b). Out of forty-five international countries where this film was distributed, the top countries grossing the highest revenue were 1) China, 2) South Korea, 3) United Kingdom, 4) Mexico, and 5) Brazil.

Table 3.3b: Ideological Preparation “Outside” Film 6: Captain America: CW

Film 6:

**Captain America: Civil War, 2016 (MCU Phase 3)**

Produced by Marvel Studios and Distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

Top Five International Countries	Gross Consumption		Release Time
1. China	Domestic: \$408,084,349	35%	Released: May, 2016
2. South Korea	Foreign: \$745,220,146	65%	Closed: Sep, 2016
3. United Kingdom			
4. Mexico	Total: \$1,153,304,495		Total: 139 days
5. Brazil	Theaters: 4,226		or 20 weeks
Total Countries: 45	Opening: \$179,139,142		

Source: Box Office Mojo, 2018

With regard to worldwide box office revenue, the selected film grossed \$1.15 billion, with a larger portion of that coming from international theaters and foreign viewers (65% or \$745 million) and the other from domestic viewers (35% or \$408 million) from four thousand two hundred theaters worldwide. This film ran for one hundred thirty-nine

days, which is twenty weeks. During just the opening weekend, this film grossed one hundred seventy-nine million.

## RECOURSE

This analysis may act as a precursor to any study of the operation of ideological hegemony in superhero films as it relates to U.S. military ideology, representation, and involvement. The following chapter discusses the highlights and issues related to the promotion of ideology through film. The implications related to the promotion of U.S. military ideology inherent inside and outside the films themselves help affirm the idea that avenues of ideology in film may operate in ways that promote defined outlooks and perspectives on audiences choosing to view these films.

## Chapter 5

## DISCUSSION: CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

## FILM'S CAPABILITY

*Findings and Significance*

To gain an explicit understanding of film's capability for subjecting audiences to dominating ideology, this thesis collected data through the examination of two of America's top grossing Superhero film franchises, the *Iron Man* and *Captain America* film franchises, in terms of representation and involvement of the U.S. military in the plot. In addition to the data internal to the films, online sources provided the information needed to help generate knowledge on the productive structure of the film franchises, that is, the extent to which audiences are accessing these films (consumption) and their overall reach into other nations. This study examines how American military ideology in popular films may help in maintaining American ideological hegemony.

U.S. military representation was at its strongest in the early films, specifically *Iron Man* and *Captain America: The First Avenger*. In general, U.S. manufactured weaponry were present throughout each film. This is typical of American films produced in America. The winning or good side tends to have U.S. manufactured firearms providing the appropriate implication that some of the most effective firepower and equipment is found through U.S. manufacturing. The U.S. military and its eventual intervention were highly showcased in the initial films, *Iron Man* and *Captain America: The First Avenger*; to a

lesser degree in the second films, *Iron Man 2* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*; and, almost not at all in the final films, *Iron Man 3* and *Captain America: Civil War*.

*U.S. military ideology through the Iron Man franchise.* In the first *Iron Man*, the U.S. military, specifically its Air Force, is highlighted and shown to a great extent as being instrumentally proficient. The Air Force, in terms of its aircraft, vehicles, or personnel, were present at ceremonies, on the battlefield, at headquarters and bases, and at press conferences. They tended to play the authoritative role having all narratives go through them first. Although the film contained ample opportunity for manifest U.S. military symbolism, it did so without helping the superhero succeed in their mission. *Iron Man* was able to save the world while the U.S. military acted as a referee in all matters.

The representation and involvement of U.S. military in the later *Iron Man* films begins to decline with the introduction of S.H.I.E.L.D., or the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division. The agents and paramilitary forces associated with S.H.I.E.L.D. make their way into the plots of *Iron Man 2* and *Iron Man 3* as the authority wherethrough narratives pass. Although the U.S. military was somewhat effective in its involvement in the plot, it was mainly in an effort to enhance story and spectacle.

*U.S. military ideology through the Captain America franchise.* Similar to the Iron Man franchise, the first Captain America film had a strong U.S. military influence. Given the film's storyline taking place during World War II, and like most war films, it was rife with World War II paraphernalia, especially that of U.S. military vehicles and equipment. This marks a highly suggestive element in that whatever the situation, the U.S. military has the weaponry to overcome. As a military combatant, experimentally and chemically enhanced through the U.S. military's super soldier program, Steve Rodgers (Captain America) perfectly promotes the portrayal of U.S. military advantage, ingenuity, and ideology. The quintessential American citizen enhanced by the U.S. military's super soldier program and armed with exceptional human power whom becomes completely capable of acting as a one-man-army. It is by way of the U.S. military and its experimentation that scrawny Steve Rodgers is made into a super soldier fighting for his country.

In the later Captain America films, the involvement of U.S. military is lessened by an increased presence of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents and paramilitary forces, even more so than in the Iron Man franchise. Captain America, already a unit of the U.S. military, was swiftly and easily brought into the ranks of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s "Avenger's Initiative". The U.S. military was effective in their involvement with the plot; however, overtime this began to have little to do with Captain America saving the world.

*Implications, importance, and further investigation.* This thesis sought to understand, measure, and discuss film's capability for promoting U.S. military ideology to audiences. This capability further transmits to audiences ideas and beliefs of U.S. military and the nation's preoccupation with the military. Even though the military-industrial complex in the United States is mainly concerned with the business of warfare and therefore preoccupied with it, it is the ideology that is feared as preoccupying the people of the nation as well.

It is in the interest of the dominant powers, the productive ruling powers holding dominion over what is produced mentally and materially, that the people of a nation should have ideas, beliefs, and feeling similar to the dominant ideology. It was hypothesized that through the spectacles, symbolism, and visual patterning of ideology in some of the most popular film franchises, a predefined consciousness or mentality was in production. One that highlighted the American war machine, its workings, its moral standing, and its technological prowess.

While the U.S. military was originally integral and present during the initiation of the film franchises, their presence quickly diminished. The U.S. military was replaced by the, what looks to be obviously American-operated, S.H.I.E.L.D. agency. There is much contention behind who actually operates S.H.I.E.L.D; the Director, Nick Fury, appears at first to report to nameless executives and administrators when dealing with internal affairs. In *Captain America: Civil War*, it is mentioned that the S.H.I.E.L.D. will operate under United Nations jurisdiction, yet S.H.I.E.L.D. is essentially a secret intelligence U.S.

paramilitary entity functioning at an international level. The implication here is that the United States has the wherewithal, the ingenuity, and the advantage to act internationally and exert great influence.

This implication is taken further to expand on the idea of the corporatization of the military and of war. Bearing in mind the shift from military to paramilitary, the latter is employed by what are likely those ruling powers with the means to do so. This highlights the privatization of war and the ideology of “war-as-business”, also suggesting that the ruling classes within either the United Nations or the United States are important in the matter of the freedoms of others.

The shift from the representation of U.S. military to the obscurely-operated, yet American in origin, S.H.I.E.L.D. paramilitary forces may coincide with political events outside the films. Iron Man showed a great deal of contemporary U.S. military, especially since the film was released in 2008 while the United States was involved in the Iraq War. Being one of the earliest wars during the twenty-first century, those highly industrious nations involved were able to deploy many of their latest military innovations, such as shock and awe bombing campaigns. Certainly films depicting the U.S. military are keen to borrow this equipment for their stories. Iron Man 2, released in 2010, showed the U.S. military to an extent, portraying only characters in U.S. military officer uniforms and downplaying soldiers engaged in military activities.

By this time U.S. military involvement in the Iraq War had declined. In December 2011, all United States formal combat troops had withdrawn from Iraq, technically ending the conflict. This corresponds to the decline in U.S. military representation in the films up to this point. After 2010, *Iron Man 3* (released 2013) and the three *Captain America* films (*The First Avenger*, 2011; *The Winter Soldier*, 2014; and *Civil War*, 2016) depicted very little U.S. military intervention. This relates to the decreased involvement of U.S. military forces abroad and the shift from U.S. military to paramilitary forces in the films, albeit paving the way for a secret intelligence international agency, associated with the United States government, known as S.H.I.E.L.D.

The representation of U.S. military's transformation to S.H.I.E.L.D. presents similar inferences that are associated with the continued effort of the United States in domestic and international affairs. The shrouded and secret agency of S.H.I.E.L.D. may act as a private military company under the United States or United Nations (or both). As a private military company, S.H.I.E.L.D. may serve as an alternate form of power application without the restriction of government policy or international law. S.H.I.E.L.D., cloaked by the legitimacy of the state, may represent an example in the United States of the military-industrial complex's increasing association with the privatization of war.

The agency of S.H.I.E.L.D., in the case of the films, claims to organize superheroes to fight evil all over the world and the universe for the good of earth. In the films, the people of the world appear to accept this agency and their mission for the most part. The acceptance of this invisible arm of the state – the acceptance of the private military

company known as S.H.I.E.L.D. – comforts the people of the world, knowing that threats of evil domination or total annihilation are cast away. Suggested is the convenience, relief, and inconspicuousness, assured by private military companies. The ideology found relates to the perpetual and imperial domination of ruling powers, or those incorporated ruling classes who hold the means of mental and material production.

Notwithstanding that the removal of U.S. military representation in the films may mark a devaluing of the U.S. military effectiveness, the move from blatant U.S. military representation to an agency founded by Americans and associated with the United States government still brings with it the ideology internal to American cultural hegemony. The United States remains at the helm of global affairs, exercising either the blatant armed forces or a secret intelligence defense agency.

Through the distribution of these films to international countries, speakers of foreign languages must voiceover the dialogue making it comprehensible by foreign viewers. This evidences the implication of ideological socialization inherent in the productive structure of films, revealing the influential power and ubiquity of U.S. ideological hegemony insofar as other nations must navigate through the symbols and messages of American films, characters, stories, and scripts to make it accessible to more audiences.

With audiences in mind as viewing consumers, the high level of gross consumption for the six films indicates a wide and affective arena for the representation of defined ideologies to a public who have no means of interacting with the message they receive.

These American attitudes, ideas, and products show significant influence in the global market and politics. The distribution of American culture is pervasive and the ideas and beliefs they usher through the medium of film is almost palpable. The excursion to measure film's capability to promote U.S. military ideology has brought with it more questions and plans of further investigation.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is extensive and continues to expand with new movies. This thesis examined only two franchises of the MCU, Iron Man and Captain America. Those two franchises consist of only six films out of twenty MCU films. Further research may find it relevant to construct a timeline to line up movies and U.S. military representation with actual military conflict where the United States is present. Additionally, nominal data collected for heroes, villains, towns, and nations involved or effected could help build an understanding of who is implicated as the right or wrong or good or bad sides. Further data may include the race and genders of characters, what accents they have or where they hail from, what type of attire they have, what happens to these characters, what is said about these characters, and what these characters say about the United States and its military. All of this is produced either materially or mentally with the potential of socializing viewers.

The aforementioned production of mentality resummons Marx's syllogism that the ideologies of the ruling classes are the ruling ideologies, warning that those ruling material production also rule intellectual production. The ruling power embodies a set of beliefs and ideas that appeal to them, that keep them in power. By manipulating both the relations of production (the base) and social institutions (the superstructure), the ruling classes consolidate enough power to garner considerable leverage in social, industrial, and productive affairs, especially that of ideological promotion. At their will the productive structure surrounding film and the messages intrinsic to the film itself are controlled.

Like all products of the culture industry, ideological promotion may as well happen through media products such as film. The films studied showcase direct coercion or force through the guise of the social institution of media. To Gramsci, the use of force while not able of being employed so easily without, is easily veiled by the use of film. What is represented, like the U.S. military, is brought to the forefront of the viewing public in favorable ways. This direction, or ideological consciousness, is imposed on viewers when their preferences are addressed and met by products, drawing out their consent and legitimizing those products.

Not unlike Bernays' and powerful tobacco industrialists' cooperative use of social institutions such as the media to shift the cultural ideologies surrounding women smoking cigarettes, films may be used by stakeholders and contain certain ideological symbolism in order to produce or maintain a certain ideological order. It would be in the interest of the military-industrial complex to garner support for the military, or the arms industry, to

ensure their continued dominance. Thus is the case of films that promote U.S. military or any other paramilitary organization in the United States.

Passing through the culture industry, as Horkheimer and Adorno stated, these films like all films are delivered to the public after regulation. Standardized and homogenized, these products are supervised by the dominant ideological classes and are used to satisfy consumers; satisfied, the products are legitimized by consumers, opening their minds to ideas of what and why – ideas the dominant ruling powers have predefined. These films reach many audiences internationally and are important in the delivery of American propaganda.

Debord and Kellner's conceptualization of the spectacle finds its greatest incarnation in film, where astonishing visual effects and rhetoric bring audiences to laughter and to tears, involving the emotions of the viewers and adjusting their attitudes towards what they're observing. Because films play an important part in socialization, the messages they hold are conveyed to many audiences, expressing dominant and ideological perceptions.

For Laclau and Mouffe, those ruling powers represent a fundamental class in the core of the hegemonic force. Their political discourse is brought into film whereby their accompanying ideologies may find articulation. Those ruling powers with the means of production have control of how that ideology is represented. The study of these films identifies possible silos of power and the operation of ideological hegemony by evincing

the relationships of the military, politics, and cultural products. In particular, within these films the shift in power from the U.S. military to a paramilitary, private, agency reiterates the alliance between corporations and politics.

Films that promote in viewers favor for a country's military power at the same time promote a country's military ideology. Expanding on Nye's conceptualization, this hard power is exhibited through the media recreated as soft power influencing the ideas and beliefs of viewers. In admiration, these films and their spectacle attracts the public. The productive structure reaches far into other nations and helps spread the attraction.

In this way and developing further on the ideas of Merton, these films may act, in their latent functions, to impart ideas of global conflict and the intervention of the United States to audiences, suggesting that the U.S. government, its corporations, its private military companies, and its ruling powers, are all intertwined in the freedoms of others, or even the entire world.

The connection between the military, the political, and the economic, as suggested by Mills, is also exemplified in these films. The military-industrial complex in the United States thrives on political and economic discourse. The power elite command the dominant ideology and exercise their will through the society. If that means the showcasing of U.S. military products, or those products in the hands of a private military, they will, especially in the effort to enhance war business. In media, where the military-industrial complex finds

room for advertising, their messages are produced by few, delivered to many, and irrevocable. All the while playing an influential role in public opinion and discourse.

Maintained throughout this thesis was the research question that asks, “how does the hegemonic ideology of the American military operate through Superhero American films, its portrayal of the U.S. military, and the nation’s coinciding military preoccupation.” The operation of ideology in film works by promoting, in this case, the military of a nation in every possible sense – from just being on screen to having an impact, in order to provide a convincing spectacle that is interpreted by viewers. This interpretation is thought to promote in viewers the belief and ideas associated with the spectacle, thus influencing their perception and ideas of what is exhibited. Some cultural products sponsor a defined physical look of a man or woman or who is more likely to be incarcerated or who is the most important, while some other cultural products obviously show off the U.S. military in effective and awe-inspiring ways.

Questions of why will likely continue to thrive, but consider the following: At first, the quote by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau that heralds this thesis read as though opinion was the first slave of kings; however, after careful thought, perhaps it is meant to warn, reading instead... that kings are the first slaves of opinion.

## Appendix A: Data Element Dictionary

Data Element	Definition
Duration	Length of overall movie time in minutes.
Military Thematics	Ideologically visual patternation of military involvement and representation.
Aggregate	Cumulative length of screen time of military portrayal in minutes: seconds.
Ratio	Elapsed time percentage of duration.
Impact	Plot impact of military involvement in five scored degrees: limited, exemplary, conspicuous, prominent, and absolute.
Effect	The measure of military effectiveness as it relates to median plot impact degree score.
Top Five International Countries	Highest grossing foreign countries where distributed
Gross Consumption	Worldwide box office revenue, divided by domestic and foreign proceeds
Release Time	Month and year for release and close dates.

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