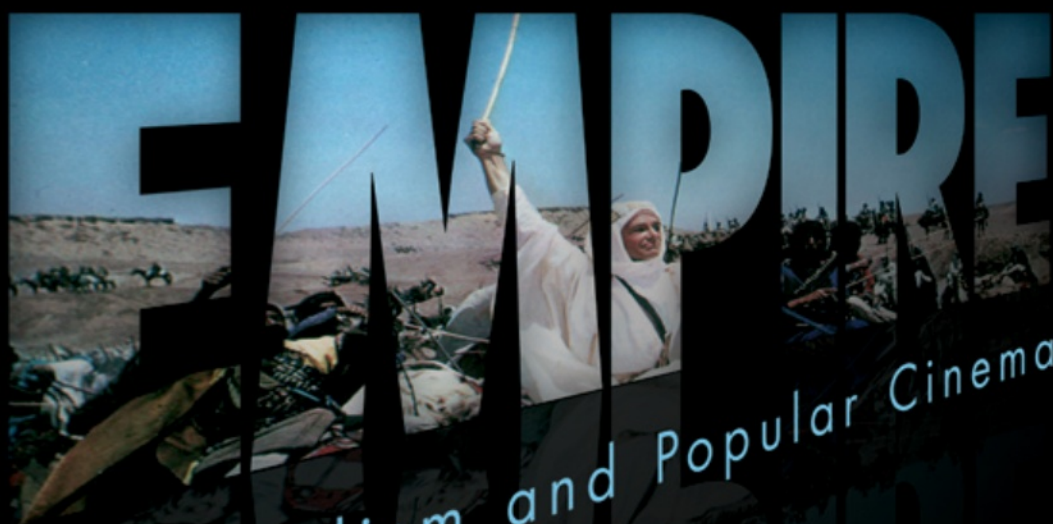


James Chapman & Nicholas J. Cull

PROJECTING



Imperialism and Popular Cinema

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Imperialism and Popular Cinema

James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull

I.B. TAURIS

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Dedicated to Jeffrey Richards and Tony Aldgate,
whose collaboration and scholarship inspired this volume

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The illustrations in this book were provided by the Stills, Posters and Design Division of the British Film Institute; the Cinematic Arts Library, University of Southern California; and the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. They are included for the purpose of criticism and review.

Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| BBFC | British Board of Film Censors |
| BFI | British Film Institute |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| EMB | Empire Marketing Board |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| GPO | General Post Office |
| MOI | Ministry of Information |
| MPAA | Motion Picture Association of America |
| MPEA | Motion Picture Export Association |
| OWI | Office of War Information |
| PCA | Production Code Administration |
| SEAC | South East Asia Command |
| USIA | United States Information Agency |

General Editor's Introduction

The birth of cinema coincided with the high noon of the British Empire. Cameras were on hand to record the great ceremonial events of that era, such as the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen-Empress Victoria in 1897 and the Delhi Durbar of the King-Emperor Edward VII in 1903. Fragmentary visual images of troops on the march in the key imperial events of the time, the Boer War and the Boxer Rebellion, survive, thanks to the medium. At the same time fictional episodes from the same conflicts were being staged and filmed. Together these early manifestations of imperial cinema embodied the elements that were to constitute the enduring appeal of the subject: spectacle, action, drama and exotic locations.

Ever since those early days, empire has featured regularly in the film-making schedules of both Britain and America. In this fascinating, wide-ranging and insightful book, James Chapman and Nicholas Cull take 13 productions from the cinema of empire, ranging from the 1930s to the present, and subject them to close critical analysis. They deal not only with the cinematic texts themselves but also the production and reception histories of the films. Their examples are drawn from a wide variety of genres, from imperial action-adventure (*Gunga Din*) to colonial melodrama (*Elephant Walk*), from wartime documentary (*Burma Victory*) to historical epic (*Lawrence of Arabia*), from knockabout comedy (*Carry On Up the Khyber*) to reverential biopic (*Gandhi*), revealing how widely and deeply the imperial experience has impacted on the popular consciousness.

Frequently the behind-the-scenes stories they have to tell about the often tortuous and eventful process of producing the films is as intriguing and revealing as the narratives of the finished films themselves. Issues of race, gender, hegemony and identity run like binding threads through the films as they react, each in their own way, to the rise and fall of the British Empire and its replacement by American imperialism. This book therefore constitutes a major examination of the cinema's reaction to and involvement with a global phenomenon that dominated the twentieth century and continues on into the twenty-first.

JEFFREY RICHARDS

Preface

This book originated in discussions at the 22nd Congress of the International Association of Media and History (IAMHIST) on *Media and Imperialism* at the University of Amsterdam in July 2007 and was mapped out during the authors' day trip to the town of Arnhem to visit the war museum and cemetery and walk the battlefield. It comprises eleven case studies of key films, British and American, in the history of the cinema of empire. These have been chosen according to several criteria, including the availability of primary sources documenting their production, their narrative and visual representations of empire, and their significance in shaping the genre. The book has been written according to a set of agreed principles and themes. The preface and chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 10 and 11 are written by James Chapman, while chapters 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12 and the afterword are the work of Nick Cull.

We have selected films from different periods and genres – adventure, documentary, melodrama, biopic, comedy – which are broadly representative of the main trends and themes in the Anglo-American cinema of empire. *The Four Feathers* and *Gunga Din* were made at the height of popular cinema's investment in the British Empire and imagine it as a site of heroic masculine adventure. They exemplify the thematic and ideological strategies of British and American film-makers, respectively, in their promotion of an imperial worldview during the 1930s. The Second World War is represented by *Burma Victory*, an official documentary of the British campaign against the Japanese in the Far East. It is included here because its production history maps the political tensions between the British and their American allies over strategic policy in Southeast Asia.

The post-war period is represented by *Elephant Walk*, one of Hollywood's colonial melodramas of the 1950s which is significant both for its representation of a feminine perspective and for the hidden hand of the CIA in its production. This film demonstrates a more equivocal attitude towards the empire informed by the process of decolonization that was underway by the 1950s. The critique of colonialism becomes more overt in David Lean's magisterial epic *Lawrence of Arabia*. This film

marked a watershed for the cinema of empire, which can be divided into pre-*Lawrence* and post-*Lawrence* cycles. This is reflected in the film itself, which divides into a heroic first part, told through the eyes of Lawrence himself, and an anti-heroic second half, a study in imperial hubris, told from the perspective of an American journalist.

The changing attitude towards imperialism signalled by *Lawrence of Arabia* is further evident in the cult film *The Naked Prey*, Cornel Wilde's savage allegorical tale of the hunter hunted, and in the *Carry On* parodies of the late 1960s which spoofed the conventions of the imperial adventure movie. Those conventions are restored in John Huston's *The Man Who Would Be King*, which reinterprets Kipling for Vietnam-era America. *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the first of the enormously successful Indiana Jones movies, is on the surface a nostalgic homage to the adventure serials of the 1930s and 1940s but beneath is an imperialist narrative of the projection of American power into the Third World. *Gandhi*, Sir Richard Attenborough's long-cherished biopic of the Indian martyr, marks a return to the imperial biopic, this time exploring the perspective of the colonized as well as the colonizers. We conclude with the 1999 Gulf War action movie *Three Kings*, a liberal critique of US policy which represents a lost moment of self-awareness before America committed itself to another imperial folly in Iraq.

Projecting Empire is based largely on the fruits of our researches in British and American archives. We would like to record our thanks to the staff of the following institutions for their support and assistance: the British Film Institute Library, especially Janet Moat of the Special Collections Unit who retired in 2008; the National Archives (formerly the Public Records Office) at Kew; Barbara Hall and the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles; Becky Cape and the Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington; Ned Comstock and the Cinematic Arts Library, University of Southern California; and the New York Public Library.

For advice, information and criticism, our thanks are due to Tracey Alexander; Dr Guy Barefoot; Philippa Brewster at I.B.Tauris; Dr Sally Dux; Dr Chris Gittings; Dr Mark Glancy; Nilufa Junaideen; John Milius; Bruce Raymer; Corinne Roosevelt; Professor Jeffrey Richards; David O. Russell; Dr Jack G. Shaheen; and Dr Jonathan Stubbs. It goes without saying, of course, that any faults are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

An earlier version of chapter 3 appeared as 'America's Raj: Kipling, Masculinity and Empire', in C. E. Gittings (ed.), *Imperialism and Gender: Constructions of Masculinity* (Hebden Bridge: Dangaroo Press, 1996), pp.85–97. Chapter 10 uses some material previously included in 'Camping on the Borders: History, Identity and Britishness in the *Carry On* Costume Parodies, 1963–74', in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds), *British Historical Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.92–109. Both have been substantially revised here.

1

IMPERIALISM AND POPULAR CINEMA: A SURVEY

From its outset cinema has been a vehicle for disseminating images and ideologies of empire. Some of the earliest 'topicals' – short film records of newsworthy events – were of imperial spectacles such as the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 and the Delhi Durbar of 1903. Imperial subjects were a natural for the travelogues, or 'scenics', that provided a staple of early film exhibition. They impressed audiences with their images of imperial splendour and brought pictures of exotic lands and customs to the patrons of the cinematograph. At the same time early cinematographers were involved in the propagation of imperial propaganda. The Spanish–American War (1898) and the South African War (1899–1902) were the first to be covered by film cameramen. G. W. Bitzer of the Biograph Company and Alfred E. Smith of American Vitagraph were amongst the pioneer cinematographers who travelled to Cuba as America first flexed its imperialist muscles against the Spanish. And William K.-L. Dickson of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company sailed to South Africa in October 1899. He shot footage of troops in camp and staged re-enactments with British soldiers dressed in Boer uniforms. Dickson's published memoir, *The Biograph in Battle*, recorded that the British commander-in-chief, Lord Roberts, 'consented to be biographed with all his Staff, actually having his table taken out into the sun for the convenience of Mr Dickson'.¹

It is significant that the advent of cinema in the 1890s coincided both with the zenith of British imperialism and with the first stirrings of America as an imperial power. It was only natural that early film-makers would reflect the popular mood of jingoism. The Edison Manufacturing Company's *The Monroe Doctrine*, released in April 1896, was probably the first propaganda film. It referred to a boundary dispute between Venezuela and the colony of British Guiana: it was nothing less than a warning to Britain to keep out of America's back yard. The *Boston Globe* reported that the film 'shows

John Bull bombarding a South American shore, supposedly to represent Venezuela. John is seemingly getting the better of the argument when the tall lanky figure of Uncle Sam emerges from the back of the picture. He grasps John Bull by the neck, forces him to his knees and makes him take his hat off to Venezuela.² Similarly, early British films of the South African War included staged allegorical dramas such as the Warwick Trading Company's *The Set-to between John Bull and Paul Kruger* (1900) and R. W. Paul's *Kruger's Dreams of Empire* (1900).

The Spanish–American War occurred at an opportune moment for the fledgling US motion picture industry. The novelty value of moving pictures was waning by 1898 but the war created a demand for topical films ranging from actualities of American troops to staged dramatic re-enactments. This gave a boost to exhibitors and stimulated competition between producers. The role of press magnates such as William Randolph Hearst in precipitating the US intervention in Cuba is well known, but less attention has been paid to the part played by the cinematograph. As the early cinema historian Charles Musser has written: 'It would be a gross exaggeration to say that the cinema launched a new era of American imperialism. But cinema had found a role beyond narrow amusement, and this sudden prominence coincided with a new era of overseas expansion and military intervention.'³

In Britain, too, the cinematograph played an important role in supporting the British Empire in its war against the Boers. The evidence would suggest that actuality films from the front were well received by cinema audiences. A review of a programme of topical films at the Empire Theatre, Leeds, in January 1900, for example, records that the 'audience cheered wildly when the presentment of Lord Roberts was shown on the screen ... One and all of these patriotic pictures stirred deeply the emotions of the crowded audience'.⁴ When actuality material was not available, however, enterprising film-makers were not averse to dramatic reconstruction. The Gaumont Company produced a 'ludicrously imaginative' film *Signing of the Peace at Vereeniging* (1902) with actors playing Lord Kitchener and Jan Smuts. Gaumont's Colonel A. C. Bromhead later recalled: 'We included Lord Roberts and only found out afterwards that he had not been there.'⁵

Early film representations of empire took a variety of different forms. Some, such as James Williamson's *Attack on a China Mission* (1900), adopted the conventions of Victorian stage melodrama. This short film (actually shot in Williamson's back yard) was a distillation of events during the Boxer Rebellion in China with the rebels killing a European missionary and laying siege to the mission station until the arrival of the Bluejackets. It is an embryonic version of the rescue narrative later perfected by D. W. Griffith in his Biograph shorts such as *The Lonely Villa* (1909), *The Lonedale*

Operator (1911) and *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* (1913). Other films, consistent with the theatrical tradition of early cinema, drew upon the imperial pageant. W. G. Barker's *The Pageant of Empire* (1911), produced for the coronation of George V, for example, 'shows Britannia on her throne, supported by John Bull, his bull-dog and sisters, and before whom the Colonies pay obedience'.⁶ The most spectacular of these pageants was Charles Urban's film of the Delhi Durbar of 1911 – a great Orientalist extravaganza welcoming George V as Emperor of India – which was shot in Kinemacolor and premièred at the Scala Cinema in London accompanied by a 24-piece orchestra.⁷

These early films of empire need to be understood in the context of a wider popular culture of imperialism during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. As social historians of imperialism such as John MacKenzie have shown, imperialism was a core element of the British historical experience. MacKenzie identifies an 'ideological cluster which formed out of the intellectual, national, and world-wide conditions of the late Victorian era, and which came to infuse and be propagated by every organ of British life in the period'.⁸ The British Empire was celebrated in popular fiction, theatre, music hall, cigarette cards and postcards. It represented a force for political stability and moral improvement. Nowhere was this more evident than in the field of juvenile literature where the works of W. H. G. Kingston, R. M. Ballantyne, Manville Fenn and, pre-eminently, G. A. Henty imagined the empire as a site of heroic adventure for their schoolboy protagonists. While novels may have been aimed at a predominantly middle-class readership, the working classes were catered for by the story papers such as *Marvel*, *Union Jack*, *Chums*, *Captain* and *Young England* – cheaper rivals to the decidedly middle-class *Boy's Own Paper*.⁹ The working classes were amongst the most avid consumers of such fiction and also provided the core audience for the cinematograph.

The relationship between early cinema and the popular culture of imperialism can be seen on several levels. Early film shows, for one thing, were part of a multimedia experience which also included lectures, slide shows and novelty acts. The influence of juvenile fiction, furthermore, can be seen in the production of series films featuring similarly square-jawed imperial heroes. The British and Colonial Kinematograph Company, for example, produced a series of 13 *Lieutenant Daring* films between 1911 and 1914 relating the adventures of a naval officer who saved Great Britain from the plots of assorted spies and anarchists. In the United States the 1910s were the heyday of the 'serial queen' melodrama as plucky heroines such as Pearl White (*The Perils of Pauline*, *The Exploits of Elaine*, *Pearl of the Army*) and Ruth Roland (*The Red Circle*, *The Adventures of Ruth*, *Ruth of the Rockies*) took

on all manner of foreign villains in narratives of American intervention and overseas expansion.

It was during the First World War, however, that the cinematograph came of age as a medium of propaganda. The British War Office was initially sceptical of the value of film and refused to allow cameramen access to the front. Consequently the early films of the war were staged melodramas, with a particular vogue for atrocity stories about the 'beastly Hun'. It was not until 1915 that the Topical Committee for War Films was set up under Sir William Jury to liaise between the government and the trade. The first official cinematographers were allowed in British sectors of the Western Front in November 1915 and the first newsreels of the front line were shown publicly in London in January 1916. The first feature-length film produced by the Topical Committee was *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), compiled from material shot by two British official cameramen, Geoffrey Malins and J. B. McDowell. It was a critical and commercial success and was followed by two more long documentaries: *The Battle of the Ancre and the Advance of the Tanks* (1917) and *The German Retreat and the Battle of Arras* (1917). In 1917 the War Office took over the production of the newsreel *Topical Budget* which included items from other fronts. Amongst the events covered by *War Office Official Topical Budget* were General Allenby's entry into Jerusalem on 11 December 1917 and the signing of the peace treaty in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on 28 June 1919.¹⁰

The growing acceptance of the cinematograph by military authorities was indirectly responsible for the creation of one of the most enduring myths of the war. T. E. Lawrence has been described as 'the only old-style hero of the first World war'.¹¹ Lawrence came to prominence largely through the efforts of Lowell Thomas, an American journalist, who, with cameraman Harry Chase, covered the British campaign in the Middle East in 1917–18. There was already an official British cinematographer in Palestine, Harold Jeapes, who, along with his Australian colleague Frank Harvey, shot *General Allenby's Entry into Jerusalem*. Lawrence, then a major, can be seen taking part in the parade and is visible amongst a group of officers standing around Allenby.¹² The fact that other cinematographers were allowed in the theatre – Ariel Varges, another American, was shooting in Mesopotamia at the same time – suggests that the War Office attached considerable importance to the propaganda value of the Middle East campaign at a time when the Western Front was still deadlocked.

Thomas's arrangement with the War Office prevented him from showing any of his material publicly until after the war. In August 1919 he brought his travelogue *With Allenby in Palestine* from New York to London where he presented it to packed houses at the Royal Opera House, the Albert Hall

and the Queen's Hall. Thomas was a showman rather than a historian: his account of the war in the Middle East owed more to the tradition of imperial adventure fiction than it did to history. Even the title was redolent of juvenile fiction: in 1918 Captain F. S. Brereton had published a novel entitled *With Allenby in Palestine*, one of a series of books that also included *With French at the Front* and *Under Hague in Flanders*.¹³ The authenticity of Thomas's filmic material has also been called into question. The Imperial War Museum catalogue describes *With Allenby in Palestine* as 'a typical Lowell Thomas mishmash' and questions how much of it he actually shot.¹⁴

The part of Lowell Thomas's lecture that attracted most attention was his account of Lawrence and the Arab Revolt. He reflected this when he changed the title of his show to *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia*. It played in London for several months before touring the provinces. Thomas then took it overseas to other major cities of the British Empire. It was seen by an estimated four million people.¹⁵ Lawrence was the first celebrity whose image was created by the mass media. 'Lawrence of Arabia', as he quickly became known, was the latest in the lineage of great imperial heroes who also included Clive of India and Gordon of Khartoum. Lawrence's own attitude to this image, however, was ambivalent. He is known to have attended the London lectures, writing afterwards to Thomas: 'I saw your show last night and thank God the lights were out.'¹⁶

The popularity of Lawrence would suggest that the First World War did not, after all, destroy the romantic allure of empire. Historians such as Paul Fussell have argued that the bloody attritional battles and mechanized slaughter of the Western Front exposed the myth of 'King and Country' once and for all.¹⁷ The evidence usually cited in support of this view is the bitter, disillusioned poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon and the grim accounts of trench warfare in memoirs and novels such as Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* – the latter filmed as an early talking picture by Universal Pictures in 1930. In fact the war provoked different responses. On the one hand there was shock and revulsion at the killing fields of the Somme and Passchendaele and a sincere desire that it should be the 'war to end wars'. On the other hand, however, there was also a genuine sense of pride in the achievement of Britain and her empire in weathering the storm. The British Empire emerged from the war strengthened and united. The role of the self-governing dominions (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa) was celebrated in compilation films such as *The World's Greatest Story* and *Our Empire's Fight for Freedom* in 1918–19. And in the 1920s a cycle of reconstructed documentaries – *The Battle of Jutland*, *Ypres, Mons* and *The Battles of Coronel and the Falkland Islands* – was

produced by British Instructional Films under the supervision of 'ardent imperialist' Harry Bruce Woolfe.¹⁸

By the interwar period there was a growing recognition of the potential of film for the promotion of British commercial and cultural interests. This was reflected in the formation of the Empire Marketing Board (1926) and the British Council (1934). The aim of the EMB was to promote trade throughout the British Empire through exhibitions, posters and pamphlets. Its greatest success, however, came in the production of documentary films through the EMB Film Unit, set up in 1930 under the Scots documentarist John Grierson. Grierson argued that the role of the unit was to promote a new vision of empire based on trade and commerce rather than territorial expansion: 'For the old flags of exploitation it substituted the new flags of common labour; for the old frontiers of conquest it substituted new frontiers of research and world-wide organisation.'¹⁹ The EMB itself was wound up in 1933, but its film unit was transferred to the General Post Office. The origins of the British documentary film movement are to be found, therefore, in the work of an official agency of imperial propaganda.²⁰

It was the feature film, however, that became the primary vehicle of what, following Jeffrey Richards, we may term 'the cinema of empire'.²¹ In the 1930s the cinema of empire emerged as a major genre in the film industries of Britain and Hollywood. Between 1934 and 1939 most of the major Hollywood studios contributed to a cycle of British Empire films that included *Clive of India*, *The Lost Patrol*, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Wee Willie Winkie*, *Four Men and a Prayer*, *Storm Over Bengal*, *Stanley and Livingstone*, *The Sun Never Sets*, *Beau Geste* and *Gunga Din*.²² Paramount's *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, loosely based on the book of the same title by Francis Yeats-Brown, became the prototype of the Northwest Frontier film for the next 25 years. Its success prompted Warner Bros. to locate most of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* in India, moving the action to the Crimea for the rousing action climax.²³ This cycle of 'Hollywood British' films prompted *The Times* to remark in 1937: 'The Union Jack has in the last few years been vigorously and with no little effect flown by Hollywood.'²⁴

How can we explain the emergence of empire cinema in Hollywood in the 1930s? One reason is cultural. John Fraser has pointed to the existence of a shared Anglo-American culture of chivalry that exerts a strong hold on the popular imagination on both sides of the Atlantic. He writes:

The family of chivalric heroes has been by far the largest and most popular one in twentieth-century American culture, and its members, in whole or in part, have entered into virtually everyone's consciousness. They include, naturally, the legion of

knightly Westerners in print and celluloid sired by Owen Wister's *The Virginian* and their Indian counterparts ... They include the officers and gentlemen of *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, and the gentleman rankers of *Beau Geste*, and the First World War aviators of *Dawn Patrol* ... They include gentlemanly English actors like Ronald Colman and George Sanders, and gentlemanly American ones like Douglas Fairbanks Jr and William Powell, and all those immortals, Gary Cooper, Spencer Tracy, and the rest, who have epitomized native American gallantry and grace.²⁵

It is this shared sense of Anglo–American values that explains how actors such as Gary Cooper (American but educated at an English public school) and Errol Flynn (born in Tasmania, and educated in Australia and England) could move effortlessly between British Empire films and Westerns. Cooper starred in *The Virginian* (1929) and also in *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* and *Beau Geste*, while Flynn made the transition from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* to reprise much the same role in the cavalry Western *They Died with Their Boots On* (1942) in which he played George Armstrong Custer. The absence of major 'A' feature Westerns in the 1930s has sometimes been seen as another reason for the ascendancy of the British Empire film. The two genres share common ground – the narrative of expansion, the taming of the frontier, the clash between civilization and savagery – and both feature outdoor action and spectacle. It is no coincidence that the end of the empire cycle in 1939 coincided with the revival of the 'A' Western: *Stagecoach*, *Dodge City*, *Union Pacific*, *Jesse James*.

Yet there was also a hard-nosed economic reality behind Hollywood's British Empire films. Approximately half of the US film industry's total revenues came from outside North America and for the more expensive productions (which included the empire films) overseas revenues could mean the difference between profit and loss. Furthermore, the British market was by far the most lucrative of all foreign markets. In the 1930s Britain accounted for some 50 per cent of all Hollywood's overseas revenues. There are several reasons for this. For one thing there was no language barrier to the export of American films to Britain and therefore no need for costly dubbing or subtitling. American films also benefited from the relative instability of the British production sector, which was hit by a cycle of boom and bust. Above all, however, the British were very frequent cinema-goers. There were some 5000 cinemas in Britain – the same number in one small densely populated country as in the whole of Latin America.²⁶ Moreover, as other markets, such as Nazi Germany, were closed to American films from the late 1930s, the British market assumed even greater significance. In his

study of Hollywood's 'British' films, Mark Glancy argues persuasively 'that Hollywood's love for Britain stemmed primarily from box-office considerations rather than ardent Anglophilia'.²⁷

The first major cycle of empire cinema ended with the outbreak of the Second World War. The propaganda imperative of the war, exemplified in both British and American films, was to promote the idea of Britain as a progressive liberal democracy in contrast to the highly ideological totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany.²⁸ British feature films such as *49th Parallel* (1941) focused on the idea of a democratic British Commonwealth, while historical films such as *Lady Hamilton* (1941) and *The Young Mr Pitt* (1942) mobilized the past for propaganda by drawing parallels between Napoleon and Hitler. The British Empire was conspicuously absent, except in documentaries produced by the newly instituted Colonial Film Unit largely for consumption in the colonies themselves.²⁹ The ideological demands of the war, however, made the cinema of empire redundant at a time when films were promoting the war effort of the United Nations. India, where the nationalist cause was boosted by the war, represented a particularly thorny problem. In 1942 the US Office of War Information prevailed upon RKO not to re-issue *Gunga Din* and in the same year MGM abandoned its production of *Kim*.³⁰

When the cinema of empire returned in the 1950s it took on a very different hue. The pervading theme of British-made empire films of this period is the idea of the empire under threat. This is evident in a brace of colonial police films produced by Ealing Studios (*Where No Vultures Fly*, *West of Zanzibar*) and in melodramas set against the background of colonial insurgencies in Malaya (*The Planter's Wife*, *The Seventh Dawn*) and Kenya (*Simba*, *Safari*).³¹ The colonial melodrama was also a favourite of Hollywood in the 1950s: *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *Mogambo*, *Elephant Walk*, *The Rains of Ranchipur*, *Bhowani Junction*.³² These films displaced political tensions around the rise of nationalism onto romantic dramas involving European and American ex-pats. They are significant in that they tend to privilege the female perspective: women become the focus of tension in the tropics rather than native uprisings. Their characterizations are drawn from the romantic melodrama: essentially they are soap operas set in the colonies. The traditional imperial adventure film returned in the 1950s, though with the exception of MGM's *King Solomon's Mines* and its long-delayed *Kim*, most of these were routine programmers: *Soldiers Three*, *King of the Khyber Rifles*, *Khyber Patrol*, *Bengal Rifles*, *Storm Over Africa*, *Storm Over the Nile*, *Zarak*, *The Bandit of Zhobe*, *Killers of Kilimanjaro*.³³ The last, glorious flowering of the *Boy's Own* imperial adventure film came in 1959 with the Rank Organization's *North West Frontier* – an 'elegiac farewell to Empire' that both harks back to the

empire cinema of the 1930s and anticipates the more critical examination of the imperial project that would emerge in the 1960s.³⁴

From the 1960s the cinema of empire has been a less consistent presence in Britain or Hollywood. To an extent this might be attributed to the winding up of the British Empire: the cinema of empire no longer possessed the ideological currency it had enjoyed in the 1930s when it had been a vehicle for the promotion of imperialism. But it also reflects the trend across the film industry as a whole as it shifted from the continuous production of bread-and-butter genre films to concentrating on fewer but bigger films intended to reap rich box office rewards. This 'blockbuster' mentality can be traced back to the 1950s when Hollywood had responded to declining cinema attendances and the emergence of television as a rival mass entertainment medium by turning to spectacular Biblical and Ancient World epics produced on a scale that television could never match. This trend continued into the 1960s with a cycle of major empire films including *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *55 Days at Peking* (1963), *Zulu* (1964) and *Khartoum* (1966). These were international epics shot on location by independent producers – Sam Spiegel (*Lawrence of Arabia*), Samuel Bronston (*55 Days at Peking*), Joseph E. Levine (*Zulu*) and Julian Blaustein (*Khartoum*) – backed by Hollywood studios.

At the same time as the British Empire was disappearing from the map, however, another was emerging to take its place. The United States emerged from the Second World War as the leading industrial and military power in the world. Since 1945 the United States has abandoned its traditional isolationism and has looked to assert its influence on a global scale. The American empire is not a formal empire of territorial acquisition but an informal empire of political and economic influence. Americans might not always acknowledge their role as new imperialists, but since the middle of the twentieth century there is no question that the United States has acted like an imperial power in enforcing its strategic interests in South America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia through a combination of diplomacy and military power. Like the rise and fall of the British Empire, moreover, the United States has had to contend with a shifting geopolitical landscape and to face the consequences of global over-reach as its imperial pretensions were exposed first in Vietnam and again in Iraq.³⁵

Hollywood became one of the prime vehicles for the projection of US imperialism. In part this was an extension of the economic hegemony that the US film industry enjoys around the world. After the Second World War the newly formed Motion Picture Export Association – the foreign division of the principal trade body, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) – spearheaded an aggressive campaign to re-establish American

domination of those markets lost during the war. The primary motive was economic and the US film industry was undoubtedly helped by the devastation wrought upon the domestic film industries in Europe by the war. But there was also a powerful cultural motive. As Eric Johnston, president of the MPAA, declared in 1947: 'The American motion picture will carry the ideas of Canton, Ohio, to Canton, China; the point of view of Paris, Maine, to Paris, France.'³⁶

Projecting Empire, then, examines the changing representation of imperialism in the cinemas of Hollywood and Britain between the 1930s and the present. It is the first study of the cinema of empire in over 35 years.³⁷ We have focused on films that, in the main, were popular with audiences on the grounds that this provides most insight into changing attitudes towards imperialism. We have considered films by major producers and directors – Alexander Korda, David Lean, John Huston, Steven Spielberg, Richard Attenborough – as well as the work of lesser-known or cult film-makers such as Cornel Wilde and the producer–director partnership of Peter Rogers and Gerald Thomas.

As cultural historians our methodology is that of empirical investigation and analysis. We have been concerned to locate the films in their various contexts – industrial, economic, political, social, cultural – and to document their production and reception histories. To this end we have drawn upon a wide range of primary sources including government archives, studio records, personal papers, scripts, censors' files, diaries, autobiographies, trade papers, and contemporary newspaper and journal reviews. Our approach has been influenced by the work of Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate, especially in their book *Best of British*.³⁸ That is to say that we treat the films as social documents which speak of and for the times in which they were produced and consumed.

A crude version of social film history, influenced by Siegfried Kracauer's pioneering but methodologically flawed *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Film* (1947), understands films as a reflection or mirror of their social context.³⁹ This is no longer widely accepted as a reliable methodology. A more useful metaphor, we believe, is to see films as the residue of the production process. The finished film is the outcome of a range of factors including, but not limited to, the intentions of the producer and/or director, the commercial interests of the production company, the interventions of censors and in some cases the hidden hand of government agencies. We will see, for example, how the Foreign Office colluded with the British Board of Film Censors to prevent Alexander Korda from making *Lawrence of Arabia* in the 1930s, and how the CIA influenced the script of *Elephant Walk* to reflect a more positive view of America for overseas consumption. We

will see how the British and American propaganda agencies clashed over the representation of colonial policy in Southeast Asia during the making of *Burma Victory*. We will also see how the content of films is determined by external factors. Several of the films included here – *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Man Who Would Be King*, *Gandhi* – were in development over many years. The many treatments and scripts of *The Man Who Would Be King*, in particular, reveal how the film developed over nearly a quarter of a century.

The limitations of space prevent us from discussing all the films we would have liked to include. In particular we regret the absence of the different versions of *King Solomon's Mines* and of interesting films such as *The Wind and the Lion*, *Greystoke* and *White Mischief*. We have not included the progressive documentary-drama *Men of Two Worlds* or the perennial popular favourite *Zulu* because those films have been adequately covered elsewhere.⁴⁰ However, we do believe that our selection is representative of the main themes and trends in the cinema of empire. Above all we hope that *Projecting Empire* provides new insights into what has become a somewhat neglected genre. For too long the cinema of empire has been unfashionable for its perceived ideological reaction and cultural conservatism. What we hope to demonstrate here is that popular cinema has been a vehicle both for supporting and for contesting imperialism and that the cinema of empire has been a historically significant trend in the film industries of Hollywood and Britain. At a time when the legacy of imperialism is still being felt, it is high time that the cinema of empire came under the microscope.

Notes

- ¹ Preface to W.K.-L. Dickson, *The Biograph in Battle: Its Story in the South African War* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), p.xiii.
- ² Quoted in Luke McKernan, 'The American Invasion and the British Film Industry', in Alan Burton and Laraine Porter (eds), *Crossing the Pond: Anglo-American Film Relations before 1930* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2002), p.7.
- ³ Charles Musser, *History of the American Cinema Volume 1. The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.261.
- ⁴ Quoted in Simon Popple, "'But the Khaki-Covered Camera Is the Latest Thing": The Boer War Cinema and Visual Culture in Britain', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain 1896–1930* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p.24.
- ⁵ Quoted in Rachael Low and Roger Manvell, *The History of the British Film 1896–1906* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), p.69.
- ⁶ Quoted in Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film 1906–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), p.148.
- ⁷ Luke McKernan, 'Putting the World before You: The Charles Urban Story', in Higson, *Young and Innocent?*, p.73.

- ⁸ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.2.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.199–226; and Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000* (London: Reaktion, 2000), pp.49–82.
- ¹⁰ See Nicholas Reeves, *Official British Film Propaganda during the First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Luke McKernan, *Topical Budget: The Great British News Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1992); Gary S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); and M. L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
- ¹¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.49.
- ¹² See Luke McKernan, ‘“The Supreme Moment of the War”: General Allenby’s Entry into Jerusalem’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 13: 2 (1993), pp.169–80.
- ¹³ See Michael Paris, *Over the Top: The Great War and Juvenile Literature in Britain* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2004), pp.75–99.
- ¹⁴ Roger Smither (ed.), *The Imperial War Museum Film Catalogue Volume 1. The First World War Film Archive* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1994), p.422.
- ¹⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.168.
- ¹⁶ Quoted in Joel C. Hodson, *Lawrence of Arabia and American Culture: The Making of a Transatlantic Legend* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), p.39. In Michael Wilson’s second draft screenplay of *Lawrence of Arabia* (British Film Institute Unpublished Script Collection S15680, 27 September 1960) an early scene has Lawrence attending one of Thomas’s lectures in *mufti* and slipping out quietly during the performance.
- ¹⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- ¹⁸ Michael Paris, ‘Enduring Heroes: British Feature Films and the First World War, 1919–1997’, in Michael Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.55.
- ¹⁹ John Grierson, ‘The EMB Film Unit’, in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Collins, 1946), p.99.
- ²⁰ On the EMB Film Unit, see Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.90–126; and Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926–1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.21–48.
- ²¹ Jeffrey Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.2.
- ²² *Clive of India* (Twentieth Century, dir. Richard Boleslawski, 1934); *The Lost Patrol* (RKO, dir. John Ford, 1934); *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (Paramount, dir. Henry Hathaway, 1935); *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Warner Bros., dir. Michael Curtiz, 1936); *Wee Willie Winkie* (Fox, dir. John Ford, 1937); *Four Men and a Prayer* (Fox, dir. John Ford, 1938); *Storm over Bengal* (Republic, dir. Sidney Salkow, 1938); *Stanley and Livingstone* (Fox, dir. Henry King, 1939); *The Sun Never Sets* (Universal, dir. Rowland V. Lee, 1939); *Beau Geste* (Paramount, dir. William Wellman, 1939); *Gunga Din* (RKO, dir. George Stevens, 1939). While not strictly a British Empire film, *The Real Glory* (Goldwyn, dir. Henry Hathaway, 1939) belongs in ethos to the same tradition and is an interesting early example of a film about US imperialism: the action is set in the Philippines in 1898.

- ²³ Richards, *Visions of Yesterday*, p.3.
- ²⁴ *The Times*, 12 April 1937.
- ²⁵ John Fraser, *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.12.
- ²⁶ H. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p.29.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6.
- ²⁸ See Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (London: I.B.Tauris, 3rd edn, 2007); James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939–1945* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1998); Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1988).
- ²⁹ See Rosaleen Smyth, 'The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 8: 3 (1988), pp.285–98.
- ³⁰ Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, pp.190–92; Richards, *Visions of Yesterday*, p.216.
- ³¹ *Where No Vultures Fly* (Ealing, dir. Harry Watt, 1951); *The Planter's Wife* (Rank, dir. Ken Annakin, 1952); *West of Zanzibar* (Ealing, dir. Harry Watt, 1954); *Simba* (Rank, dir. Brian Desmond Hurst, 1955); *Safari* (Warwick, dir. Terence Young, 1956); *The Seventh Dawn* (United Artists/Charles K. Feldman, dir. Lewis Gilbert, 1964). British cinema's response to decolonization is discussed in Jeffrey Richards, 'Imperial Heroes for a Post-imperial Age: Films and the End of Empire', in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp.128–44; and Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.122–48.
- ³² *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (Fox, dir. Henry King, 1952); *Mogambo* (MGM, dir. John Ford, 1953); *Elephant Walk* (Paramount, dir. William Dieterle, 1954); *The Rains of Ranchipur* (Fox, dir. Jean Negulesco, 1955); *Bhowani Junction* (MGM, dir. George Cukor, 1956).
- ³³ *King Solomon's Mines* (MGM, dir. Compton Bennett, 1950); *Kim* (MGM, dir. Victor Saville, 1950); *Soldiers Three* (MGM, dir. Tay Garnett, 1951); *King of the Khyber Rifles* (Fox, dir. Henry King, 1953); *Khyber Patrol* (United Artists, dir. Seymour Friedman, 1954); *Bengal Rifles* (Universal, dir. Laslo Benedek, 1954); *Storm over Africa* (Allied Artists, dir. Lesley Selander, 1954); *Storm Over the Nile* (London Films, dir. Zoltan Korda & Terence Young, 1955); *Zarak* (Warwick, dir. Terence Young, 1956); *The Bandit of Zhohe* (Warwick, dir. John Gilling, 1959); *Killers of Kilimanjaro* (Warwick, dir. Richard Thorpe, 1959).
- ³⁴ Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p.82.
- ³⁵ The parallel between the British Empire in the nineteenth century and the USA in the twentieth century is suggested in Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Fontana, 1988). A more sympathetic understanding of the generally benign influence of 'this most decent, honest, generous, fair-minded and self-sacrificing *imperium*' informs Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006). For a highly subjective response to the cinematic representation of the American empire, see Gore Vidal, *Screening History* (London: André Deutsch, 1992).