

Why We Fight and The Focused Interview. Cinema and Social Science during World War II

***'Why We Fight' i 'The Focused Interview'.
Cinema i ciència social durant la Segona Guerra Mundial***

Ramon Girona¹

Professor del Departament de Filologia i Comunicació
de la Universitat de Girona.
ramon.girona@udg.edu

Xavier Gimeno Torrent

Sociòleg i investigador independent.
xavier.gimeno@xaviergimeno.net

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ABSTRACT:

During World War II, the U.S. military suggested troop indoctrination methods that combined physical and technical training with rational formation. The series of documentary films *Why We Fight* was one of the best examples of these new methods. WWF tried to activate the rational part of the soldier, providing him with comprehensive information about the war, while at the same time this rational argument became the foundation on which emotional stimulation strategies were built. Besides being a key player in the Army's educational program, however, WWF was also a breakthrough in audience reaction research. In connection with this, techniques such as the focused interview were developed to investigate the responses of soldiers when faced with these films. It appears that the aim of this method was to evaluate reactions and to propose changes in the films in order to better achieve their purpose of moral and psychological indoctrination.

KEYWORDS:

documentary, propaganda films, audience reaction research, military indoctrination, WWII, interviewing techniques.



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RESUM:

Durant la Segona Guerra Mundial, l'exèrcit dels Estats Units va plantejar uns mètodes d'adoctrinament de la tropa que combinaven la instrucció física i tècnica amb la formació racional. La sèrie cinematogràfica documental *Why We Fight* (WWF) va ser una de les millors respostes a aquests nous mètodes. WWF pretenia activar la part racional del soldat, proporcionant-li documentació exhaustiva de la guerra, i, al mateix temps, aquesta argumentació racional es convertia en la base sobre la qual es desplegaven les estratègies d'estimulació emocional. Però, a més a més de ser una peça clau en el programa pedagògic de l'exèrcit, WWF també va esdevenir un avenç en la investigació de les reaccions de les audiències. En relació amb això, es van desenvolupar tècniques com l'entrevista enfocada per a investigar les respostes dels soldats davant dels films. L'objectiu del mètode sembla que era avaluar les reaccions i proposar canvis en els films perquè complissin millor el seu propòsit d'adoctrinament.

PARAULES CLAU:

documentals, cinema propagandístic, investigació de les reaccions del públic, adoctrinament militar, Segona Guerra Mundial, tècniques d'entrevista.

1. Introduction

Why We Fight (WWF) is a seven-episode documentary series produced between 1942 and 1945, describing the development of World War II and the necessary involvement of the United States in this conflict. The series was first addressed to the American soldiers who were to take part in the war.²

This production, developed under the military's Information and Education Division, had the director Frank Capra as its executive producer and general supervisor.

The WWF series may be considered one of the most outstanding audiovisual contributions to the ambitious information and propaganda project carried out by the U.S. political and military structures in World War II. Despite being initially designed for soldiers, WWF had another use just after World War II, as this article will try to prove. After the war, the seven films – or at least some of them – became an excellent testing ground for the development of different aspects of audience reaction research.

2. World War II and training and indoctrination techniques for U.S. troops

Compiling the experience of World War I while seeking to move beyond it, the leaders of the U.S. Army, immersed in World War II, deployed an ambitious comprehensive strategy that tried to influence not only the military training of soldiers but also their psychological training.³ This new strategy was proposed by the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General George C. Marshall, among others.⁴

Faced with the prospect of World War II, General Marshall had insisted in several public sessions on the important role to be played by the infantry if the U.S. finally got involved in the war. Marshall believed in the infantry or did not underestimate it, as opposed to those who wished to rely on technology as a means to achieve victory in this new armed conflict, "...keeping alive a realization of the importance of the rifleman in the settlement of any war – especially in these days of myriads of planes, of mechanized cavalry, and of submarines and mysterious gases" (Marshall, 1945a: 10). Marshall had also insisted that the members of the Army should be prepared not only physically but also psychologically.

Accordingly, Marshall proposed a "new army" that would deal with the training of the soldiers, an army that would seek to obtain the soldiers' obedience after strengthening their intellectual capacity and their ability to reason: "We are replacing force of habit of body with force of habit of mind. We are basing the discipline of the individual on respect rather than on fear; on the effect of good example given by officers; on the intelligent comprehension by all ranks of why an order has



to be, and why it must be carried out; on a sense of duty, on *esprit de corps*" (Marshall, 1945b: 124).

All these considerations that pointed towards a rethinking of the training methods of soldiers responded to an ideological will to *democratize* the Army as well as to the conviction, which was becoming increasingly stronger and widespread, that to achieve the optimum performance of the soldiers, emphasis had to be placed on their physical and psychological integrity. For this reason, to complement the strictly military training of the soldiers, General Marshall gave the green light for the creation on March 8, 1941 of an organization that initially took the name of Morale Service Division and, subsequently, Information and Education Division (IED).

The Information and Education Division was created to maintain and ensure the physical and mental endurance of the troops. The different proposals and programs to achieve this objective ranged from playing sports to supplying soldiers with information through various media – films, radio and newspapers published by the Army – as well as to giving them the opportunity to obtain a university-level education with the establishment of libraries and the publication of paperbacks, while providing them with the necessary resources to address their religious and spiritual concerns.

In this ambitious program, films played a prominent role, providing soldiers with entertainment and contributing to their training and indoctrination. For entertainment, to occupy some of the soldiers' free time, the Army and Hollywood joined forces. Through the War Activities Committees (WAC), Hollywood worked in coordination with the War Department and through it with the Army, to create a global distribution circuit of the movies produced by the film production colony (Schatz, 1999). This undertaking, however, which consisted basically of entertainment, was combined with another more ambitious task from the educational and propagandist point of view, similar to what was proposed by General Marshall. This other task, which was to be based on the cinema medium, culminated in the development of documentary films, the production of which, unlike that of fiction films, was the responsibility of the Army and its film production units.

In this respect, the Information and Education Division contained a specific organization, the Information Service, which was created to deal with everything related to information. The Information Service controlled the press and radio, the production of leaflets and film production. Specifically for films, the Information Service established the 834th Signal Service Detachment, a unit designed to produce documentary films, headed by the director Frank Capra.⁵ In accordance with its initial educational and propagandist purpose, the 834th Signal Service Photographic Detachment produced a wide range of films (Girona, 2009). Of all the 834th's productions, the series under the general title of *Why We Fight* stood out from the rest, comprising a total of seven documentaries: *Prelude to War* (1942), *The Nazis Strike* (1943), *Divide and Conquer* (1943), *The Battle of Britain* (1943), *The Battle of Russia* (1944), *The Battle of China* (1944) and *War Comes to America* (1945).⁶

3. *Why We Fight*

Consequently, the production of series such as *Why We Fight* should be understood in the context of the broader training program deployed by the U.S. Army's Information and Education Division. WWF became one of the most successful expressions, in images, of General Marshall's wish to prioritize aspects of soldiers' training which had remained in the background or been overlooked until then.

Initially, *Why We Fight* was produced in response to the failure of a planned series of speeches for the Army troops, conceived to inform and educate soldiers on issues relating to a war in which the U.S. was involved. The failure of those speeches, most of which were recorded in audio alone, led to a strengthening of the audiovisual format.

The informative and educational aim of the WWF series, as films of the type known as *orientation pictures*, was clearly established from the first episode, *Prelude to War*.

At the beginning of this first episode and at the beginning of the others as well, the words of General Marshall appear. Marshall's words established two different issues. He stated, "This film, the first of a series, has been prepared by the War Department to acquaint members of the Army with factual information as to the causes, the events leading up to our entry into the war and the principles for which we are fighting."⁷

With the urgency of preparing the thousands of recruited civilians within a very short time, WWF's first goal was to place the American soldiers in the context of the global conflict, and as a consequence, to make them understand that, beyond the response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States' involvement was necessary in the fight against the other two Axis Powers: Germany and Italy.

This turned WWF into a highly descriptive series. In the course of the seven episodes, the films described, among other aspects, the countries in conflict, the policies of these countries before war, the major battles and the overall development of the war, from the bombing of Pearl Harbor to the onset of American involvement.

In the seven documentaries, footage and maps explain various previous wars and describe the world situation and the clash of strategies and strengths between the two sides in conflict. This description of the drift of the world war and the subsequent U.S. involvement in the conflict, however, implied the second major goal which was pursued by the series and which was expressed by Marshall in his introductory statement: the wish to describe "the principles for which we are fighting." This second pivot of the storyline involved the moral education of the soldiers.

Indeed, this second aspect brought together some of the key ideas of the U.S. ethos. Over the seven episodes, but especially in the last one, *War Comes to Amer-*

ica, the authors of the series argued that the struggle between the Allied countries (including the United States) and Axis countries (Germany, Italy and Japan) was a fight between a free world and an enslaved world. It also claimed that the virtues of the free world were those traditionally attributed to the U.S. Two great ideas summed up these virtues: the first one presented the origin of the U.S.A. as the place where the principles of equality and freedom became a reality and how these principles had become the political and social legacy that the country's founders had passed down to subsequent generations. This was what was known in the documentaries as the *American Heritage*. The fight of the Americans in World War II responded, therefore, to the need to defend that legacy against external attacks. Additionally, however, this work of defense was associated with another task, namely, the obligation to extend this legacy beyond America's borders. This task responded to a *Manifest Destiny* which had been assumed by the U.S. since the time of its founding. It combined an altruistic wish to spread the virtues of freedom worldwide with another more practical wish: to achieve a future world free of armed conflict with the consolidation of democracy.

3.1. The argument in *Why We Fight*. Strategies of visual rhetoric

Beyond the ideological content of *Why We Fight*, it is interesting to describe and analyze the way in which the Army wanted this content to be transmitted to the troops. It is a method that disclosed the subsequent uses of the series in the immediate postwar period.

Why We Fight appears to respond, in its storyline strategy, to the aim of General Marshall and his team to promote the rational aspect of soldiers and to make their training more effective. To achieve this, two narrative techniques were deployed: the use of flash backs and the discussion of a series of rhetorical questions that find their answer in the documentaries themselves.

The seven episodes of the series were the successive stages of a long journey that culminated on December 7, 1941, when Japanese aircraft bombed Pearl Harbor, and that dated back to the events which, in the opinion of the documentaries' authors, marked the beginning of World War II. The authors placed these events in 1931, when Japan began to unfold its expansionist strategy towards Continental China, occupying Manchuria. On the basis of these events, the documentaries showed and narrated, among others, the expansionist ambitions of Mussolini on Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, the invasion of Poland, the Battle of Britain, the sieges of Leningrad and Stalingrad, etc., returning in the last episode to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in an attempt to prove that Americans could not respond unilaterally to the Japanese aggression but also had to join Britain, China and the USSR in the fight against the fascism of the enemy coalition. The essential function of this visual journey through the years immediately preceding the U.S. involvement in the war, however, was to turn the images into an undeniable testimony – for its documentary value –, into a chronicle of what had happened and of what

was even then taking place in the world. Through the films and the images that formed part of those films, the Allies and the Axis forces had to be judged – by the soldiers – and this cinematographic judgment had to become, for the authors of the series, the ultimate test of the democratic essence of the U.S. and its Allies and of the objectives of their destructive dictatorial enemies.

The images that had to act as dispassionate witnesses of the global war situation were also the audiovisual response to a series of questions which were posed in the course of the seven documentaries.

In *Prelude to War*, after General Marshall's introductory words, the narrator asks the question that lies behind the general title of the series: *Why We Fight*. This general question soon raises a series of other questions, however: "...causes and events leading up to our entry into the war. Well, what are the causes? Why are we Americans on the march? Is it because of Pearl Harbor? Is that why we are fighting? Or is it because of Britain, France, China, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Poland, Holland, Greece, Belgium, Albania, Yugoslavia or Russia? Just what was it that made us change our way of living overnight? What turned our resources, our machines, our whole nation into one vast arsenal, producing more and more weapons of war, instead of the old materials of peace? What put us into uniform, ready to engage the enemy on every continent and every ocean?"⁸ This resource of using a question to generate the discourse reappears at different times in other episodes as well.

The rhetorical construction based on a series of questions suggests a didactic intention that brings one back to Marshall's statements about trying to change the methods of "order and power" that had traditionally governed the training of troops.

The rhetorical questioning that appears throughout the seven episodes reflects a dynamic based on the discussion and contrast of opinions, despite the limitations that these concepts may have in a context such as an army, in which hierarchy and obedience are essential. It is now difficult to establish whether the viewing of the WWF series by the troops fulfilled this wish expressed by the highest echelons of the military and assumed by the people in charge of the Information and Education Division. As noted, however, the rhetorical method used in the seven episodes would point in this direction. It is a method that sought to move away from the basically emotional style used, for example, by the propaganda machine of Hitler's and Goebbels' Germany.

4. WWF as a testing ground of modern audience reaction research

The Information and Education Division's work in connection with WWF did not end with this series of documentaries, however. It went even further, seeking to



find out whether the soldiers were really morally indoctrinated with these fundamental principles of the U.S. ethos which WWF tried to transmit. To do this, it had to investigate how the soldiers reacted when they watched the documentary in order to see if it produced the desired effect on them. On the part of the Army, this task was specifically assigned to the Information and Education Division's Research Branch, headed by Samuel Stouffer, and on the civilian part, to Robert. K. Merton and to Paul Lazarsfeld, the founder and director of Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR) (Merton, 1990; Lee, 2010).

In fact, the pioneering work of Samuel Stouffer and his team was essential to the creation of a soldier emotionally involved with his army, his country and the supposed U.S. values: "The Research Branch had been established to provide the Army Command with information about the attitudes of soldiers. More specifically it was concerned with problems of morale and the relation of morale to military performance" (Schweber, 2002: 68). In this way, "by the war's end they had produced over three hundred reports based on the attitudes of more than half million young men" (Schweber, 2002: 76). Likewise, in this way, through this research and during its eight years of elaboration and re-elaboration, the 130 social researchers who were belonged to the Research Branch compiled an unprecedented amount of information on soldiers (Schweber, 2002). In 1949 this research, generically known as *The American Soldier* (TAS), was published by the Princeton University Press (Stouffer et al., 1949a, 1949b and 1949c; Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield: 1949). It represents the development of the techniques and methods used in modern research on the effects of mass media on an audience.

4.1. WWF and *The Focused Interview*

It was precisely this need to evaluate the effects that WWF had on recruits that led to the relationship between WWF and *The Focused Interview* (TFI) (Merton, Fiske and Kendall: 1990), resulting in the third volume of the TAS series, *Experiments on Mass Communication*. This was how the qualitative or clinical methods and social research techniques were introduced into the mass communication research field and also, from a broader standpoint, important innovations were developed in what were at that time group interview techniques based to only a small degree on accumulated scientific research and mostly left to the discretion of each investigator (Lee, 2010). It is true that TAS primarily entailed an important innovation in the field of the so-called quantitative social research methods, with improvements such as the introduction of control variables, the discussion of spurious factors and time order variables, the formalization of analysis procedures, the interpretation of data from survey research and the conceptualization of the relationship between personal and unit data (Kendall and Lazarsfeld, 1974); the introduction of the pre-testing of questionnaires and the extensive use of replication techniques as requirements for verifying initial conclusions (Schweber, 2002); the introduction of the concept of intervening variables (Schweber, 2002); the formalization of construc-

tion procedures of attitude scales (Guttman's Scalograms and Lazarsfeld's Latent Structure Analysis, the current classification analysis forerunner) (Schweber, 2002); the approximation of survey results to controlled experimentation, and the improvement of traditional experimental designs in social psychology (Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield, 1949), which are the improvements that have traditionally been highlighted. Nevertheless, the contribution of this body of research, along with the focused interview, as will be shown further on, was decisive in establishing a scientific methodology in the field of qualitative research techniques and group interview methods.

As previously mentioned, although the group interview is a tool which had already been used before the emergence of *The American Soldier* and of *The Focused Interview*, which describes the procedure of individual and group interviews that was used in TAS research – the sociologist Emory Bogardus had made practical but never systematic use of the group interview during the 1920s (Lee, 2008) –, it was not until the appearance of *The Focused Interview* that one may properly speak of the development or systematization of group interview techniques. Apparently, group interview techniques were hardly used at all between 1940 and 1950, possibly because they had little scientific standing (Lee, 2010). If we attempt to extrapolate the extent of this conclusion by concentrating specifically on the focused interview method as a group interview technique, it may be observed that in the period of 1956 to 1977, it was all but insignificant (Lee, 2010). The emergence of the group interview procedure known as the *focus group* in the 1980s was still a thing of the future.

The development from the focused interview or focus group interview to the focus group and the continuity and discontinuity relations established between these two schools of thought have been relatively well documented by Robert K. Merton and Raymond M. Lee (Merton, 1990; Lee, 2010). What has not been discussed, however, is the bidirectional relationship of *The Focused Interview* with war propaganda and, more specifically, with the groundbreaking *Why We Fight* documentary series. That is to say, what would be the answer to the question of how the series of documentaries called *Why We Fight* and the procedures described in the book *The Focused Interview* affected each other? This is what we will seek to determine from this point on the basis of concrete empirical data. In this respect, the procedure that has been followed consisted necessarily of, on the one hand, the viewing of the four documentaries⁹ that were analyzed from an experimental and quantitative perspective by the Research Branch and from a qualitative perspective by the BASR, and on the other hand, the detailed reading of the second edition of *The Focused Interview* book. Its Catalan and Spanish translation project has led to a high level of available detail which has in turn made it possible to associate the various fragments of real interviews contained in the book (and used to illustrate the described interview procedures, which entails describing the effective as well as the ineffective techniques) with the sequences and the scenes of each of



Category	Number	%
<i>Why We Fight</i>	45	58
<i>The War</i>	12	15
<i>Naples is a Battlefield</i>	1	1
Not determined	11	14
Not applicable	9	12
Total	78	100

Table 1. Categorization of interview extracts used in *The Focused Interview*

the *Why We Fight* documentaries to which they alluded. This process has been useful in determining how *Why We Fight* helped to establish the focused interview procedures. Additionally, however, there have been attempts to locate the relevant documents (Author N. A., 1942, 1943 and undated; Kaufman, 1943a and 1943b; Lazarsfeld, 1943; Schreier, 1943) which could explain the inverse relationship. That is to say, did the focused interview somehow have an influence on the elaboration process of the *Why We Fight* documentaries? In this way, Table 1 seeks to answer the first question about the impact of WWF on *The Focused Interview*, showing the close relationship between these two cultural products. This table links the excerpt from each interview in *The Focused Interview* to the respective documentary film, with frequencies representing the absolute or relative number of interview excerpts alluding to each of the films. The total of 109 pages analyzed include 78 different interview fragments.

Table 1 clearly shows the importance of the documentary series *Why We Fight* in the process of codification and systematization of the procedures known as the *focused interview*: 58% of the fragments that appear in the book belong to interviews that directly allude to this set of films. Moreover, if this percentage is recalculated leaving out the categories “not determined” and “not applicable,” the level rises to 74%. Whether it is calculated in one way or another, this indicator leaves no doubt about the special influence that WWF exerted on *The Focused Interview*.

4.2. The influence of WWF on *The Focused Interview*

On several occasions during the analysis of *The Focused Interview*, remarks appeared in interview excerpts that seemed to suggest that the role of the interviewers was not simply to analyze the reactions of the interviewees with respect to all the films viewed, but also to propose possible changes in these films so that the viewers' reaction to the films would be closer to the desired response.¹⁰ This led to the need to explore whether the focused interview procedure had somehow been used as a device for proposing changes in the whole series of *Why We Fight*, that is, as

an early test-audience method. Consequently, in this respect it would now be necessary to answer the other part of the question as posed earlier: what was the impact of *The Focused Interview* on WWF?

To perform a preliminary verification of this hypothesis, several previously mentioned documents have been consulted (Author N. A., 1942, 1943 and undated; Kaufman, 1943a and 1943b; Lazarsfeld, 1943; Schreier, 1943). However, it should be made clear that the analysis was completed only tentatively and needs a more thorough inquiry than the one performed in order to clarify the matter, since the documentary sources used are not sufficient to answer it nor is it the exclusive remedy for the excessively narrow focus adopted: to determine whether the focused interview technique was used to propose changes in the assembly of the secondary images which form the basis of the *Why We Fight*¹¹ series, it is clearly necessary to delve thoroughly into the various cinematographic processes of film analysis (especially with respect to the writing and revisions of the script, editing, production, etc.) and the cinematographic career of those who took part in it (directors, screenwriters, etc.) in order to obtain more conclusive information. In this regard, in future research on this topic it would be necessary to have material from the archives of the authors of the documents and, consequently, to address the issue from a cinematographic perspective as well. Apparently, this comprehensive task of reconstructing the entire creation process of the subsequent versions of *Why We Fight* and of tracking the changes that they underwent has not yet been carried out, which makes it difficult to firmly establish the role, if any, of the interviews with the soldiers (who had watched the film) applying the focused interview method (Girona, 2009; Merton, 1990).

It is precisely in this respect, although in a more modest way, that the analysis conducted is only one possible starting point. In order to undertake the research that will lead to a provisional verification of the hypothesis postulated earlier, in the first place it is necessary to find out how the BASR viewed the objectives that WWF wanted to achieve. That is to say, from the BASR's standpoint, what was the objective that the films had to fulfill and what function did it consider that the documentaries had to carry out, since the answers to these questions will reveal the use that the BASR made of the interviews conducted with the soldiers and, more generically in this case, of the use which it made of the focused interview method. In this respect, the BASR's internal documents will provide us with invaluable help since they reflect the BASR's perception of the objectives that WWF pursued. One of the memos refers specifically to this issue, mentioning one of the films (*Divide and Conquer*) of the WWF series. The point of view that is expressed can be easily extended to the rest of the films: "The purpose of the film presentation in general appears to be two-fold. For one, its aim is to inform. It gives facts which may be entirely new to the onlooker, may have been forgotten or may be well known. *Secondly, and more important, these facts are interpreted. The interpretation of facts – be they real or fictitious, articulately perceived or not – is actually taking an*

attitude. The film embodies such an attitude, which it means to convey to its audience. Its second aim, therefore, is to modify or intensify existing attitudes. It may be successful or it may fail in this undertaking. The yardstick will not be complete 'conversion of the dissenters' but more 'converts' than newly recruited 'dissenters'. Much will depend on how complete the interpretation is, on whether or not it is too dogmatic, too subtle, on whether the relevant facts are open to other more convincing explanations, on how consistent it is, how widely applicable to related but not presented facts and, finally, on whether the interpretations consider the audience's frame of reference" (Kaufman, 1943a: 1).¹² Consequently, for the BASR, the main objective was "to modify or intensify existing attitudes". Obviously, the modification of attitudes is a complex issue, as is clearly pointed out in the documents, and the most appropriate mechanisms to allow the objectives to be achieved with the available means must be found. It is evident that the only way to modify attitudes through a film, as cannot be otherwise, is to plan the content so that all the potential audiences react in a way that ensures that the transmitted message has the desired effects. This means that the appropriate procedure for achieving the objective of attitude modification through WWF must fulfill the following criteria:¹³ 1) "Provide a guide to the attitudes which the film might introduce or reinforce in an army audience"; 2) "Provide suggestions on *possible effects* of the film on *special groups* within the army", and 3) "Provide suggestions for 'product improvement', that is, for improvement of the film by changes in the emphases, modes of presentation, etc. Examples: *The treatment of differences between democracies and dictatorships is rather abstract and would perhaps not be too clear, especially to the enlisted man with little education*" (Author N. A., 1943: 1-2).¹⁴ As may be observed, the three points of the procedure seem to be aimed at achieving the "product improvement"¹⁵ objective, that is to say, at proposing changes in the films in order to improve their ability to modify the audience's attitude. This is because it is obvious that the first objective is subordinate to the second (to hypothesize how certain specific categories of individuals will react, it is first necessary to determine what the standard reaction will be, which is the objective pursued by the first step of the process), and both the first and the second objective are subordinate to the improvement of the product in order to improve the attitude modification, either in standard or special categories of individuals (the example mentioned makes this last point very clear). This scheme provides the interpretive key required to decrypt the contents of the analyzed BASR internal documents, since they supply the categories through which information can be organized and interpreted.

From this perspective it is not surprising that one of the first notes that appears on the documents (Kaufman, 1943a) refers precisely to the complexity of the interaction between the informative and attitudinal component of the films, and to the differential perception of these two factors that the various audiences have; through the various frames of reference put into play when interpreting the film, these factors reveal a greater or lesser inclination to attitude modification through

film stimuli which are significant for each audience. The document recommends, in this way, that each of the films should include facts and interpretations relevant to more than one audience, since this is one way to ensure the attention of many different audiences and interpretations, and, therefore, a good way to plan the film contents in a way that all the potential audiences react to the film contents, allowing the conveyed message to produce the expected effects. As may be observed, this is a theoretical discussion of preliminary nature, emphasizing the difficulty of achieving the attitude modification sought by WWF, which is accompanied by additional discussion of a methodological nature: which procedures to use to test the effects? (Author N. A., 1943 and undated; Schreier, 1943; Lazarsfeld, 1943); how to measure jointly the effect of the sound and the visuals of the films? (Kaufman, 1943b); how to assess the joint effect of the series *Why We Fight* and the possible autonomy and/or complementarity of each one of the films? (Kaufman, 1943b), and how to quantify the persistence of the effects they cause? (Kaufman, 1943b), all of which is nothing more than the technical side of this controversy. It is not a minor issue, however: questions of method occupy 32 of the total 61 pages analyzed, representing 53%. With respect to the analytical purposes, however, the most interesting thing is to observe how, through these documents, a series of proposals or hypotheses are revealed that, in the first place, try to suggest possible research lines in order to assess whether the films are able to transmit the desired values (that is to say, whether they are able to achieve the desired effects) and that in the second place try to provide solutions to correct the film materials that may present discrepancies between what was intended to be transmitted and what the different audiences actually grasped. The case of the pre-analysis of the *Divide and Conquer* (Kaufman, 1943a) script is paradigmatic of these facts. For Kaufman, the BASR analyst who wrote this document, this is a film which basically describes facts, with few interpretations, at least explicitly (Kaufman, 1943a). Its main objective is therefore to provide factual information about the origin of the Nazi war policies. Secondly, it tries to warn about the danger they represent (Kaufman, 1943a). The value that it attempts to convey is the need to take action to stop the Nazis. Kaufman hypothesizes, however, that it may happen that the informative component (the description of Nazi policies) can neutralize the interpretive component (warning about the danger of the Nazis in order to arouse action), cancelling out the mobilizing effect. In line with this, the rest of the document includes a series of proposals aimed at avoiding this possible undesirable effect and improving, where necessary, the various aspects of the film that could cause inappropriate reactions. The first proposal shows the general trend of successive suggestions, which often focus on the values inherent to the American people, values which are usually emphasized by *Why We Fight*:¹⁶ it has to do with the value of democracy as something opposed to and incompatible with fascism. In this respect, the BASR analyst asserts that the treatment given to this topic in *Divide and Conquer* may be too abstract, causing certain categories of soldiers (the less educated

ones) not to show the desired response, which is to say, to take a stance against the Nazis and in favor of the need for the U.S. to mobilize and to fight them because they represent a real danger to the ingrained democratic values of the American people (Kaufman, 1943a; Author N. A., 1943). Next, the same storyline which Kaufman has already generically presented is resumed from a strictly political point of view, stating that one of the possible unwanted effects of the film is the characterization that is made indirectly of the idea of democracy by the emphasis placed on certain aspects of the Nazi regime: underlining the weaknesses of democracies, which are inherently divided (lack of cooperation between France and England – the major powers –, the relationship between which is not well explained in the film and often seems not to exist or to be antagonistic; the disunity and the vulnerability of the other European countries to the divisive action of Nazi propaganda, the ineffectiveness of the United Nations), causing the democratic countries to be unable to deal politically with a dictatorial regime like the Nazis, who are better organized politically for the attainment of their intention of aggression and conquest (Kaufman, 1943a). In summary, it presents the failure of the European democracies against the political successes of the Nazi regime. Another aspect closely linked to the previous two stands out in particular for the BASR, however: the military superiority of the Nazi regime. According to the BASR researcher, *Divide and Conquer* emphasizes the supremacy of Nazi Germany, highlighting the military aspects: the superiority of their military strategies (the *blitzkrieg* or lightning war, which makes the slow and ineffective strategies of the Allies obsolete), their armaments (aircraft, tanks, artillery, showed extensively in the film), their military training (which shows the lack of experience of the Allied soldiers compared to the German soldiers, who have received training since childhood), their numerical superiority (the Nazi army is the world's largest), or the Nazi army's effectiveness, which appears in numerous combat scenes of the film. From this perspective, it is hypothesized that the effect may be undesirable, as the film can provoke feelings of fear and paralyze the soldiers, who may feel incapable and useless faced with the military superiority of the Nazi army, although it could also arouse their aggressiveness in response to the need to combat it (Kaufman, 1943a). As the BASR analyst pointed out, however, it is possibly the human aspect that is closely related to the superiority of the Nazi army and to its atrocities which leads to a topic that makes every possible audience less indifferent: the bombing of civilians in Norway and Rotterdam, the machine-gunning of Belgian refugees (especially women and children) and the scenes of destruction in *Divide and Conquer* associated with the Nazi conquest can hardly arouse pro-Nazi sympathies. These sequences, which speak in a more realistic language than the previous military or political considerations and which are consequently less abstract and more accessible to everyone, can produce a strong animosity towards the Hitler regime, leading to a greater commitment to democratic principles, which are irreconcilable with dictatorial values. Thus, the human tragedy may achieve more results than rational arguments,

causing horror and repulsion in some or a sense of challenge and determination to end the dictatorship in others. However, as Kaufman points out, it may also be possible that those audiences who were most strongly opposed to entering a war or those whose beliefs were based on strong political convictions, considered the human tragedy argument a form of emotional blackmail or a way of attacking their points of view, thus jeopardizing the message in *Divide and Conquer*, which could be considered from this standpoint to be mere propaganda (Kaufman, 1943a). Apart from these suggestions, which have to do with changing the way of addressing the various topics, the analyst pointed out, in conclusion, two technical aspects that could bring about unwanted effects. First, he states that *Divide and Conquer* has a major problem: the end is too hasty and abrupt, and this may have a counter-effect. Although the film attempts to clarify the successive events of the period which it covers, the fact that it ends in 1940 with the conquest of the Ardennes by the Nazi army before the U.S. entered the war on December 7, 1941, could cause confusion in some audiences unfamiliar with the relationship between this event and the entry of the U.S. into the armed conflict, since this film hardly mentions the U.S., its role in the war, its relationship with the United Nations or what it had in common with the Allied democracies in 1940. This is why if *Divide and Conquer* wants to answer the question of why the U.S. is fighting (the question that the WWF series seeks to answer), it should be able to explain the role played by the various democracies in the allied strategy and policy (Kaufman, 1943a). In second place, Kaufman wonders if there are not too many maps in this film. Of the total frames, 20% are maps. The ratio between the sequences showing real images and those that include maps, diagrams or cartoons is 2:1. This can have its consequences: although the maps are usually quite simple and come with audio commentaries that make them understandable, the intensive use of maps may result in a loss of effect on audiences less familiar with them. "In other words, the maps and diagrams may distract the men rather than intensify their impressions" (Kaufman, 1943b: 1).

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of our analysis is as follows: although all hypotheses pointed to by the BASR are the result of a pre-analysis of the film scripts for *Why We Fight* (specifically for *Divide and Conquer*) and, thus, are dependent on subsequent verification via the specific focused interviews of soldiers, it remains undeniable that the analysis method or perspective that influences the investigation of the effects generated by the films points to, as has been made very clear, a possible proposal to alter the "emphasis, modes of presentation" and, in short, the films' approach to the transmission of democratic values that are supposedly characteristic of the

American people, which stand as a guarantee of the people's freedom. It is evident, however, that although certain changes were proposed by the BASR, they were not necessarily put into practice. No confirming evidence has been presented in this respect. However, there remains a final document that can shed some light on this aspect. This is the draft script of *Divide and Conquer* (Author N. A., 1942). This script has been compared to the film's final editing. Although an in-depth examination has not been made, the film was viewed, comparing its structure and content with the draft script. This analysis suggested two things. Firstly, that both the content of the draft (pictures and narratives) and its structure (arrangement of the scenes, sequences) are very different from the final editing: the order of scenes changes, some of the narrator's explanations are not listed and some that were not in the script appear (in fact, whole sequences appear). Secondly, as a consequence of the foregoing, the film is much longer than what is indicated by the 14-page script, which covers only about 20 minutes, while the film lasts 56. In short, three things are clear. First, there is a huge difference between the draft of the script pre-analyzed by the BASR and the final editing of the film. The second is that, as seen in section 3, the versions of *Why We Fight* seen by the soldiers appear to be very similar to the final version. The third aspect is that, if it is indeed true, as it would appear, that certain changes were made in the documentaries when they went through the hands of the BASR, which was directly attached to the Office of War Information, which in turn had the last word on proposed changes, it does not seem unreasonable to think that these changes – which should have been slight as seems to be indicated by the fact that versions of the films viewed by the soldiers have been recognized by us, meaning that they were very similar to the final version – could have been based on the BASR focused interviews with the recruits. 🍷

Notes

- [1]** Correspondence address: Ramon Girona. Pl. Ferrater Mora, 1. E-17071 Girona, UE.
- [2]** In principle, the documents were also intended for the population in general. Despite this, however, only three episodes were shown in the U.S.: *Prelude to War*, *The Battle of Russia* and *War Comes to America* (Girona, 2009).
- [3]** World War II entailed a widening and deepening, in all respects, of the methods used in communication and propaganda by the United States during its participation in World War I. Furthermore, in World War I, at least at the beginning, a refractory public opinion had to be persuaded in general terms of the involvement in a war which was being waged far from home. Likewise, at that time the involvement of the U.S. had to be seen as emphasizing the fact that the country was fighting for the defence of democracy on its own soil as well as overseas. One of the key players in World War I was George Creel, a journalist from Colorado with many years of press experience and a firm supporter of the politics of Woodrow Wilson. At the head of the Committee on Public Information, by express wish of the U.S. president, Creel clearly saw the task as an advertising project, as an immense sales venture and as the world's biggest promotional campaign. A key book for understanding what Creel was trying to do in carrying out Wilson's assignment is CREEL, G. (1920), *How We Advertised America* (online), New York and London, Harper & Brothers Publishers, <<https://archive.org/stream/h<owweadwertameri00creerich#page/n9/mode/2up>> (retrieved: 5 November, 2014).
- [4]** George C. Marshall was a member of the General Staff of the U.S. Army from July 1938 and on the same day that the Germans invaded Poland (September 1, 1939) he became the Chief of Staff. Among the duties inherent to this position were those of acting as the principal advisor to the Secretary of War and as the head of the Army. Marshall was also responsible for the security of the country in peacetime and the commander of the Army in wartime. With the approval of the Secretary of War, he was responsible for preparing the military training program to be carried out by the War Department. Marshall was consequently a key figure in the design and development of the updated U.S. Army that had to cope with fascist threats during the late 1930s and early 1940s.
- [5]** Capra was responsible for the unit on June 6, 1942. See Culbert, 1990.
- [6]** See the study by one of the authors of this article: GIRONA, R. (2009), *'Why We Fight' de Frank Capra. El cinema al servei de la causa aliada*, València, Edicions de la Filмотeca de l'Institut Valencià de l'Audiovisual, for an in-depth discussion of the context and an analysis of the seven documentaries from ideological, political, social and cinematographic standpoints.
- [7]** See *Prelude to War* (1942). United States War Department. Special Service Division. Army Service Forces; Prod. Lt. Col. Frank Capra. The documentaries can be seen online at <http://video.google.com>.
Prelude to War: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBtdTiHsQqI>;
The Nazis Strike: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVda0Lp00hU>;
Divide and Conquer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su2iQWgDrJs>;
The Battle of Britain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVH-5Aj7pBE>;
The Battle of Russia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xg3LqFqwJcs>;
The Battle of China: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8Ez0PqzpS4>;
War Comes to America: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3l538SWqDo>
(retrieved: 5 November 2014).
- [8]** See *Prelude to War*, *op. cit.*
- [9]** As pointed out in Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949), these films were: *Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike*, *Divide and Conquer* and *The Battle of Britain*, all four produced in 1943. The Research Branch and the BASR also analyzed five short films that formed the series called *The War: Finishing School, Back Home, I Was There, First Birthday* and *Snafu*. The series *Why We Fight* can be viewed publicly at <http://video.google.com> since it is in the public domain. To the contrary, the films of the series *The War* could not be viewed or located and it has only been possible to associate the interviews with each of the films to which they referred thanks to the synopses that appear in Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949).
- [10]** All quotes are from Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990). Specifically, these are the remarks (the italics are ours): *a*) from those interviewed: "Yes, and [they should show something] about colored WAACS" (*ibid.*, 24); "And he made a speech. *That should be cut out*" (*ibid.*, 30); "Well, the X-rays that had to be taken. He talked about the kidneys and

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the heart and so on. *It wasn't necessary* (*ibid.*, 84); "...but the Navy 'E' thing is boring" (*ibid.*, 101); *b*) from the interviewers: "Did you find yourself pretty well bored by that kind of discussion or do you feel you have learned something from it? *If you had your choice, would you want that to be in the film or cut out?*" (*ibid.*, 62).

111 As pointed out by Ramon Girona (2009: 176): "The series *Why We Fight*, unlike other army pictures based on material filmed directly on the battlefield, was the result of an intensive and extensive compilation of existing images and a careful subsequent assembly. [...] In this respect – regarding the use of existing images – Frederick Osborn stated that 80% of the material of *Why We Fight* came from – or would come from – news and cinematographic files from various countries."

112 The parts in italics are ours. Other documents placed emphasis on the same points (Author N. A., 1943: 4): "...it should be remembered that these films might influence the audience"; "Although our main concern is with *attitudinal* changes, the *informational* aspects should not be overlooked". See also pp. 3-4.

113 "They may be of some use in answering the question: What are these analyses intended to be?" (Author N. A., 1943: 1).

114 The italics in section 3 are ours.

115 The same goal of product improvement appeared highlighted as one of the possible uses of the focused interview in the book of that title (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1990).

116 According to Ramon Girona (2009: 241), "In its content, in those essential aspects of its rhetoric, *Why We Fight* is part of what might be called the common U.S. heritage or, more specifically, the legacy that those in power have historically considered to be what defined the country, establishing its idiosyncrasies, making the U.S. a unique nation in the global context".

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